

The Falkland Islands 1937 Coronation Issue Through the Eyes of Their Postmaster

By Albert-Friedrich Gruene

In 1934 Ellen Maude Carey became the Colonial Postmaster of the Falkland Islands, thus becoming the first female postmaster of the British Empire. A collection of letters written by her in the 1930s offers a unique insight into the daily lives of post-office workers on the island. Albert-Friedrich Gruene reveals how one such letter, concerning the 1937 Coronation omnibus issue, gives a vivid impression of what the event meant for the post-office staff in Stanley.



Fig 1 A passport photograph of Maude Carey—the first female postmaster of the British Empire

A few years ago I bought a selection of letters written to stamp collectors in the 1930s by the Falkland Islands well-known postmaster, Miss Ellen Maude Carey (1888–1950). The letters from Maude Carey are important philatelic items as they fill many archival gaps left behind by a fire in the Town Hall of Port Stanley on 16 April 1944 which completely gutted the post office and postal archives. One such letter gives us a unique perspective of the huge challenge that faced the island's post-office staff as they struggled to keep up with demand for the 1937 Coronation omnibus issue.

A remarkable woman

Miss Carey (Fig 1) was born in 1888. She was one of eleven children of Charles Carey, who was an ex Royal marine and became Chief of Police in the Falklands, and Ellen Elizabeth née Rudd. In 1903, when she was just 15 years old, Maude became a teacher in Stanley. At the age of 32, she took up employment as a post office clerk. After working for 14 years in the post office she was appointed to the post of Colonial Postmaster on 1 January 1934. With this appointment she became the first female postmaster of the British Empire. In 1935 she was presented with a Silver Jubilee Medal from King George V and in 1943 she was awarded the Imperial Service Order for merits during her long colonial service. We can assume that in 1937 she had a salary of £280, which allowed her to buy a car after she had acquired the first driving license for a woman in the Falklands. She lived in Stanley in a white house next to the Jubilee Villas, called 'Harbour View'. Miss Carey died in 1950, three years after her retirement due to health problems. Peter Robertson of Port Stephens—the current owner of 'Harbour View' (Maude Carey was his great-aunt)—believes that the burning of the old Town Hall and post office had a terrific effect on her health. He still remembers standing beside her at the age of ten and witnessing the dramatic event in 1944.

Over the years, Maude Carey became

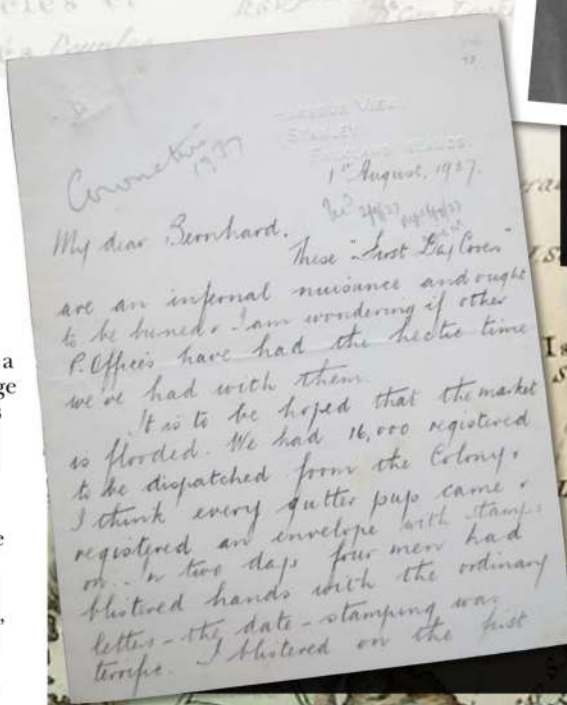


Fig 2 The front page of the letter sent by Maude Carey to Captain Bernhard Grant on 1 August 1937 concerning the 1937 Coronation issue

a great friend of many well-known collectors. One of them was Captain Bernhard Grant, who in 1952 published with Stanley Gibbons the well-known book *The Postage Stamps of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies*, now one of the classic works on Falkland Philately. A letter sent by Maude Carey on 1 August 1937 to Captain Bernhard Grant gives a unique perspective of post office life as collectors scrambled to get first day covers of the 1937 Coronation issue (Fig 2).

'My dear Bernhard,
These "First Day Covers" are an infernal nuisance and ought to be burned. I am wondering if other P. Offices have had the hectic time we've had with them.

It is to be hoped that the market is flooded. We had 16,000 registered to be dispatched from the Colony & I think every gutter pup came & registered an envelope with stamps on. In two days four men had blistered hands with the ordinary letters – the date-stamping was terrific. I blistered on the first day to help to get the mail away. We had only a week & what a picnic. Even last mail 4000 registered were sent away.

I had such a lot of worry – the doctor almost made a fuss & ordered me not to work. However, I pegged away with my usual driving spirit and managed it fairly well.

Re your stamp I cannot remember what I did. It would appear that I've forgotten to seal your envelope yet the clerks would have noticed it & told me.

To-morrow, I'll get your list & note what you wanted. I am sending you the "Fox Bay" covers. They are not well done – too heavy. There is a new man at the job out there – he has done little date stamping, however they are postmarked the 12th May.

Many thanks for all the papers you sent me after reading them I pass them over to the rest of the family. I am sorry that Mrs Grant is not so well – she is wonderful to keep about so much. Please give her my love, also Marjorie. My brother has been in London a whole year – what a long holiday – he is not returning until Novbr. He saw the coronation & enjoyed it. Have you had covers from South Georgia? I sent some there & wonder if there has been an opportunity of dispatching them.

My car is running smoothly & I am getting heaps of fun with it. I been in the ditch more than once

but not damaged anyone or the car. The roads are narrow for turning.
Well! I must switch off – have very little time for anything these days – my grand piano is a beauty but is left idle. Jim bought a beautiful wireless set GBP 36-10-0. We even get Japan on it.
With all the best,
Y's Maude

The time of mid-May 1937 was an extremely hectic period for the post office in Stanley. For the first time in the philatelic history of the Falkland Islands more than a million copies of one single Falkland Island stamp were sold: the green ½d. Coronation stamp. A comparison of the stamps sold of the 1935 Jubilee issue and the 1937 Coronation issue reveals that record high sales for this new omnibus issue were reached.

Stamps sold of the 1935 Jubilee issue:

1d.	168,840 stamps
2½d.	99,440 stamps
4d.	78,100 stamps
1s	76,920 stamps
Total:	423,300

Stamps sold of the 1937 Coronation issue:

½d.	1,141,022 stamps
1d.	730,610 stamps
2½d.	606,384 stamps
Total:	2,478,016

The first omnibus issue saw sales of slightly more than 400,000 Jubilee stamps compared to almost 2.5 million Coronation stamps in 1937. A more than six times higher demand had to be handled by practically the same post office staff. 'Blisters' seemed to be inevitable!

Captain Bernhard Grant explains in his book: 'Owing to the large quantity of registered mail, the ordinary registration labels were dispensed with, and the old registration crown hand stamp used in Victorian and Edwardian days was brought into use, each envelope being numbered in manuscript [Fig 3]. This was the only occasion since those days, on which this registration device was used. Fox Bay, however, was not so pressed, and continued to use the normal Fox Bay registration labels [author: with a few exceptions which were registered at the Stanley post office] and the stamps were also placed on sale in South Georgia in the normal way at the same time [author: but in South Georgia provisional handwritten registration marks were also widely used].'

From her letter to Bernhard Grant, we can see that Maude Carey was often straightforward in her views. Personally, I don't agree that the Coronation 'First Day Covers are an infernal nuisance and ought to be burned' (but I have to confess I had not to deal with them). She was certainly right that the market was flooded by them. If you look for Coronation covers nowadays you always find a good selection, mostly at moderate prices. In my opinion this is a great

Fig 3 A Falkland Islands Coronation issue f.d.c. mailed to the USA featuring the neat handwriting of Maude Carey and the provisional registration crown handstamp (Reduced)



Fig 4 A late Coronation cover sent in 1944 cancelled in Stanley but with a Fox Bay registration label—Fox Bay has been crossed out by blue crayon (Reduced)

Fig 5 A Coronation cover from South Georgia to Pebble Island West Falkland (Reduced)



Fig 6 A Coronation f.d.c. cover addressed to the Governor of the Falklands (Reduced)

opportunity to pick the ones in which specialised collectors have an interest. There is so much material available that you can often make interesting discoveries. Fig 4 shows an example of a late Coronation cover from 1944 cancelled in Stanley with Fox Bay registration label in which 'Fox Bay' has been crossed out by blue crayon. Apart from covers which bear an interesting destination (Fig 5) or show a correct commercial use, I have specialised over the years in Coronation covers which bear addresses of interesting personalities living in the Falkland Islands (Fig 6).

South Georgia and Fox Bay

The overall quantity of covers originating from South Georgia seems to be relatively limited and the ones from Fox Bay seem to be very limited. Only a small contingent of Coronation covers was serviced in Fox Bay. My crude estimate would be that for ten Coronation covers that exist from South Georgia only one exists from Fox Bay (if at all). Many covers from South Georgia were serviced with provisional registration marks, but some also exist with normal South Georgia registration labels (Fig 7).

Although Maude Carey criticised the way the new Postmaster of Fox Bay, Mr McLaren (from early 1937 to April 1938) cancelled the Coronation stamps ('They are not well done—too heavy'); I think the ones I have seen are mostly very acceptable (Fig 8) commercial covers.

Some years ago, I found an interesting commercial cover with Coronation stamps from the Globe Store, Stanley, to the Dunlop Rubber Company (Fig 9). Maybe the Globe Store ordered new tires for Maude Carey's car from the Dunlop Rubber Company? The cancellation of the stamps on the cover is not clear (I wish Mr McLaren from Fox Bay would have stamped it!), but the postage rate of 3d. indicates that the letter was sent after the ½d. increase of the postage rate in September 1940, so it was probably in 1941.

An oversized cover addressed to local merchant Les Hardy shows the whole Coronation set in blocks of four with the overprints of the individual sheet numbers (Fig 10). This sheet numbering system was introduced with the Coronation issue for the first time in the Falklands. The idea was to facilitate correct and easy inventory management within the postal administration. I am told that Les Hardy was probably the most successful local business entrepreneur of his time (1898–1962). He owned and lived in Montague House on John Street. In the front of his premises he operated a very up-market retail outlet, the 'Kelper Store', where he sold fancy goods, fashion, jewellery, confectionary, ice cream, toys, magazines and periodicals. Of course, he could not miss dealing with Coronation covers!

The well-known collector, Karl Vernon Lellman (1910–2010), managed to get his Coronation first day cover with normal registration labels (Fig 11). Maybe he was an 'early bird' on the 12 May, or convinced Maude Carey to release some for him personally instead of using the old registration crown handstamp on his covers?

In 1948, Karl was appointed town clerk to the newly instituted and democratically elected Stanley Town Council. In 1953 he emigrated to New Zealand where he spent 20 years in the public service. He never lost contact with the Falklands.

A unique example

William Barlas (1888–1941) was appointed in 1928 as the Magistrate and Deputy Postmaster at South Georgia Island. Together with Maude Carey, he was awarded the King's Silver Jubilee Medal in 1935; two of ten people from the Falkland's so honoured. Some time ago I found a very special Coronation cover he created for himself. The cover, which I picked up for less than US\$4 is unique (Fig 12). William Barlas cancelled



Fig 7 A Coronation cover from South Georgia with a normal registration label (Reduced)



Fig 8 A Fox Bay Coronation cover cancelled by Postmaster McLaren (Reduced)



Fig 9 A commercial Coronation cover to the Dunlop Rubber Company from the Globe Store, Stanley (Reduced)

each Coronation stamp with a different canceller (Heijtz SG1, SG2, and SG4). This cover shows all three cancellers which were in use in South Georgia's small post office on 12 May 1937. In 1941 he came to a sudden end by an avalanche which pushed him into the sea while he was walking along the path between King Edward Point (the site of the magistrate's residence and post office) and the whaling station at Grytviken (slightly more than a kilometre away).

Ample collecting opportunities

I think the few examples of covers depicted in this article demonstrate that the 1937 Coronation issue can be a great collecting area and offers ample opportunities for interested collectors to find attractive niches for specialisation.

Maude Carey's letter to Captain Grant shows clearly her dedication and strong commitment to her duties as the first Lady Postmaster of the British Empire. Even health problems had to be ignored to cope with a previously unknown dimension of philatelic demand. No doubt Maude Carey and the post office staff did a great job!



Fig 10 A Coronation cover showing individual sheet numbers on blocks of four (Reduced)



Fig 11 A Coronation f.d.c obtained by Karl Vernon Lellmann with Falkland Islands registration label rather than the provisional registration crown handstamp



Fig 12 A unique, self-addressed Coronation f.d.c. created by William Barlas, the Deputy Postmaster at South Georgia Island. All three cancellers in use in South Georgia's small post office on 12 May 1937 have been applied