

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE _____ by Mike J. Burrows

The reasons why something is odd but not impossible have more than once turned out to have an interesting history. The facts may lie just below the surface and need only a few hours of reading and research to make the curious happy. Sometimes, of course, it just serves to make the curious, to use the words of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, "curiouser and curiouser."

A good example of this type of problem was the arrival of an exchange packet one Saturday morning, which started off a chain of thought that just grew and grew.

Mounted on a page in one of the booklets was the item I shall call Clue 1. Not much to look at, just a damaged Great Western Railway prepaid newspaper parcel stamp. What caught the eye was the fact that it was a Perfin: WG 16,10 6mm. Upon removal, it was about to be placed in the pending tray (in reality, the never-find-the-time-to-get-around-to tray) when a chord was struck.

Checking my collection, it yielded up another example of the same Perfin, but this time on a Midland Railway prepaid newspaper parcel stamp, Clue 2. To be confronted with the same Perfin on rival railway companies' prepaid newspaper parcel stamps was somewhat surprising, to say the least. Further digging brought to light a QV ½d. vermilion of the Jubilee issue, Clue 3. This postage stamp had been cancelled with one of the many undated Newspaper Branch killers.

The next item found was a KGV ½d. from the 1924 issue, which had been cancelled with a machine slogan postmark. This stamp had come from a collection where the previous owner had removed the stamp from its original backing paper and then cut out the name printed on the original envelope and mounted it alongside the Perfin. This is a practice that is not very wise to follow. It is fine for the person that cuts the identifying piece and mounts it with the Perfin. Only that person knows for sure the correct identity. When the collection passes into another enthusiast's hands, these items can only be regarded with suspicion. The piece gave the user of the Perfin as a newspaper company, Westminster Gazette, of G.P.O. Box No. 672, London E.C. 4. Also there was a portion of a datestamp from a Hey & Dolphin machine. Checking this with the portion on the stamp, the slogan catalog gave the period of use as November 1927 to March 1928. So there were Clues 4



Clues 1-5. Circumstantial evidence.

and 5. All that remained was to put them into the correct order against the known facts.

Where to begin - well, it all started with the brilliant writer, Charles Dickens. Like several other great writers, he did seem to have had his odd moments. Possibly during one of his off-days he agreed to put his name to the prospectus for a new London daily newspaper, the Daily News, not exactly an awe-inspiring title, but then the Victorians were a pretty staid bunch. Nevertheless, sufficient investment was forthcoming for Charles Dickens to exercise his editorship. Under his literary guidance, the paper hit the street in January 1846. Due to his other literary commitments - trying to edit a newspaper and keeping others happy by attending dinners and other

functions is a very punishing life style - the combination of his social life and a not-too-robust health caused Charles to quit the paper on the 9th February, before three weeks were up. At the time of his leaving, the circulation was a mere 4,000.

Having lost such an illustrious personage - he had by this time produced something like ten of his major works - one would think that the paper would have folded. Not so, for one reason or another, it went on and on, until it started buying up its competitors.

One of these was the Westminster Gazette of 104 Shoe Lane, London. This was a fairly young newspaper, having been started by George Newnes in 1893. This organ of the Liberal party came about with the change of ownership, politics and the availability of the staff of the Pall Mall Gazette, which were promptly hired by George Newnes. From early directories the location of the Westminster Gazette is given as Tudor Street, Blackfriars, London, S.E. Although Sir George - he was created a Baron in 1895 - started other magazines which were successful, he did not seem to have the same success with the Westminster Gazette. By the time it came under the control of the Daily News Ltd., in 1928, it had become known as Lord Cowdray's costly failure.

The title of the Daily News was changed in 1930 to the News Chronicle, upon the absorption of the Daily Chronicle. The News Chronicle ceased publication in October 1960, when it was taken over by Associated Newspapers Ltd.

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under the Act of 1921, which is more commonly known as the 1923 grouping, it would be necessary for a newspaper company to hold stocks of prepaid newspaper parcel stamps to facilitate the transmission of their products over the lines of the various railway companies then in existence. Of course, there were the exceptions where some of the railway companies allowed the parcels of other companies over their metals by agreement.

So there are the facts and one must admit they do fit the clues. Oh, by the way! Most of the facts presented were taken from books that once formed part of the News Chronicle Library.