

PROPRIETARY POST OFFICES - Addendum No. 4

Study entrusted to F. W. Benians (ESC 123)

A general definition of this Study could be described as those offices, controlled by the Civil Postal Authorities in commercial undertakings, primarily for the convenience of 'foreigners'. To the list of those operating in 'Hotels' have been added a 'Departmental Store' and a 'Travel Agency'. In this context it would be logical to add the cancellations of the 'Seamen's Home, Alexandria' - a hostel which was operated for the convenience of merchant seamen (foreigners) while in the port of Alexandria.

The cancellations from this office have always excited attention and interest. During the mid and late nineteen-sixties they were mentioned in postmark articles of the time and these were followed by some correspondence in philatelic magazines. There was, too, an invitation in 'The Q.C.' to collate the available data. I have tried without success to trace any Record which the Circle may have had and, in its absence, I am opening a file specially for this office.

THE SEAMEN'S HOME, ALEXANDRIA

The seamen's Home or Hostel, Alexandria, is described in the Tourist Guide-Plan of Alexandria, 1937, under the heading of 'Batiments de L'Etat, Instituts, Batiments Publics, Chambres de Commerce, etc as being in the Avenue Alexandre le Grand, near to the British Consulate.

But its location according to a World II *Services Guide to Alexandria* is given in the Commercial Dock area some one and a half miles away :-

'Seamen's Home or Hostel, Alexandria, Gate 2 ,.ay Quay 33 - within the docks.'

These two addresses have given rise to some confusion but, as we shall discover, the two institutions; had connections with each other, but it is the one within the docks area where the Post Office was situated.

The city of Alexandria is about 18 mile: long and 1, miles wide and is the chief port of Egypt. During the course of a year, many ships with their crews visit the city, but there seems to have been very little research into their welfare or the postal arrangements made for them while in the port of Alexandria.

The earliest reference; is that, in 1860, there was a Scottish church Mission established in an old hospital ship from the Crimean War. A local committee was formed and raised sufficient funds by 1898 to build a permanent home on a site in the docks near to No. 22 gate. It was run on a religious basis by the Scottish Presbyterian Church. It is believed that a rule was that a religious service should be held on a Sunday evening and that no beer should be sold on the premises.

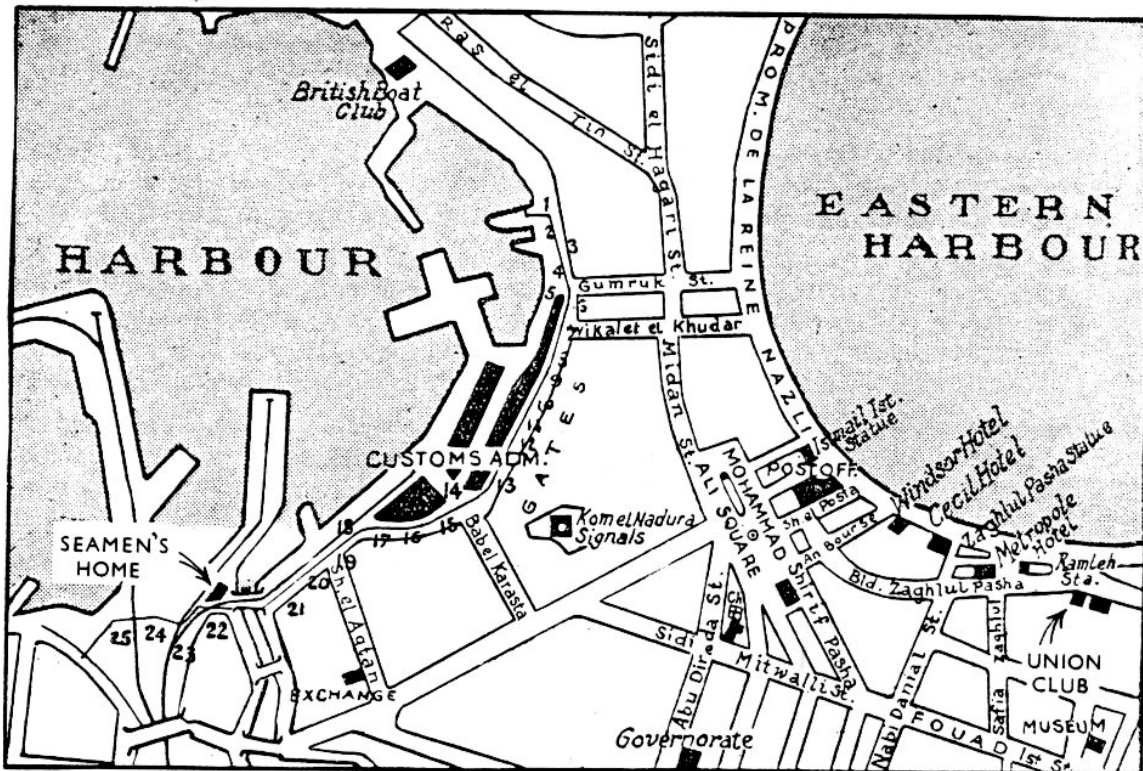
The earliest reference we have to the permanent home. Murray's *Handbook for Egypt and the Sudan*, published by Edward Stanford in 1907 7, with an Index-Directory for 1910

Index - Merchant Seamen's Home, opposite the landing wharf, maintained by voluntary contributions of shipowners residents and the Scottish Mission. (page 589)


By some means the institution came to be run by the Consul-General and a committee, under the directorship of a Presbyterian Minister. In 1925 it is known that a Mr .Dawson with a few helpers ran it.

In 1936 there was a visit of the British Grand Fleet for ten months; the Royal Navy virtually took the place over and, at their request, beer was sold.

By 1937 it was run on entirely secular lines by an ex-policeman and his wife. The original concept was by then at a very low ebb, although a Royal Naval Chaplain did convert a bedroom for use as a chapel.



BRITISH MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE SOCIETY.



INFORMATION
ON
ALEXANDRIA

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MERCHANT NAVY CLUB
GATE 22 — QUAY 33
ALEXANDRIA.

TELEPHONE: { CLUB No. 27263
P. O. „ 20921

From 1938 to 1950 the honorary treasurer and secretary of the Seamen's Home and Merchant Navy Club was a Mr George W. Gerrard, O.B.E. In a note (see illustration) he says that the Seamen's Home was then: ' . . the only remaining private Post Office authorised to frank letters posted at the Seamen's Home, Alexandria Docks.'

In 1950 there was a determined effort by the Anglican Clergy in Alexandria to revive the work by an appeal to the 'Mission to Seamen'. In a report of the time :-

'On the ground floor behind the stage of the Assembly Hall was a funny three-cornered room with a harmonium and a lot of books, in which about six people can sit down and which is called a Prayer Room, the most uninviting and uninspiring spot in a most uninviting building'. Beer was still being sold, and at this time we learn that the manager was a Greek - 'a nice fellow'.

BRITISH MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE SOCIETY

Early in 1947 the two major Institutions then in Alexandria for the welfare of merchant seamen were brought together under one umbrella and the Statutes of the new society throw an interesting light on the role of the Seamen's Home.

STATUTES

As adopted at a General Committee Meeting held at the British Consulate-General, Alexandria, on the 31st day of January 1947.

1. Name and Offices - The name of the Society is the British Merchant Navy Welfare Society, Alexandria, with its office care of the British Consul-General, Alexandria, or at any of the Society's premises hereinafter mentioned.

2. Objects - The objects of the Society are to create and constitute clubs for the recreation of merchant seamen visiting the port of Alexandria, to provide for their welfare generally and to collect subscriptions and donations in respect thereof.

3. Premises - The existing Clubs under the control and management of the Society are :-

- (i) The Merchant Navy Club, formerly the Alexandria Merchant Seamen's Home, Gate 22, Alexandria Dock - Founded 1881.
- (ii) The Merchant Navy Club, in the city.

"The Society's booklet 'Information on Alexandria' (see illustration) was issued for the benefit of visiting merchant seamen, and this outlines the activities of the Club.

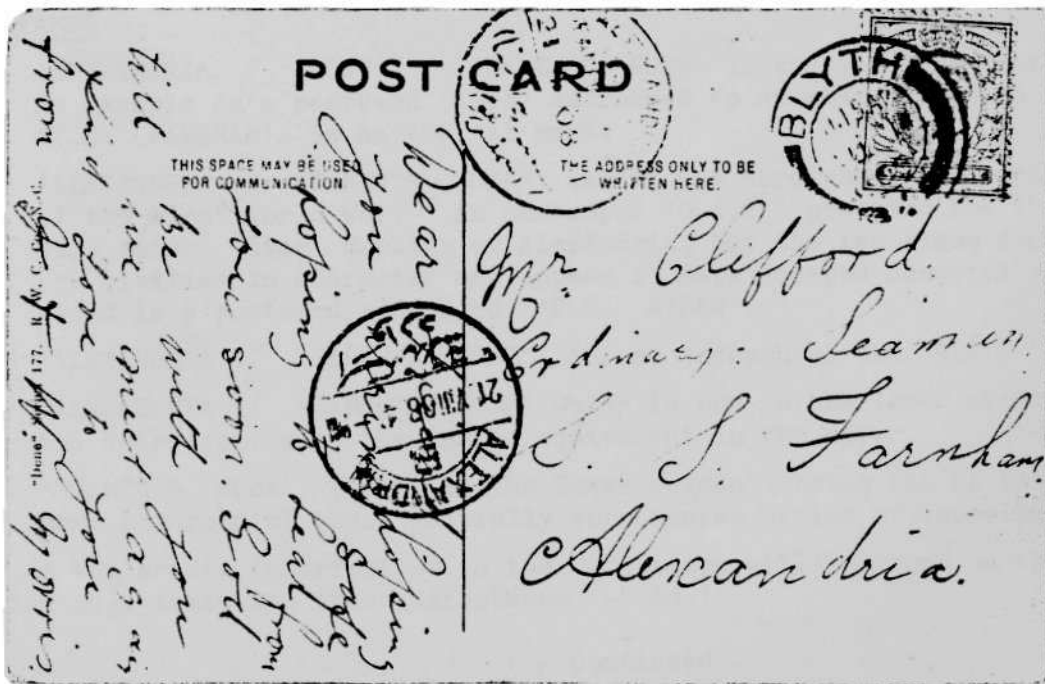
There were general sections dealing with Customs, Addresses, Hotels, Cinemas, Hospitals, Churches and Clubs.

One section was headed:-

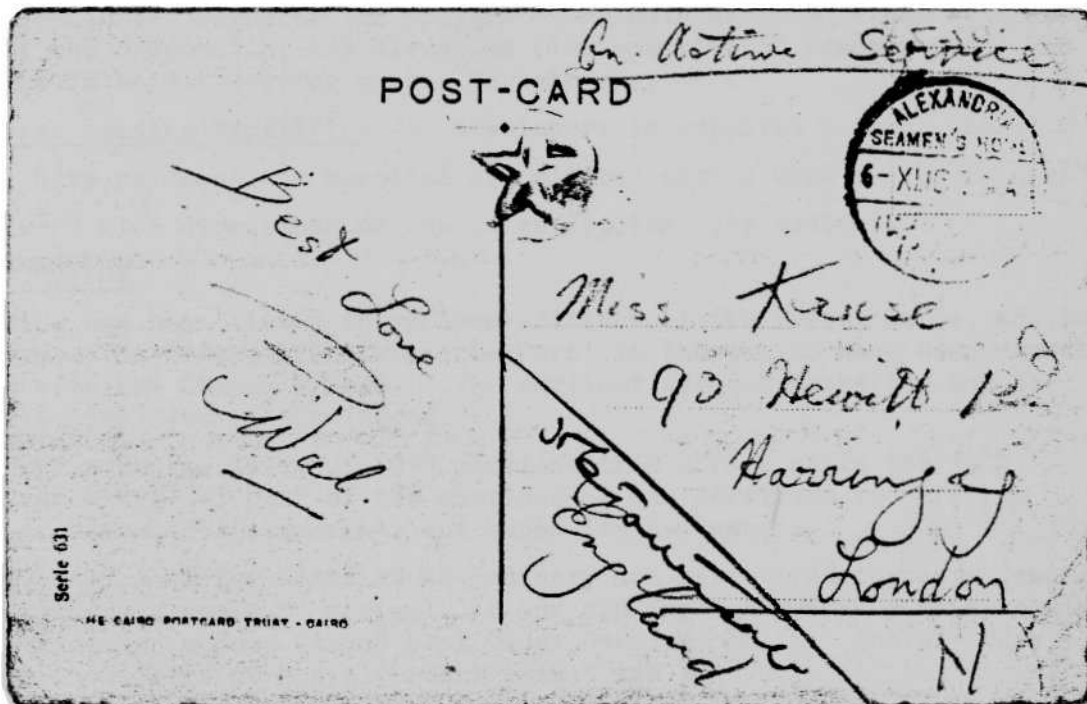
MERCHANT NAVY CLUB AND POST OFFICE

Telephone: Club 27263 Post Office 20921

An 'ON ACTIVE SERVICE' Postcard addressed to the United Kingdom. Type II Seamen's Home marking dated 6 DE 16 Also the 'STAR' Dumb Censor marking of Alexandria



Post Card addressed to an Ordinary Seaman on S.S. 'Farnham' Alexandria B Arrival Mark and Type I Seamen's Home, both dated 21 AUG 08



AIR. MAIL LETTER addressed to George W. Gerrard, O.B.E., a former Honorary Treasurer and Secretary of the Seamen's Home, with Type V datestamp of 19 JL 55



The 'Statutes' of the British Merchant Navy Welfare Society, Alexandria

A note by Mr Gerrard

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As adopted at a General Committee Meeting held at the British Consulate-General, Alexandria, on the 31st day of January, 1947.

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3. Objects.-The objects of the Society are to create and constitute clubs for the recreation of merchant seamen visiting the port of Alexandria, to provide for their welfare generally and to collect subscriptions and donations in respect thereof.
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- (i) The merchant Navy Club, formerly the Alexandria Merchant Seamen's Home. Gate 22, Alexandria Dock-Founded 1881.
- (ii) The Merchant Navy Club, in the City.

4. Members.-Any individual or Steamship Company, Commercial Society or Company is entitled on request to be registered a member of the Society who

Note - The Postmark
'Seamens Home'

This was the only
remaining private
Post Office authorised
to frank letters
posted at the Seamen's
Home, Alexandria
Docks - E

I was the Hon. Treasurer
& Secretary of the Seamen's
Home & Merchant-Navy
Club for 12 years
1938-1950!

G. W. G.

“Welfare Activities :-

Billiards, Cards, Chess, Dominoes, Draughts, Darts, Snooker, Table Tennis. Sunday . A Chapel is available for those who wish to use it for divine meditation. The Manager will be pleased to meet any visitors who are desirous of coming together for prayer. The Main Hall and organ will be placed at the disposal of any Clergyman (irrespective of denomination) who would like to hold a service on the Sabbath day.

Writing and Reading Facilities - stationery is supplied without charge. Merchant Navy personnel in hospital are visited once a week by the Manager” (There were also directions on how to get to the City centre).

THE POST OFFICE

The office has been listed in various editions of the Postal Guide, and in earlier issues the office of ‘Alexandria Port’ is thought to have been closely associated with the Seamen’s Home. The earliest type of datestamp has the word ‘(Port)’ included in its legend.

The Egyptian Postal Guide of 1917 mentions this office while the 1928 edition gives a full account of the services it was permitted to perform. Listed under ‘City of Alexandria’, and under its own name :-

“ Services Office admitted to ordinary and registered correspondence, ordinary parcels on arrival, inland and foreign ordinary money orders. Collection orders Inland Post Order Service, British Postal Order Service, British Postal Orders issued and paid.

Admitted to the Insured Parcels in arrival not exceeding £ E. 20. All letters from abroad, addressed to men in ships visiting the port, are received at this post-office and subsequently delivered, by the Club’s special postman, aboard ships as soon as they are alongside the quays or anchored in the harbour.

Letters posted at the Club must be handed over the post-office counter, there is no official box at the club. No parcels or cables are accepted owing to the post-office being situated in the customs area.”

THE DATESTAMPS

Type (i) ‘ALEXANDRIA / (PORT) / SEAMEN’S HOME’ in the upper segment. An example on a postcard (1908) addressed to an able seaman on ‘S.S. FARNHAM’ is an arrival mark.

Type (ii) ‘ALEXANDRIA / SEAMEN’S HOME’ was in use throughout the period of the First World War. An unstamped ‘O.A.S.’ postcard has the dumb censor ‘Star’ marking of Alexandria, but the few items seen are civilian in character and appear to have escaped censorship. Noted is a postcard addressed ‘S.S. RYDAN’.

Type (iii) ‘ALEXANDRIA / SEAMEN’S HOME’ in use throughout the 1920’s.

Type (iv) ‘ALEXANDRIA / SEAMEN’S HOME’ which is now in the lower segment of the datestamp, with the Arabic equivalent in the upper.

Type (v) ‘SEAMEN’S HOME’ (only) in the lower segment, being one of the more numerous of these generally very scarce series of cancellations.

		diam mm	U/L	= mm	Earliest	Latest
Type	(i)	28	U	4.0	29.AP.06	22.MR.09
	(ii)	26	U	6.5	14.JL.09	10.JA.18
	(iii)	28	U	7.5	12.MR.21	13.AP.30
	(iv)	29.5	L	9.0	22.FE.31	27.AP.32
	(v)	27	L	8.0	9.AP.32	18.JL.55

Legend :-

- U - English in Upper segment of datestamp
- L - English in Lower segment of datestamp
- = mm - distance between bars

The dates in Types (i) to (iv) are in Roman characters.

These recordings show that this office operated for a period of at least 49 years.

Type (ii) - there is a recording on a 3-mill stamp of '23'.

REGISTRATION MARK

Only one stamp appears to have been used bearing the legend 'SEAMEN'S HOME OFFICE. The registration number being added by hand in red ink. There were at least two runs of one hundred registration numbers each but being spread over a number of years indicates how small this office was and how few items it serviced.

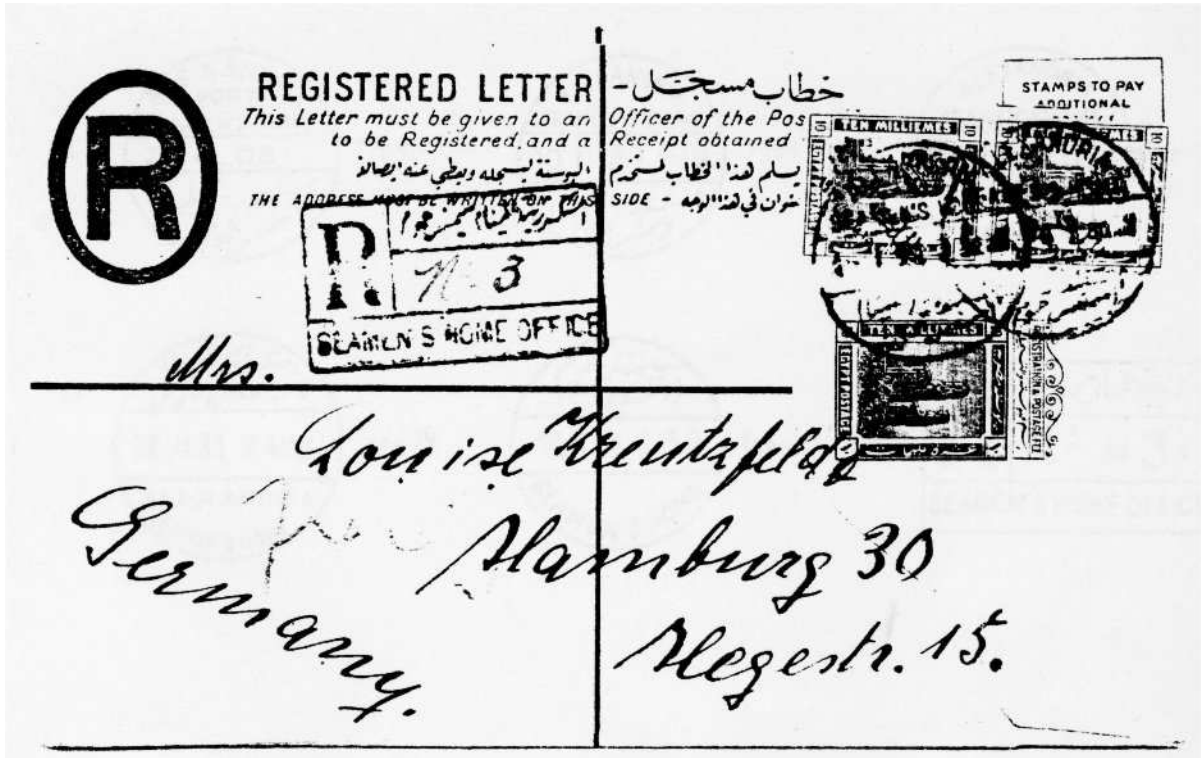
Date	Registration Number	Type of Datestamp
4.MY.17	88	(ii)
1 . JA . 24	3	(iii)
22.FE.31	43	(iv)

Addresses containing the names of vessels are interesting and provide a guide to the 'clientele' who used the hostel.

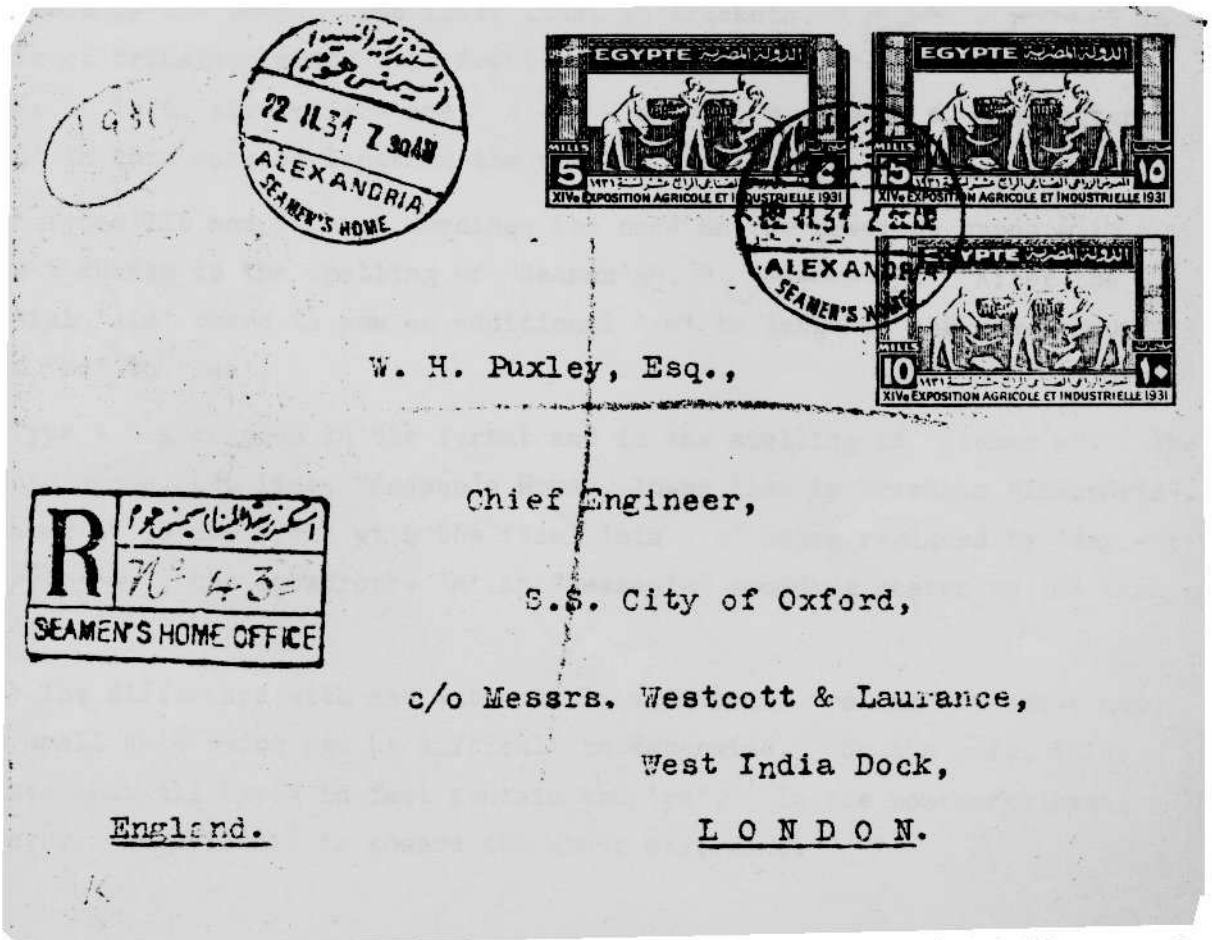
Name of Ship	Date	Type of Datestamp
S.S. 'FARNHAM'	21.AU.08	(i)
S.S. 'ROYSTON'	3.JA.18 /10.JA.18	(ii)
S.S. 'SITRA'	5. MY.21	(iii)
S.S. 'STAR OF ALEMEDROUS'	9.AP.32	(v)

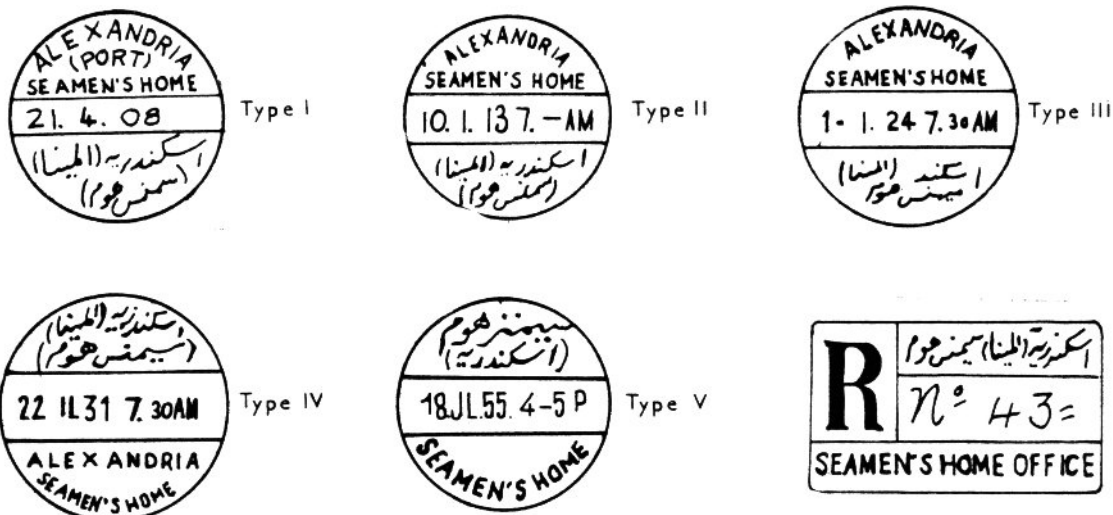
These markings are by no means common. From this beginning is a basis to which others may add and, when more is known, a truly fascinating story will emerge.

Registered Letter with Type III datestamp addressed to Germany



Registered Letter with Type IV datestamp addressed to London





Notes on the Arabic inscriptions in the Datestamps

* In Type I and II, the top line reads “Iskandriye”, then in brackets “el-mena” - the port. The lower line, in brackets, اسمنس هوم is a direct transliteration into Arabic of “Seamen’s Home”. Reading from right to left, the letters are: s - m - n - s h - (w) - m, the letter ‘wau’ in this case to lengthen the vowel.

* Types III and IV have wordings the same as the previous types with a slight change in the spelling of “Seamen’s”, سمنس. After the initial ‘sin’ there is now an additional ‘ya’ to lengthen the vowel sound from ‘se’ to ‘see’.

Type V has changes in the format and in the spelling of “Seamen’s”. The Arabic reads, top line, “Seamen’s Home”, lower line in brackets “Iskandria”. “Seamen’s” is now spelt with the final ‘sin - s’ being replaced by ‘zay - z’, سمنز the apostrophe ‘s’ in “Seamen’s” sounding nearer to ‘z’ than to ‘s’

* The difference with and without the additional ‘ya’ is dependent upon. two small dots which can be difficult to determine. So the possibility exists that all types in fact contain the ‘ya’. In the postmarks seen, however, the evidence is toward the above statement.

I am particularly grateful to Denis Clarke, Edmund Hall and Mike Murphy (ESC’s 165, 239 and 240) who have given me information, or loaned me their material, thus providing some of the sources from which our information was derived

REFERENCES

Letters in *Stamp Collecting Weekly* 9 Sept 1966; 4 Nov 1966; 25 Nov 1966; 4 Dec 1966

Entries in the *Q.C.*

Reports from Alexandria to the Mission to Seamen (unpublished)

British Merchant Navy Welfare Society, Alexandria

(i) Statutes

(ii) Information on Alexandria