

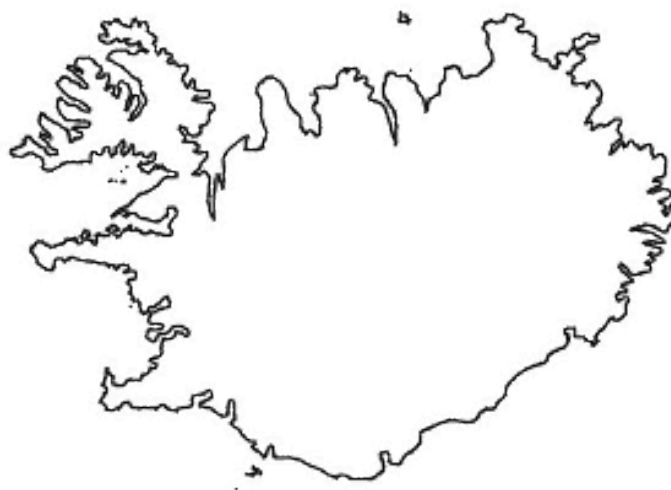
ICELAND PHILATELIC MAGAZINE

An independent journal for collectors of Iceland stamps and postal history



London Ship Letter

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SPECIAL # 37– LONDON SHIP LETTER – 2023 V1

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This is a part of a series published which summarizes, supplemented by recent discoveries, information published over the years in IslandsKontakt and elsewhere. We must all be grateful for the sustained efforts of all those who, over the years, as Editors or Authors have contributed to the gathering and dissemination of information relevant to the philately of Iceland.

This is a part of seven studies:

IslandsKontakt Special # 29 V1 2021
IslandsKontakt Special # 31 V1 2023
IslandsKontakt Special # 32 V1 2023
IslandsKontakt Special # 33 V1 2023
IslandsKontakt Special # 37 V1 2023

And earlier:

IslandsKontakt Special # 3 V2 2018
IslandsKontakt Special # 5 V1 2016

GRANTON SHIP LETTER
EDINBURGH LARGE SHIP LETTER
EDINBURGH SMALL SHIP LETTER
LEITH SHIP LETTER
LONDON SHIP LETTER

EDINBURGH PAQUEBOT
LEITH PAQUEBOT

Compilations of other British postmarks and other issues in the series “IslandsKontakt Special” can be accessed for free at <https://www.nfvskandinavie.com/artikelen-ijisland.php>

In the study of LEITH SHIP LETTER we found a few examples of an additional postmark, LONDON SHIP LETTER.

In 2015 the late Wilbur Jonsson¹ commented in IslandsKontakt # 104, July 2015 page 10 on a 1891 stationary with LEITH SHIP LETTER as well as LONDON SHIP LETTER:

“I have seen the combination of the London S/L CDS with other Ship Letter marks and have always wondered why the detour.”



¹ 1936-2022

He never – as far as we can see - got an answer², but we will try to give one now.

It all started in 1657 with an “ordinance” and Act of 1660 and with Robertson³:

“ ... letters brought into this country [UK] from abroad by private trading ships (known as SHIP-LETTERS) were made subject to postage on arrival in UK. Under penalty for evasion masters of vessels were instructed to hand over their letters to the Post Office Official in the first port of call.

The letters were sent to London where they were marked up with the total of three charges: (a) The ship-letter charge; (b) The small fee paid to the ship master for each letter handed over; (c) Inland postage according to the number of miles the letter had been conveyed by road from the port of entry (via London) to the place of address.”

That was a detour!

The system developed over the years and when mail from Iceland was handled, the majority of mail was carried by shipping companies under contract with the Postal Administration. Mail coming into UK by ship were registered with a SHIP LETTER handstamp and forwarded.

Much mail – especially from “the Scandinavian countries and Iceland” - arrived with “private ships” and often the stamp(s) on such mail was not cancelled in the country of origin. The stamp(s) was cancelled with the date postmark at the post office in the port of call or a SHIP LETTER postmark was used.

Early mail that passed London on its way to the rest of Europe and other parts of UK received LONDON PAID⁴ (example):



LONDON PAID is a LONDON inland transit cancellation on ship mail. It is not a detour.

There are interesting examples of LONDON PAID from Norway⁵.

² Jakob Arreavad tried in IslandsKontakt # 104, page 11 f. but it was not a real answer!

³ Alan W. Robertson: “A History of the Ship Letters of the British Isles”. Reprinted Edition Volume I, A.1

⁴ Some with PAID between two bars some without.

⁵ There are many from Norway – search for example old auctions at Scanfil: <https://skanfil.no/auksjon/>



Mailed from Christiania (Oslo) 28 June 1870 and transit cancel Edinburg duplex with 131 JY 1 70. Red LONDON PAID upon arrival to London. I have found two examples from Iceland.



From Reykjavik 1874 with postmark Reykjavik D2 17/6. EDINBURGH SHIP LETTER, transit Edinburgh JU 23 74 (on the back, see below), transit LONDON PAID 24 JU 74 in red and arrival cancel EDMONTON JU 24 74 on the back. DIANA left 17.6.1874. The "1½" pence is the British part of the postage.





Cover front from 1877 (2 July) Reykjavik to Rennes in France with arrival 9 July 77. Large EDINBURGH SHIP LETTER and Edinburgh JY 7 77 and red LONDON PAID 9 JY 77. It was sent with “SS Snowdon” and mentioned in the newspaper Ísafold from 03 July 1877: “A horse merchant ship from Slimon in Leith, the steamer 'Snowdon' (355, Thomas), was here on the morning of the 30th last month, and went again yesterday with 283 horses and many passengers.”

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LONDON SHIP LETTER PAID (or without PAID) ⁶ is something different⁷ – now the “paid” seems to refer to some control when mail is leaving UK.

There are numerous ship letters stamps from London. The interesting one is Robertson number “S.33”⁸ used from 1858 until 1903 and number “S.54” used from app. 1872 until app. 1898⁹

LONDON SHIP LETTER (Robertson S33):



S. 33

LONDON SHIP LETTER (Robertson

S54):



S. 54

⁶ Alan W. Robertson: “A History of the Ship Letters of the British Isles”. Reprinted Edition Volume I, A.1 give an introduction concerning INCOMING «SHIP LETTERS”, and Volume II, E.171 ff gives a long introduction to LONDON SHIP LETTER.

⁷ At Steambord.com an answer to the use is: “it is just to show that the letter had been fully prepaid in the country it was sent from”

⁸ Alan W. Robertson: “A History of the Ship Letters of the British Isles”. Reprinted Edition Volume II, E.177 Hoskin # 124 and # 126 - Mike Dovey & Keith Morris:” Paquebot Cancellations of the world” (Hosking 4. edition)

⁹ In red 1873-86 – black 1897-1898.

We have only found one use of red LONDON SHIP LETTER PAID on mail from Iceland. It is from 1880:



Stationary 10 aur to Denmark – Reykjavik 10 08 and small SHIP LETTER – red LONDON SHIP LETTER PAID 16 08 80 and Copenhagen 16 08 80. Sent with SS CAMOENS (Trip 3) to Scotland and then by train via London to the Channel and again by train to Denmark. Here it is important to understand, that SS CAMOENS at least at that time was a “private” ship so before leaving UK there must be control of payment for the transport in UK.

The interesting period of use of LONDON SHIP LETTER in relation to mail from Iceland is the years 1890, 1891 and 1892 but Norwegian use of LONDON SHIP LETTER PAID can be of interest as well, so we include examples from 1887 and 1888. We have not seen examples from Norway later than 1889:

1887



Norway 20 øre letter with S/S NORGE from Bergen to Bordeaux via NEWCASTLE ON TYNE SHIP LETTER JY 11 87 and red LONDON SHIP LETTER/ PAID – JY 12 87.¹⁰

¹⁰ Per Erik Danielsen “Sjø- Postruter på Utlandet» page 10.

1888



NEWCASTLE ON TYNE/SHIP LETTER on cover redirected back from Norway; 23/31 July 1888 Sent from IPSWICH to "Bergen, Norway but redirected back to London from Bergen - red **LONDON SHIP LETTER PAID** – JY 31 88.

Then back to Iceland:

Why is LONDON SHIP LETTER found on mail from Iceland after arriving at LEITH and only in the years 1890-1892?

We cannot give a definitive answer to that, but we believe, that the answer to the “detour” is – that it was not a “detour” in 1890 -1892 when the mail arrived in LEITH and received LEITH SHIP LETTER and later in London a further LONDON SHIP LETTER.

Part of the answer can perhaps be found in Per Erik Danielsen “Sjø- Postruter på Utlandet» page 16-18. There is an article from “Posthornet” from July 1890 describing the first mail trip from Bergen to Newcastle, 31 May 1890 with SS MERCUR. The person in charge of the mail on board tells about the arrival at Newcastle, where the postmaster has heard of the new route, but has not received instructions, which he later receives.

For the “private” ships from Iceland there was no agreement with the postal authorities in UK – so the payment for transport in UK and further on was confirmed (PAID) – same as in 1880 when CAMOENS arrived with mail.

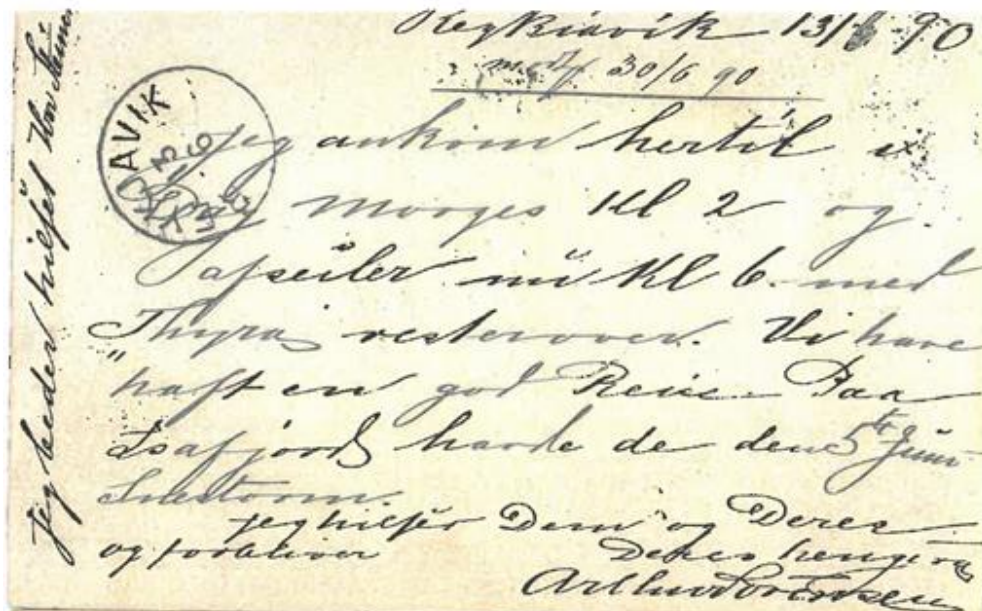
To secure, that ship mail was handled correctly, ship mail going to “the mainland” was handled in London. It arrived in UK as ship mail and it was treated as ship mail – but at an office in London.¹¹

There was no “DETOUR” – the mail was on its way overland by train but there was control on the way – in London.

There are as far as we know only 6 examples from Iceland with both LONDON SHIP LETTER and the round LEITH SHIP LETTER over the years 1890 until 1892 – but no more!

¹¹ It is presently not clear if it happened to mail delivered north and south of London or delivered at some distance from London.

1890



Stationary 8 aur added 3 aur from Reykjavik 13.6.90 to Copenhagen. LEITH SHIP LETTER JU 27 90 and black – but unclear – black **LONDON SHIP LETTER**.

The text tells, that the sender arrived at Reykjavik 13. 6. 90 and the next day will continue with S/S THYRA going west. Per the schedule from 1891 (predicting that it is a duplicate from 1890) it is trip 5 – expected to go to leave Reykjavik around 13. 6. On the card is written in pencil: “received 30/06-90”.

Isafold 21 96 90: “Magnetic , Slimon's steamer, left here the night of the 19th...”

Probably sent with S/S Magnetic. S/S Magnetic belonged to R.& D. Slimon, Leith and was not a “mail ship”¹².

1891

Isafold 13 06 91: “Steamer Magnetic, Slimons, arrived here yesterday and leaving again tonight going west of the country and north.”

¹² See further in IslandsKontakt # 104.



Letter from Reykjavik 13.6.91 to Copenhagen with LEITH SHIP LETTER JU 22 91 and red **LONDON SHIP LETTER** JU 23 91. Probably with SS Magnetic.

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“Steamer Magnetic, Slimons, arrived here Sunday evening 4th., and with her few foreign tourists,The ship left from here directly to Scotland last evening with over 400 horses,” (Isafold 8.7.1891)



Reykjavik via LEITH SHIP LETTER JY 10 91 – red **LONDON SHIP LETTER** JY 11 91 - sent to Germany.

The next two were with S/S Magnetic too.



10 aur stationery card from Reykjavik 20.7.1891 per S/S Magnetic via England to Copenhagen. Two different ship cancels "LEITH SHIP LETTER JY 24 91" and in red **LONDON SHIP LETTER** JY 25 91. Arr. mark "K.OMK 1 27.7.91".



10 aur stationery card canc. REYKJAVIK 20.7 sent to France via England with transit canc. LEITH SHIP LETTER JY 24 91, red **LONDON SHIP LETTER** JY 25 91" and CALAIS 25 JUIL 91 as well as arrival canc. TOURS INDRE ET LOIRE 26 JUIL 91.

1892

Isafold, 6 7 92: "The steamship Stamford, partly the property of Mr. Zöllners in Newcastle, came here this morning from the north country and the west. Had left England 23rd last month and called at Seyðisfjörður, Vopnafjörður, Húsavík, Akureyri, Hofsós and Sauðárkrók. Took some fish to the east and north. Here it takes horses, going directly to England the next evening. Mr. Zöllner himself is with the ship."



Stationary from Reykjavik 7 7 92 to Germany. LEITH SHIP LETTER JY 19 92 and red LONDON SHIP LETTER JY 13 92.

1893

We have not seen any examples from 1893.

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So – it all started with a “detour” in 1657 but ended with a “pitstop” on the way from UK. LONDON SHIP LETTER “S.33” was used until 1903 and number “S.54” used until 1898 but from 1892 not as far as we can verify on mail from Iceland (or Norway). The reason is probably – at least from 1894 – the introduction of the PAQUEBOT cancellation. PAQUEBOT cancellations are another story, and it can be started with the introduction from Mike Dovey from the TPO & Seapost Society home page:

1894 Paquebot marks in the beginning.

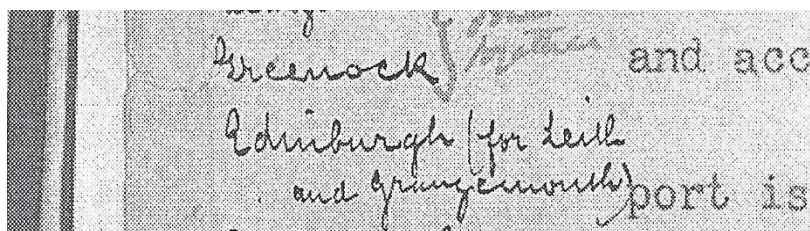
By Mike Dovey

“By 1891 the shipping lines from Europe were going all over the world and the passengers on board were having great difficulty in posting mail. A letter written on board ship could only be posted if and when the ship arrived at a port. Someone was sent ashore to purchase postage stamps, and then the letter was posted by the same person having to go ashore again to the post office. In 1892 the Universal Postal Union (UPU) decided at a meeting in Switzerland that all ships were their own sovereign territory while on the high seas and outside territorial waters and that a passenger could write a letter, add a stamp of the country to which the ship was registered, and put the letter in the ship's mailbox. From there it was taken to the nearest post office in the next port of call and a "paquebot" postmark was added to the letter, usually over the stamp.



The first time vessels on the high seas were to use this method was in 1894. It was taken up at first by Britain and France and then spread around the world because it was so much easier to use this new postal system to send mail. From 1894 onwards the Post Office in Great Britain issued a new rubber "paquebot" cancellation 33mm in length (Hosking 22) to all post offices that needed such a mark. These included not only London but also Bristol, Dartmouth, Dublin (Dublin & Cork TPO), Edinburgh, Folkestone, Grangemouth, Greenock, Grimsby, Hull, Leith, Liverpool, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Plymouth, Queenstown, St. Helier, St. Peter Port, South Shields, and Southampton.”

The omnibus paquebot was sent to Leith on January 9th, 1894.



Edinburgh came later (1903)¹³

¹³ Further to that story can be found here: <http://www.tpo-seapost.org.uk/tpo2/sppaquebot1894.html>
EDINBURGH PAQUEBOT IslandsKontakt Special # 3, V2 – 2018 and LEITH PAQUEBOT IslandsKontakt Special # 5 V1 – 2016.

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IslandsKontakt Special # 31 V1 2023 EDINBURGH LARGE SHIP LETTER

IslandsKontakt Special # 33 V1 2023 LEITH SHIP LETTER

IslandsKontakt Special # 5 V1 2016 LEITH PAQUEBOT

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