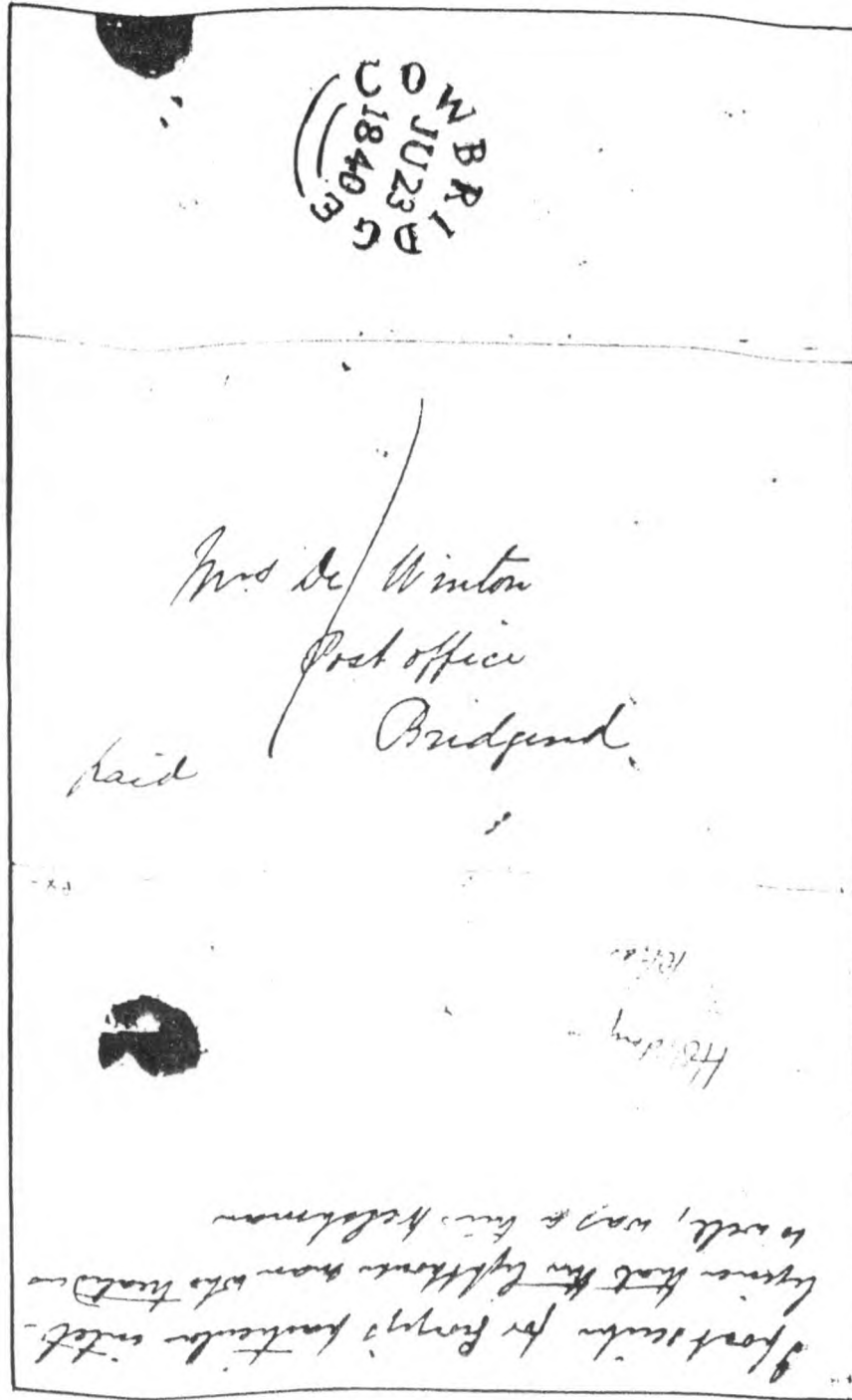


A COVER FROM MY COLLECTION: VIII

Submitted by Neil Prior



(The letter illustrated above from Neil Prior's collection is interesting both as a piece of postal history and for its content. As can be seen, it is an early example of the Universal Penny Post which has been prepaid in cash at Cowbridge. Another example of old habits dying hard is the fact that the letter is cross-written, even though the writer could have allowed

himself to use a second sheet of paper without incurring any financial penalty. As to its content, it is a lively letter, full of well-described detail, from T.B. Collinson to his sister Julia De Winton. It is the sort of letter that she must have been glad to receive and to pass round among her family and friends. It speaks for itself really, but a little background information on the writer and his sister will add to the interest.

Thomas Bernard Collinson was born in 1821, so at the time of this letter he was a very young man. He was the son of the Rector of Gateshead and had no Welsh blood in him at all. He had entered the Royal Engineers in 1838 and according to his obituary in the Proceedings of the Institution of Civil Engineers (vol.150, 1901/02, p.461), at this period of time he was engaged on Ordnance Survey work in Wales, Ireland and the north of England. His sister Julia, to whom he is writing here, was married to Walter Wilkins, a Radnorshire notability and M.P. for the county between 1835 and 1840. In 1839 Wilkins had altered his name by royal license to the much more distinguished "De Winton", claiming that that was his family's original name, so there must still have been a certain novelty for Julia in being addressed as Mrs De Winton. The family home was at Maesllwch, near Glasbury, so what they were doing near Bridgend is uncertain. The letter is endorsed 'Holiday letter', which suggests that perhaps the De Wintons were staying with one of the Vale of Glamorgan families and brother Thomas had arranged things in such a way that he was doing his Ordnance Survey work in south Wales at the same time from a base in the village of Llanbleddian near Cowbridge.

The fact that the letter is addressed to the Post Office at Bridgend does not mean that Mrs De Winton was the Postmistress or that she was lodging at the Post Office. What it must mean is that wherever she was staying, there was still no regular delivery and letters had to be collected from the nearest post office. It was only later in the 1840s that a regular foot post was started from Bridgend into the Vale.

T.B. Collinson went on to enjoy an interesting career in the Royal Engineers, ending up as a Major-General. He saw service in China, New Zealand and the Mediterranean, as well as holding various posts in England. He left the corps in 1873 and died in 1902. Ed.)

The text of the letter reads as follows:-

"Llanblethian June 23rd 1840

My dearest Jue (*)

My particular business took us yesterday to Newport. We started from here on horseback at an hour when Harry and all his house had not awoken from their first slumber, and after such a breakfast that had that individual been awake, and wide awake, he would have been up adoin long before. After breakfast we mounted our horses and after that we got to Cardiff by $\frac{1}{2}$ past 9. We had several adventures on our journey, such as the escape and flight of one horse, the obstreperous conduct of the other in refusing to go after the lost one and such like - but however we did get to Cardiff and had $\frac{1}{2}$ an hour to spare, passed by me putting letters in the post.

Our next start was by the Monarch coach. What a gratification to Georgy, & behold, we had no sooner got out of Cardiff, than then dashed by us a mounted dragoon in full dress, moustachios and all - then another - a third - and then a whole troop. 50 dragoons galloped past as hard as they could.

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When we got to Newport at about 12, we did what will shock Hain, we paid away some money. But as it was all credited to a small account between Queen Victoria and Ll. Williams, she need not be afraid for our purses. Our own journey cost us but 6d apiece including pikes and porters. We walked from Newport to a lighthouse (5 miles) and there were treated with cheese, bread & butter, rum & water, & currant wine, all of which made Newport lighthouse a very desirable object for Hain and Georgy to walk to.

From the lighthouse we went to a church 3 miles further, all along the banks of the Severn, passing by a house where 6 or 8 weeks ago I used to get a pint of milk every day. From this church we walked into Cardiff, 6 miles, by a very pretty country walk. Here we called on Capt. Smythe & having "just dropped in" at the right time, we were regaled with fresh salmon and sherry - then after meeting all our friends in the streets one after the other, excepting Mr Abbot, the very one I wished to see - we left Cardiff on our horses, and again transacted business on the road - I called for your bowls and they ought to be at Bridgend post office today. David Harry's saddle was taken to Bridgend on this day week & left at the inn the carrier puts up at - if you can find means to convey it to Southern-down you will take a load of anxiety off my mind.

I can't think what is the reason of Charley's silence. She has not written for 24 hours.

I believe that ever since the great Cornish giant Aldiborontophoskiphorn-iostikos waded across just by the black rock below Southerndown, and took away several beeves from that place, there has been a lack of such cattle - do you find it so - probably now that a certain young gentleman has come, the great giant or his successors will restore all these beeves.

What a happiness it is to have some constant employment, to which you can continually refer! And when to such employment is added plenty of outdoor exercise, what an appetite one does get!! Keep your feet warm thro' exercise and your head cool thro' temperance says Dr. Parr - do but send Hain & Georgy to Bridgend everyday & stop the supplies of Hock, & you will be the making of them.

I hope my dear Jue you continue to get better everyday & that Hain is quite well, & Georgy quite well & all the children quite well.

Yr very affecte brother
T.B. Collinson

I postscript for Georgy's particular intelligence that the lighthouse man who treated us so well was a true Welshman."

* The reading is not altogether clear and is not helped by the fact that the letter is double-written. External evidence requires the name of the recipient to be Julia, but certainly the full version of this name is not used in either of the places where it occurs. "Jue" appears to be the reading and was presumably Collinson's name for his sister.