

Bogus Hong Kong Post Office 1841 letter



An entire-letter bearing an example of the "Hong Kong Post Office 1841" Yang's type 3 suddenly appeared on an Internet auction last month. A member spotted it early in the morning nearly (and probably) knocking him off his chair! If genuine, it would be the only recorded in BLACK**; the famous ["Owen" letter](#) now in Hongkong Post's collection is in red. The letter also has a Calcutta circular paid mark in black in addition to a Paris mark 28 January 1841 and the front also has a strike of a different Paris mark dated the same date. Someone added VIA INDIA in pencil on top left of the letter. Because of its importance and the firm believe that "Bargains may occasionally come up by less well-informed seller", bids came in quickly and eventually skyrocketed to over US\$2,500+. Obviously, if proved genuine, there is still a long way to go since the so far unique ["Owen" cover](#) fetched nearly HK\$300,000 in 2002! The news of this sensational discovery soon circulated around the globe.....

Several Hong Kong postal history gurus spotted the cover and upon critical analysis, the saying "What is too good to be true often is not!" proves right once again!

Philippe Orsetti: -

"This letter had to be in Hong Kong at the earliest on January 1st 1841 to receive the Hong Kong 1841 strike. So that makes at most 28 days from HK to Paris, through Calcutta, this one must have been flown on the "Concorde" !

The content of the letter (written in French) is quite hard to read because of its unusual handwriting. From what I gather, it only discussed sentiments and health. The only geographic places mentioned are California and Martinique. It answers a letter that was received two days earlier, on the 24th. Therefore this letter was written on the 26th, finished on the 28th of January as confirmed by the postscript and mailed the same day on the 28th. It was certainly mailed in Paris and send to Blois where it was received on the 29th. (Blois is quite close to Paris). The Paris cds is the departure strike, not the arrival marking. In my humble opinion, "Via India", Calcutta strike and HK Type 3 are completely bogus."

Then another renowned Hong Kong postal history guru Lee Scamp added: -

"Hong Kong was not occupied by the British until Jan. 1841 (26th if my memory serves), and the HK PO did not open until August 1841,

so it is clear this is a forgery, and Philippe's (Orsetti) translation proves it."

Finally, our man in Hong Kong Charles Chan FRPSL did the donkey work using his expertise in modern technology by comparing the BLACK strike and the RED strike on the "Owen" cover and his findings are: -

(a) The item is just a "facsimile" from the Webb's Book Type 3 illustrated on p.77 figure 10. The most eye-catching characteristics is the letter "O" of OFFICE, much smaller and shorter than other lettering. The genuine example of the strikes for 1841 and 184(2 manuscript) showed almost identical height and width of "O" compared with other lettering and little doubt from the same chop.

(b) Other letters similar to Webb's figure but dislike the genuine strikes included :

- "O" of POST slightly small, thick and round looked like a zero, where the genuine "O" of POST should be of Roman serif type lettering with thick for sides but thin lines for top and bottom.
- 2nd "F" of OFFICE is with very thick vertical line, where the genuine strike not.
- "O" of KONG thick and round, the genuine strike not.
- dot between "HONG" and "KONG" near the end serif of "G" for HONG, the genuine strike would be with some distance;
- the year figure "8" is very thick, smudged and became a large oval "O", where the genuine strike would be two flat "zero" to form the figure "8".

His conclusion: The item on sale is a "*genuine* facsimile" of Webb's illustration!



eBay item



Webb Type 3 - figure



Owen 1841 cover



Beckeman cover Plate A3

Postscript

Presumably the seller was fed up with so many watchdogs barking at his front door; he withdrew the lot after four days. A word of caution, this cover might eventually end up in a small auction and might catch someone off guard. *Caveat emptor!*

**The late Peter Shek also reported its use in black inking as early as in 1969 HK Arts Festival Stamp Exhibition by reference to the late John Shaw's Collection - a piece showing black Type 3 with year "1846". Please refer to the article in Hong Kong Study Circle Journal No.322 (July 2002) by Charles Chan on this subject questioning its genuine status.