



Private Carriers and Forwarding Agents

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The Waghorn Service and Successors

Thomas Fletcher Waghorn operated a service for expediting the mails between Great Britain and India from 1836 to 1841, centered on an overland crossing between Cairo and Suez (or Kosseir on at least one occasion). The story of his persistent and at times strenuous efforts to develop adoption of this route and the use of steamships, as opposed to the traditional route via the Cape of Good Hope by means of sailing ships, is fascinating, but too long to be elaborated here. Readers are referred to the book by Sidebottom¹, which also describes the development of the trans-Egyptian route after Waghorn. Briefer accounts of Waghorn's service have been written by Cicurel² and by Robinson³. Extracts from Waghorn's Alexandria Letter Book (a file of his correspondence) of 1840-41 have been published by Hill⁴; they provide interesting insight into Waghorn's troubles, tribulations, and frustrations in dealing with recalcitrant officials and the unreliability of ocean shipping. A biography of Waghorn has been written by Sankey⁵.

Communication between Britain and India by sailing ships via the Cape of Good Hope required four to six months, thus about a year for a reply to any letter sent. Development of practical steam navigation in the second decade of the nineteenth century opened the possibility of improving not only the speed of travel but its reliability as well. However, steamships were dependent on having supplies of coal at frequent depots and for long journeys they resorted to auxiliary sails. Propulsion was by paddle wheel, which was not so efficient as the screw propeller introduced much later, and the bearings for the drive-shaft of the paddle wheels did not reliably keep sea water from seeping in. Furthermore, the paddles were vulnerable to damage by rough seas. Nevertheless, Waghorn became interested in the subject as early as 1826 and began advocating improvement of the mails, as well as passenger service, via the Gulf of Suez or the Persian Gulf, in conjunction with steamships and overland passage from Trieste or Marseille to a port on the English Channel.

There was, however, no regular shipping service between Malta and Alexandria, nor between Suez and Mocha or Aden. Nevertheless, he demonstrated the potential of the route by carrying letters for the East India Company in 1829 from London to Trieste and on to Alexandria, which he reached in sixteen days. He then traveled overland to Rosetta, up the Nile to Cairo and across the desert to Suez where he was disappointed to

find that the steamer that he had been led to expect from Bombay had not even gone to sea. He thereupon took passage to Jiddah in an open boat, and after being laid up for six weeks with illness, found passage on to Bombay, which he reached nearly six months after setting out from London. No letters that he carried on this journey have been identified and it is certain that they would not have had any special markings.

Waghorn's continuing agitation undoubtedly contributed to a decision to extend the Admiralty steamer service from Malta to Alexandria in 1835 (P&O took over the route to Malta and Alexandria in 1840). Waghorn seized the opportunity with alacrity and announced the formation of a company to take letters to India at a charge of 5/-. George W. Wheatley became his agent in Falmouth, the port of sailing of the packets for Alexandria. Waghorn organized transit to Cairo and over the desert to Suez, for which he set up rest houses en route. Onward travel from Suez had to make use of whatever opportunity presented itself, for there was still no regular service in the Red Sea; connection to steamers might be made at Mocha or Aden. By 1836 Waghorn had agents in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, and Falmouth. Journeys were scheduled to leave the first day of every month (Fig. 1). In a group of letters written to Waghorn's London agents, Smith, Elder & Co., much detail about handling the mails and the accounts of charges is set out⁶.

The arrangement required that a sender have letters brought to one of Waghorn's agents, where it would be logged in and a bold handstamp applied, reading "To the Care

of Mr. Waghorn / Alexandria". A fee of 2/3 had to be paid the agent for the carriage of a single letter from Alexandria to Bombay. The sender then had to take the letter to the British Post Office and pay 3/2 for carriage as far as Alexandria. At Alexandria, Waghorn or his agent would take charge of the letters so consigned and rush them to Suez to catch the first available ship. Although the British Post Office used the same route, under the care of the British Consul at Alexandria, it was much less efficient and Waghorn was able to get his letters to Suez before the Post Office letters had even reached Cairo. The overall journey took about two and a half months eastward and just over two months westward, but there were considerable variations caused by weather, quarantine, or missed connections. The schedule of charges is shown on the facing page.

On June 3rd 1837, the London to India charge was reduced to 2/6, and shortly afterwards Waghorn was appointed Deputy Agent for the East India Company in Egypt.

WAGHORN'S EGYPTIAN AND OVERLAND AGENCY.

EGYPTIAN OFFICES; 34, Cornhill,
4th June, 1840.

MR. WAGHORN invites his Indian and other friends to subscribe to the London Branch of his useful Agency; some few of the benefits to be derived from it are as follows, viz. :—

LETTERS can be sent to these Offices for *Egypt, India, Ceylon, and China*, to be registered to the care of Messrs. Waghorn and Co., in Egypt, and then past to the Post-office, post-paid.

COMMISSIONS promptly executed for Subscribers, either in England or India.

A READING-ROOM, with the daily London Papers, is attached to the Offices, for the convenience of Subscribers while in town. A new monthly Newspaper, the "INDIAN NEWS," to be published on the arrival of each OVERLAND EXPRESS, will be sent *gratis* to Subscribers, from these offices, to any part of Great Britain, &c.

LETTERS OF CREDIT and introductions will be given to Subscribers and *Overland Travellers* for the Continent, Malta, and Egypt.

Every information and assistance rendered to parties, proceeding overland to India.

This Agency continues to register letters, insure and forward baggage, and parcels, by either the *Cape or Overland Routes*.

Fig. 1 The front page of a Waghorn circular.

Item	To	To	Total
	Waghorn	Post Office	
Single Letter	2/3	3/2	5/5
with 1 enclosure	4/6	6/4	10/10
more than 1, but under 1oz.	6/9	9/6	16/3
weighing 1oz.	9/-	12/8	21/8
each add'l quarter oz.	2/3	3/2	5/5
Newspapers	4d.	2d.	6d.

Waghorn had long favored the overland route across France, which was faster than the long sea route via Gibraltar, and boasted that he could beat the 'King's Mail' to Suez by ten days. His advocacy bore fruit when British packet service was established between Marseille and Alexandria (via Malta); a higher charge (3/8½) was made for letters endorsed for this route.

The brief success of Waghorn & Co. began to wane in 1843. P&O established regular steamship service between Suez and Calcutta, complementing the East India Company's service between Suez and Bombay, and approached Samuel Briggs, the British Consul in Alexandria since 1805, about promoting the carriage of passengers and mail by the Suez-Cairo route. However, P&O carried the mails by small steamer through the Mahmudiyeh Canal to Atfe and up the Nile to Cairo and utilized the Waghorn service (in conjunction with J. R. Hill & Co.) for the overland stretch until 1843. P&O then (ca. 1842) bought out J. R. Hill & Co. and formed a subsidiary, the Egyptian Transit Company, in which Mohammed Ali had a major interest. Waghorn gave up competition with the Egyptian Transit Company and returned to London to continue business as a forwarding agent. In 1846 Mohammed Ali bought out P&O's interest in the Egyptian Transit Company.

The principal philatelic interest in the Waghorn service is found in the covers that bear the handstamps of the Company's agents. Strictly speaking, they are not a part of Egyptian philately since they were not applied in Egypt, but traditionally they have been considered within the scope of Egyptian postal history and are avidly sought after.

The listing of the handstamps by Sidebottom was thought to be complete for many years, but eventually five new types were found (numbered 11, 12, 13, 14 and 14a in this book). Type 11, applied in Ceylon, was first reported⁷ in 1977; two copies are known. Type 12, applied in Marseille, was found⁸ in 1981 on a letter from Nice to India. Type 14 is in straight-line unframed format, reading *FORWARDED BY / MR. WAGHORN'S AGENCY / TO / MESSERS. FARNWORTH CO. / Registration fee paid BOMBAY*. Type 14a is the same as Type 14 except that *TO / MESSERS. FARNWORTH CO.* is replaced by *Mr. McCALLUM*. Waghorn had many agents with whom handstamps have not yet been identified, so new discoveries may yet be made.

The handstamps are illustrated in Figure 2 except for Agra, Type 14. In the following table the number of examples reported for each and the range of dates seen are given. The data are a combination of those of Sidebottom with a supplementary listing by Hill⁷. Altogether, 189 Waghorn covers are in the census, but there can be little doubt that additional examples lie unrecorded.

Letters carried by the Waghorn service are known originating from as far west as Philadelphia (Pennsylvania) and as far east as Java, Macao, Manila and China. The majority of the eastbound letters are addressed to places in India, but several are known to Singapore and places east. Most westbound letters are addressed to London, but many are addressed to Bordeaux, and a few to Dublin, Glasgow, Edinburgh, or Leghorn.

Dates of Use and Numbers Recorded			
Type	Earliest	Latest Numbers	
1	16 NO 36		1
2	23 NO 36		1
3	22 JY 37	9 JA 41	44
3a	5 JN 39	7 NO 39	2
4a & 4b	1 MR 36	5 MY 39	76
5	14 JN 38	22 JN 39	5
6	6 DE 37	27 FE 39	3 red
7	25 AP 39	SE 41	18
8	21 JN 38	3 FE 40	8
9	21 DE 39	18 DE 40	4
10	30 SE 36	1 JA 42	21
11	12 DE 39		2
12	5 FE 39		1
13	?		1
14	?		1
14a	3 AU 39		1

Waghorn letters generally bear a goodly collection of handstamped and manuscript markings, and most have a somewhat untidy appearance as a result (Fig. 3). The handstamps found on them include not only the date-stamps of the postal services that handled them, but marks of entry, disinfection marks, etc.

After the Waghorn service ceased and the Egyptian Transit Company became the principal entity responsible for the carriage of mails across Egypt, letters did not normally receive a special handstamp. Manuscript endorsements as to the route to be taken (via Marseille, Gibraltar, or Cape Town) took their place. The Egyptian Transit Company had handstamps inscribed for use at Cairo, Suez, and Alexandria⁹; they thus appear to have been used only in Egypt (Fig. 4). They do not appear on the bulk of the mails passing through Egypt and are quite rare. However, examples are known, struck in

**CARE OF MR. WAGHORN
ALEXANDRIA**

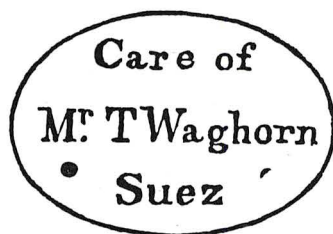
1



3

**CARE OF MR. WAGHORN
COSSIER**

2



3a

Fig. 2 Cachets of Waghorn's agents.

CARE OF MR WAGHORN
ALEXANDRIA

4

FROM MR LANGLEY
AGENT TO MR WAGHORN

5

CARE OF MESS^{RS} WAGHORN & CO
LONDON ALEXANDRIA

7



6

CARE OF MR WAGHORN
LPOOL ALEXANDRIA

8

MADRAS No 19
CARE OF MR WAGHORN
SUEZ

9

To the care of
MR WAGHORN

10

CEYLON
CARE OF MR. WAGHORN, CAIRO

11



12

FORWARDED BY
WAGHORN & CO
OVERLAND AGENTS
BOMBAY.

13

Fig. 2 Cachets of Waghorn's agents.

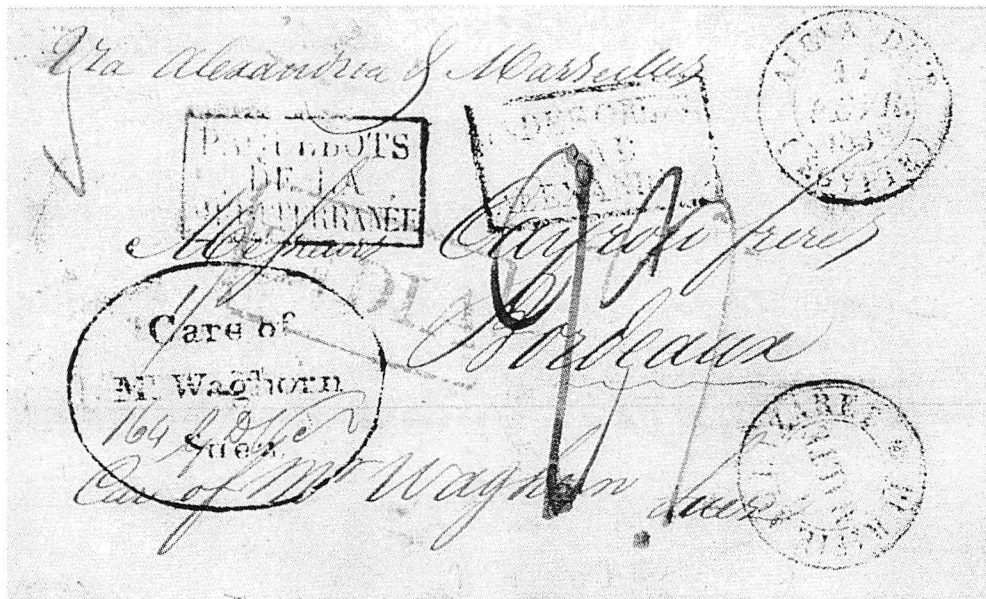


Fig. 3 A representative cover carried by Waghorn.

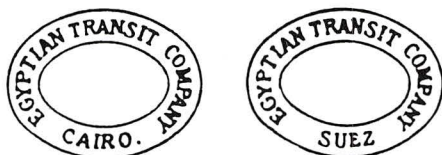


Fig. 4 Handstamps of the Egyptian Transit Company.

blue, on letters originating in Cairo in 1843 and 1849, and one on a letter from India to Vienna by way of the French post office in Alexandria in 1847. There is evidence that the Company carried some mail within Egypt, for printed receipts are known for the transport of 'groups' of specie between Alexandria and Cairo.

The Forwarding Agents

Forwarding agents are essentially business enterprises who undertake to arrange the transport of goods and correspondence, without themselves acting as carriers. Their importance was especially great in the years before the formation of the UPU. A good forwarding agent was aware of the many routes for sending mail, the frequency, speed, and reliability of ships, and which ships were soonest to depart. They agreed to set up accounts for firms and individuals making frequent use of their facilities. The general subject has been treated with thoroughness by Rowe, whose book includes a catalog of forwarding agents throughout the world¹⁰.

The first forwarding agent to consider is Samuel Briggs who settled in Egypt in 1805. He was appointed British Consul and became an agent and friend of Mohammed Aly. As Consul, he had much responsibility for handling the mails to India; he appears to have had a private enterprise in addition to his duties as Consul. In 1841 he became the P&O agent. His firm, Briggs & Co., offered a mail-forwarding service; letters so handled were struck with a small oval cachet reading FORWARDED BY / MESS^{RS}. / BRIGGS & Co. (Fig. 5).

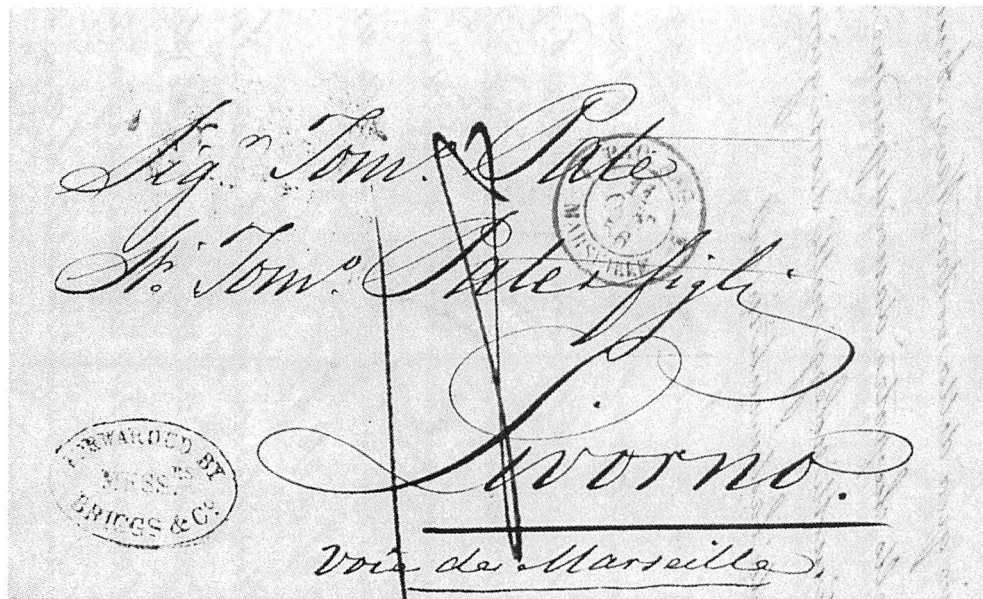


Fig. 5 A cover bearing the Briggs & Co. forwarding cachet.

Examples are at least as scarce as the commoner Waghorn covers. However, one must be alert to covers bearing a very similar handstamp without ‘forwarded by’; this was simply the normal sender’s cachet of the firm, used on its own correspondence. Although not without interest, it does not command the price of the forwarding agent cachet.

Samuel Shephard, who achieved fame as the founder of Shephard’s Hotel in Cairo, acted as forwarding agent while operating the British Hotel in Cairo and appears to have been responsible for handling much of the early mail from Cairo destined for Great Britain¹¹. His forwarding cachet is moderately rare (Fig. 6).

Rowe lists 26 forwarding agents besides Briggs & Co. at Alexandria. Most of them were active in the 1830s to 1850s, but one, Birde, Radcliffe & Buckley, is recorded in 1714 (using a manuscript endorsement). The agents known to have used handstamps are: H. Bircher, E. Bismot, Dumreicher Frères & Cie., Escalon Frères & Cie., Gsell & Bircher, Gsell & Co., Hakim e Figli, Ferdinand Krebsler & Cie., P. Le Aghion Modolfo & Co., Nahman Fratelli, Nazzio & Co., A.J. Polack, Sto. Di. Gi. Popolani, Regny & Co., A. Riga Giro, and Turin Frères. Others may yet be identified.

Cairo, not being a seaport, had fewer forwarding agents: Figli Di Demetrio and, of course, Samuel Shephard / British Hotel. Rowe lists no forwarding agent for Suez, but, curiously, two for Port Said, active in 1901–02, long after most agents had left the business: R. Broadbent and Henry S. King & Co. It is possible that their services were needed in connection with the large number of troops passing through the Suez Canal in connection with the Boxer Rebellion.

It is appropriate to mention one forwarding agent, B.F. Stevens¹², who was not actually located in Egypt, for he expedited much mail to Egypt from London for United States parties, and even had handstamps sometimes used on mail destined to Alexandria (Fig. 7) or Port Said.

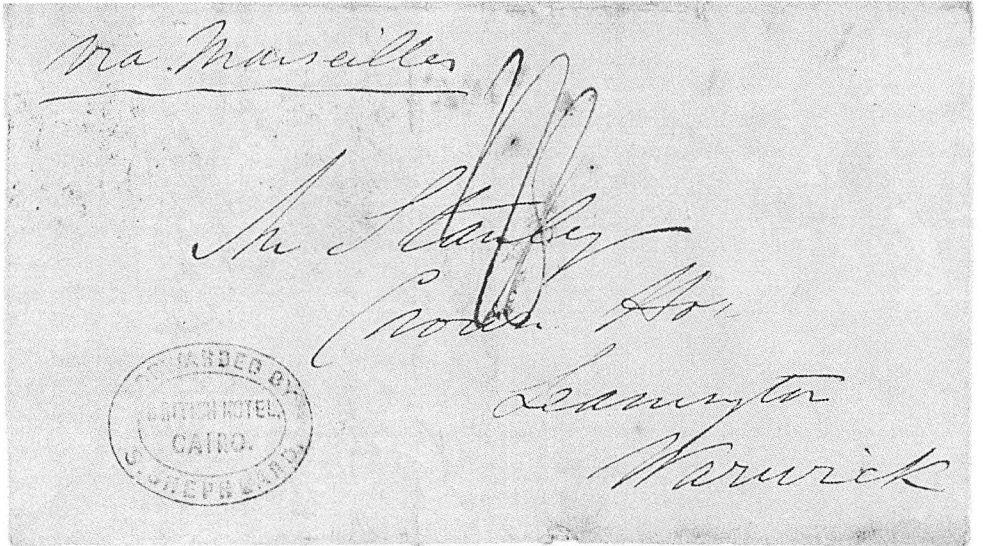


Fig. 6 The forwarding cachet of Samuel Shephard.



Fig. 7 A letter forwarded to Egypt by B.F. Stevens of London.

References

1. J.K. Sidebottom, *The Overland Mail*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948.
2. A. Cicurel, *L'OP* No. 82, 106–11 (Apr. 1953).
3. H. Robinson, *Carrying British Mails Overseas*, New York University Press, New York, 1964. Chapter 15.
4. Serialized by F. R. Hill, *QC IX, X, and XI* (1977–83); also published in *Postal History International*, June–Sep. 1974.
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6. R. Lowe(?), *The Philatelist*, 1967, 2–5 (Oct.); 37–40 (Nov.); 84–6 (Dec.).
7. F.R. Hill, *QC IX* (4/5), 35–9 (Dec. 1976/Mar. 1977). The catalog of the Christie's–Spink auction of March 12, 1997, has 23 Waghorn covers illustrated in color, including Types 11 and 14a.
8. R. Jeidel, *QC XI* (2), 33–4 (Whole no. 118, June 1981).
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10. K. Rowe, *The Postal History of the Forwarding Agents*, Leonard H. Hartmann, Louisville, KY, 1984; 4th ed., 1996.
11. J.H.E. Gilbert, *QC VII* (1), 22–8 (whole no. 73, Mar. 1970).
12. I. Paton, *AP* 108 (5), 425–7 (May 1994).