

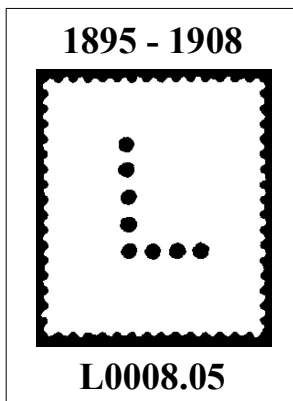
LAFAYETTE PHOTOGRAPHY

Paul Waldron

I recently acquired an interesting cover produced by Lafayette Photography. It's a hard cover, slit around on three sides, which (presumably) enclosed photographs sent by Lafayette's Manchester studio to J. A. Clegg in Rochdale.



The postage paid was 3d in total (being the rate up to 12oz) comprising KEVII 1d red and 2d green & red, the former with an inverted perfin die, the latter with a backwards perfin die – both a large “L” - in use between 1895 and 1906.



Known Dates:

Earliest
15 Jan 1895
—
Latest
12 Jan 1906

Two circular date stamps were used – “Manchester 2 6 March 1905 7.30pm”. There is also a purple triangular post office handstamp “498” which was (unsurprisingly) Manchester. The contents were obviously mis-weighed as there is an “above....oz” handstamp with a blue pencil “12”, and initials, resulting in a 1d surcharge noted on the cover. There is no indication as to how this was paid. On the reverse



is a “Rochdale” received cds - 11.45pm on the same day. The reverse has splendid coats-of-arms as you can see. I assume the letter was delivered to the addressee the following morning.

I was able with the help of the published census records, to track down the intended recipient, which adds further interest to the cover. John Arthur Clegg was born in Rochdale on 1st February 1868. His father was a wholesale grocer and the family lived at 46 Sheriff St, Rochdale. In 1891 John was 23, single, still living at his parents' house and recorded as being a professional musician. His father died in summer 1891. By 1901 John was 33, single, still living with his mother and sisters at 46 Sheriff St, and recorded as being a teacher of music, B of M (Oxon). By 1911 John, his mother and sisters had moved to 106 Clement Royds St, Rochdale, and was again recorded as a music teacher. By the 1939 Population Register John had moved to Cromwell Rd, Malvern Worcestershire, along with two of his sisters. He remained unmarried. His occupation is recorded as 'Private Means'. He died 31st March 1944, leaving £7,514/14/1d.

Lafayette has one of the longest and richest histories in photography, and is still in business today, now specialising in academic and school photography. Founded in 1880 by James Lauder – son of a successful photographic pioneer –his business became the premier portrait studio in Ireland. In adopting the name 'Lafayette', James created a new image for the family business, seeking to prosper from the cachet of a French name: Paris was then the centre of the art world and of avant-garde photography in particular.



With celebrated clientele such as the Irish Viceroy and tremendous newspaper interest, Lafayette earned several awards for outstanding portraiture. They even attracted the attention of the Royal Family. In 1887, following a commission to photograph Queen Victoria, they earned the prized title of ‘Her Majesty’s Royal Photographer in Dublin’. In later years, this title was renewed by both King Edward VII and King George V.

The Lafayette business expanded rapidly in the 1890s. Studios were established in Glasgow (1890), Manchester (1892), and with the surge of business in Jubilee year (1897) a branch was opened on London's Bond Street. In 1898 shares in the newly incorporated Lafayette Ltd. were floated on the Stock Exchange and the company continued until 1952 when it was wound up (James having died in 1923). However, the Dublin branch had been sold off in 1951 and it is this part that continues to this day.

Whilst numerous negatives were destroyed over the years, several hundred historic glass and nitrate negatives survive. However, including early examples of royal photo-journalism and portraits of famous Irishmen, such as George Bernard Shaw and W. B. Yeats. The collections now reside with the V&A and National Portrait Gallery - a combination of 3,500 glass plate and celluloid negatives dating from 1885 to c.1937, and 30,000 - 40,000 nitrate negatives from the 1920s to the early 1950s. There are also a vast number of prints of Lafayette photographs still in existence with large collections in the Royal Archives, commercial picture libraries and the Gernsheim Collection at the University of Texas.

A new die was produced in 1908 using the company’s name in three rows and a second one in 1931. Note that the “TTE” disappeared on L0100.01. These dies remained in use until the 1950’s.

