

Synopsis

The Social Aspects of Mourning: Covers and Collateral Material

Purpose: This two frame display class exhibit is intended to give an overview of the social aspects of mourning covers as they pass through postal systems. Mourning letters and cards were a noteworthy part of mail in the Victorian era. The exhibit's emphasis is on the Victorian era (1837-1901) but usage of mourning stationery continued into the twentieth century, not only in Europe but also in the Americas.

Background: Mourning stationery originated before the fabrication of the 'envelope'. Originally there was a self-folded sheet of paper with a black line perimeter, often sealed by a black wax seal, and then addressed. With the introduction of the 'envelope' stationers and printers created more elaborate designs, from black perimeter width and design, stamp frames, to embellishments on the obverse side of the cover - crests, monograms, floral motifs, wax seals. Enclosures in the envelopes could be handwritten letters of condolence, calling cards, printed funeral notices, prayer cards.

Plan: As below and shown on title page.

Exhibit Plan

Title Page

1. Basic Mourning Stationery
2. Usages
3. Border Varieties
4. George V
5. International
6. Covers & Enclosures
7. Censored
8. Inflation, mourning stamp
9. Ironic cancels, collateral

Treatment: The exhibit traces mourning stationery from its most basic designs, comparing border widths and varieties and drawing attention to embellishments. Postal rates are noted. Stampless covers are succeeded by penny postage, paid and unpaid covers. Cancels include a maltese cross and a Charing Cross 2 penny paid. "Court" corner stationery used in Canada in small Queen era. Included are 'international' usages, other 'mourning' colours, censored covers, German inflation and a mourning stamp on a mourning cover. The exhibit ends with covers cancelled with ironic comments, 'Too Late' and 'Dead Letter Office' and collateral material including a piece of Victorian mourning hair jewelry.

As an aside: **Difficulty of acquisition:** Basic mourning covers are not unusual, and therefore not difficult to find in the usual dealers' stock, **but**, mourning items

are very popular amongst "Goths", and as one dealer told me, "Goths would die for this!", referring to an item that seemed to be overpriced. One never knows wherein one's competition lies.

References:

The History of the Postmarks of the British Isles 1840-1876, John G. Hendy

Collect British Postmarks, Dr. J. T. Whitney (1983)

British Postmarks R.C. Alcock and F.C. Holland (1960)

Stamps of North America. Fred Jarrett 1929

The Nova Scotia Post, J.J. MacDonald 1985

'Court' Mourning, Mourning Notes Vol. 1, No. 4, Oct. Dec. 2007, Elmer Cleary