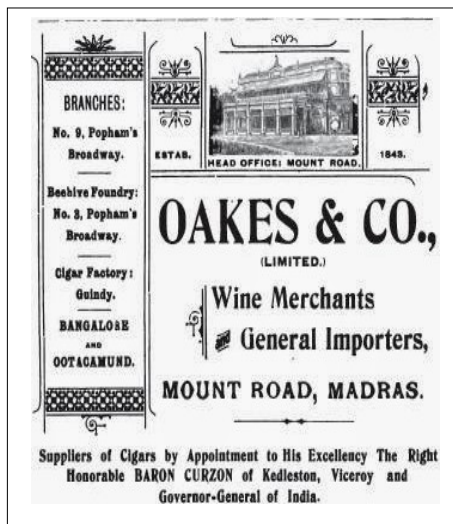


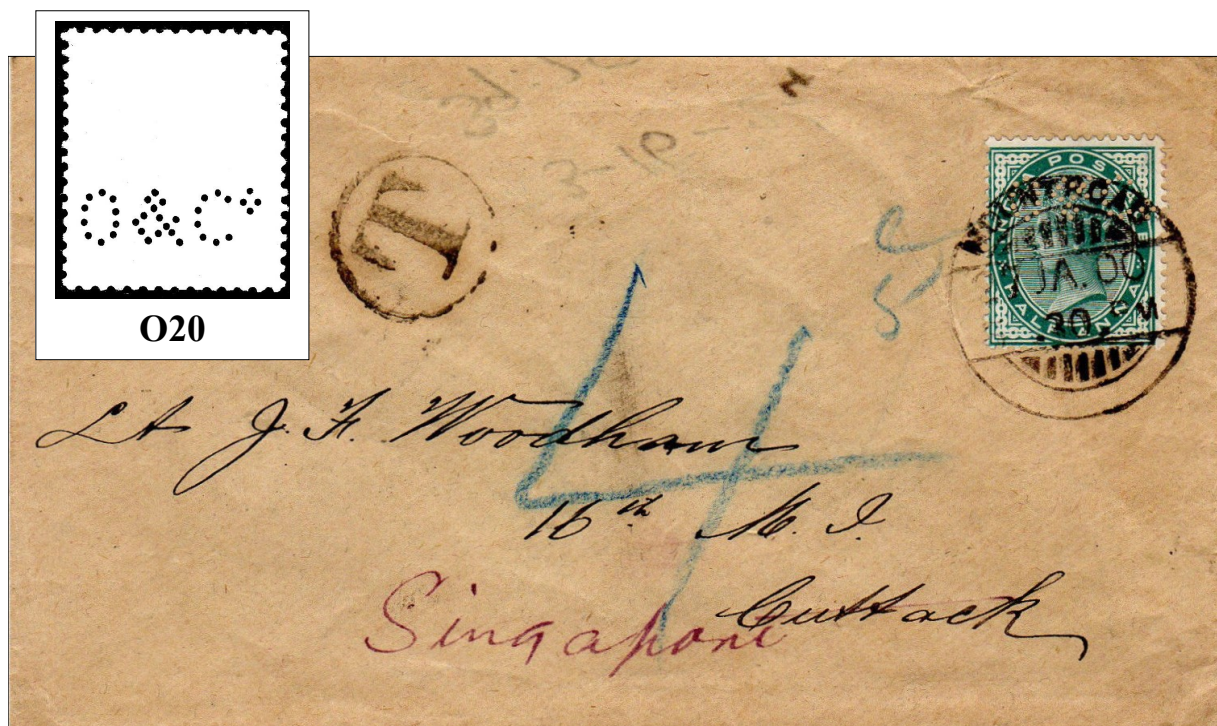
THE MADRAS DEPARTMENT STORE AND A SOLDIER OF THE BRITISH RAJ

William Hall

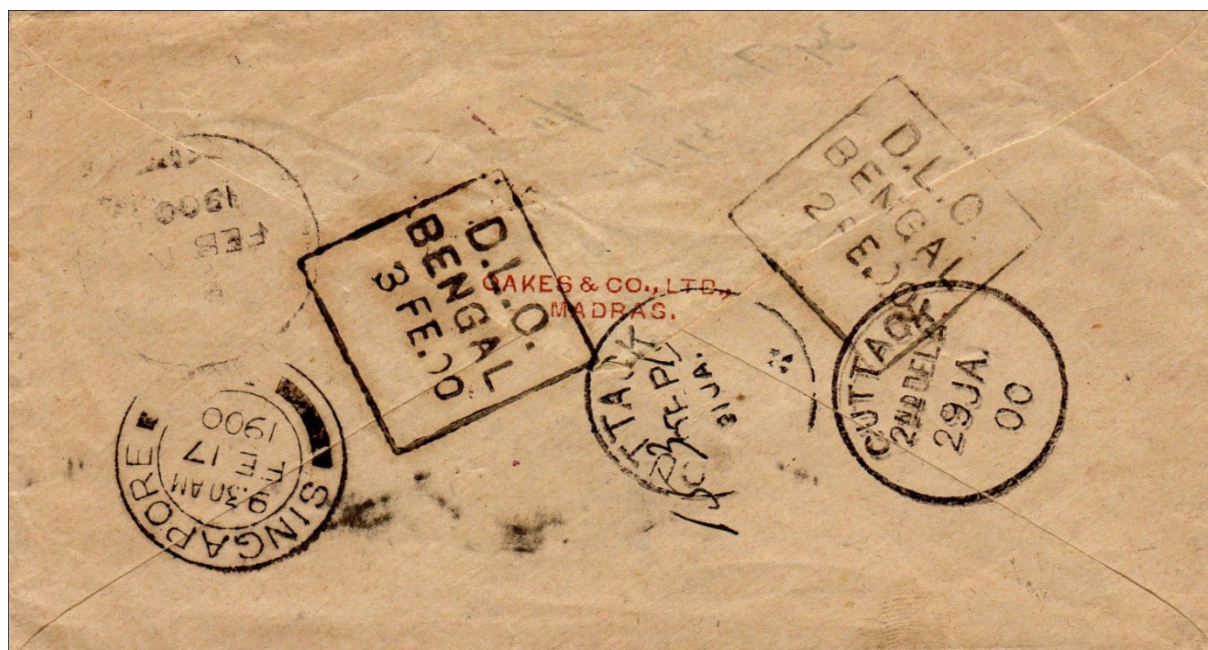
I recently acquired a cover which piqued my two hobby interests, perfins and military history. It was sent from Mount Road, Madras on 27th January 1900 addressed to Lieutenant J. F. Woodham, 16th Madras Infantry, Cuttack and is franked by a QV half anna stamp with perfin O&Co. This is identified in Jeff Turnbull's Catalogue of Indian Perfins as being used by Oakes & Co Ltd, this identity is confirmed on the rear flap of the cover.



Oakes Partridge & Co established general stores in Madras in 1843, by 1857 the firm was known as Oakes & Co, becoming a limited company in 1895 and moving to premises on Mount Road. In 1892 they established a cigar making factory and in 1907 they went into the automobile business as an agent of Ford, selling touring cars to the Government for the 1911 Delhi Durbar. The firm was taken over by arch rivals Spencer & Co in 1926.



The addressee Lieutenant James Francis Woodham was born on 20th October 1877 and commissioned as a second lieutenant direct from the Royal Military College into the Indian Staff Corps on 22nd January 1898. He joined the 16th Regiment of Madras Infantry on 31st March 1899 and was promoted to first lieutenant on 22 April 1900. He was promoted Captain in 1907 now with the 76th Punjabis who were successors to the 16th Madras Infantry. During World War I he saw action in Mesopotamia reaching the rank of Major in 1915. By 1917 he was attached to the 6th Jat Light Infantry and took part in the effort to recapture Kut al-Imara where elements of his parent regiment had surrendered in April 1916 after being besieged by the Turks. He ended the war Lieutenant Colonel, retiring from the army in 1921 to Cranleigh in Surrey.



The various postmarks on the back of the cover record its travels. It reached Cuttack on 29th January and was postmarked there that day and again on the 31st. It could not be delivered to Lt. Woodham and so was sent to the Dead Letter Office in Calcutta arriving on 2nd February and marked there again the next day. At some point it attracted a tax due mark, with a 4 annas fine. Eventually it was re-directed to Singapore arriving there on 17th February. Lt. Woodham and the 16th Madras Infantry having arrived there on 5th February on deployment to fulfil a regular Indian army posting protecting British interests in Malaya.