



TRANSATLANTIC MAIL STUDY GROUP  
OF THE  
British North American Philatelic Society

Newsletter No. 59

October 1997

THE BRITISH QUEEN

In trans-Atlantic Newsletter #57, I showed a letter which Jack Arnell had provided. It bears a Southampton Ship Letter mark, despite having been carried by the steamship '*British Queen*', a ship which was not thought to have visited that port until 1842. I promised to investigate.

I can confirm that '*British Queen*' did not berth at Southampton on that voyage but, some of her mail entered by that port. The changes in the Solent area in 1842 were extensive, and so I have devoted a Newsletter to the '*British Queen*'s' voyages and to this part of England.

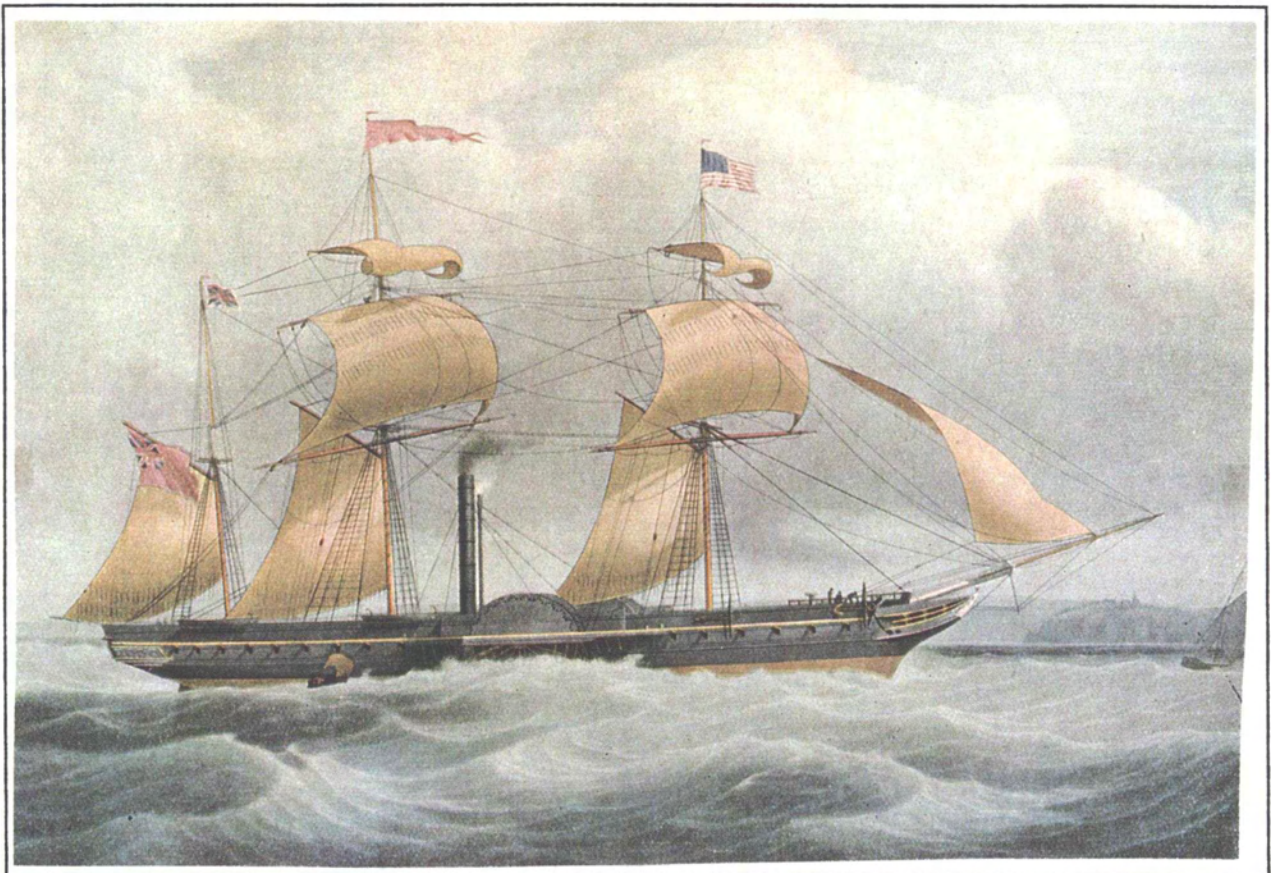


Figure 1: The Steamship '*British Queen*' (source uncertain, but this is probably from the aquatint by WJ Huggins, showing the ship taking aboard a pilot to enter Cork harbour).

The '*British Queen*' was floated out of her dock at Limehouse (London) on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 1838. She was delayed slightly and left London only on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1838 for New York, calling at Portsmouth, under command of Lieutenant Roberts, late of '*Sirius*' (also of the British and American Steam Navigation Company). She made nine round

voyages before being sold to the Belgian Government in August 1841, after which she made another three voyages, now from Antwerp to Southampton and New York, under the Belgian flag, but retaining her British officers. She was sold and scrapped in 1844 (notes taken from '*North Atlantic Seaway*' by NRP Bonsor).

## THE VOYAGES OF THE 'BRITISH QUEEN'

The information which follows has been reconstructed from the table of early steamship voyages prepared for the Trans-Atlantic Handbook #1.

I have made some notations from covers that I have seen, and will maintain the table and amend it occasionally, if anyone has supplementary detail.

STEAMSHIP BRITISH QUEEN					
Ser	Depart	Arrive	Depart	Arrive	Comments
(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
1.	London: 10 Jul 39 Portsmouth: 12 Jul 39	New York: 28 Jul 39	New York: 1 Aug 39	Portsmouth: 15 Aug 39 London: 16 Aug 39	Maiden Atlantic voyage
2.	London: 1 Sep 39 Portsmouth: 3 Sep 39	New York: 20 Sep 39	New York: 1 Oct 39	Portsmouth: 15 Oct 39 London: 16 Oct 39	
3.	London: 1 Nov 39 Portsmouth: 3 Nov 39	New York: 23 Nov 39	New York: 2 Dec 39	London: 25 Dec 39	Mail landed at Gravesend (only steamship mail to arrive in '4d Uniform Rate' period).
4.	London: 29 Mar 40 Portsmouth: 2 Mar 40	New York: 18 Mar 40	New York: 1 Apr 40	Portsmouth: 16 Apr 40 London: 17 Apr 40	
5.	London: 1 May 40 Portsmouth: 1 May 40	New York: 16 May 40	New York: 1 Jun 40	Portsmouth: 16 Jun 40 London: 17 Jun 40	
6.	London: 29 Jun 40 Portsmouth: 1 Jul 40	New York: 18 Jul 40	New York: 1 Aug 40	Portsmouth: 15 Aug 40 London: 16 Aug 40	Some, possibly all, mails landed at Ryde and sent through Southampton by rail to London.
7.	London: 30 Aug 40 Portsmouth: 1 Sep 40	New York: 16 Sep 40	New York: 1 Oct 40	Portsmouth: 17 Oct 40 London: 18 Oct 40	
8.	London: 30 Oct 40 Portsmouth: 1 Nov 40	New York: 21 Nov 40	New York: 1 Dec 40	Portsmouth: 22 Dec 40 London: 23 Dec 40	
9.	London: 8 Mar 41 Portsmouth: 10 Mar 41	New York: 4 Apr 41	New York: 11 Apr 41	Liverpool: 28 Apr 41	Put into Halifax, N.S. on 30 Mar for paddle repair. Sold to Belgian Government.
10.	Antwerp: 4 May 42 Southampton: 8 May 42	New York: 27 May 42	New York: 7 Jun 42	Cowes: 23 Jun 42 Antwerp: 24 Jun 42	Southampton new docks started that year.
11.	Antwerp: 7 Jul 42 Portsmouth: 10 Jul 42	New York: 27 Jul 42	New York: 7 Aug 42	Cowes: 22 Aug 42 Antwerp: 24 Aug 42	
12.	Antwerp: 7 Sep 42 Portsmouth: 9 Sep 42 Cowes: 11 Sep 42	New York: 28 Sep 42	New York: 7 Oct 42	Southampton: 3 Nov 42 Antwerp: 4 Nov 42	

### CHANGES AND ARRANGEMENTS IN 1840

The notes which follow were taken, unless otherwise stated, from *'The Hampshire Advertiser and Salisbury Guardian (incorporating the Portsmouth, Portsea and Gosport Herald)'*, Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> August 1840, and Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup>

August 1840; the papers are available from a set of micro-fiches in the 'Maritime Collection' at Southampton Public Library (but they did not copy very well, so I have reproduced extracts). The first of the two:

*Advertisement:*

**STEAM TO NEW YORK**  
**THE BRITISH AND AMERICAN STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY'S**  
**new and splendid STEAM SHIP**  
**BRITISH QUEEN**  
 Burthen 2016 tons, 500 horse power  
 LIEUTENANT RICHARD ROBERTS RN Commander  
 Will sail from off Blackwall, on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> August,  
 and from Portsmouth, on Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> September, and from Portsmouth and New York  
 the first of each succeeding month, alternately, throughout the year.

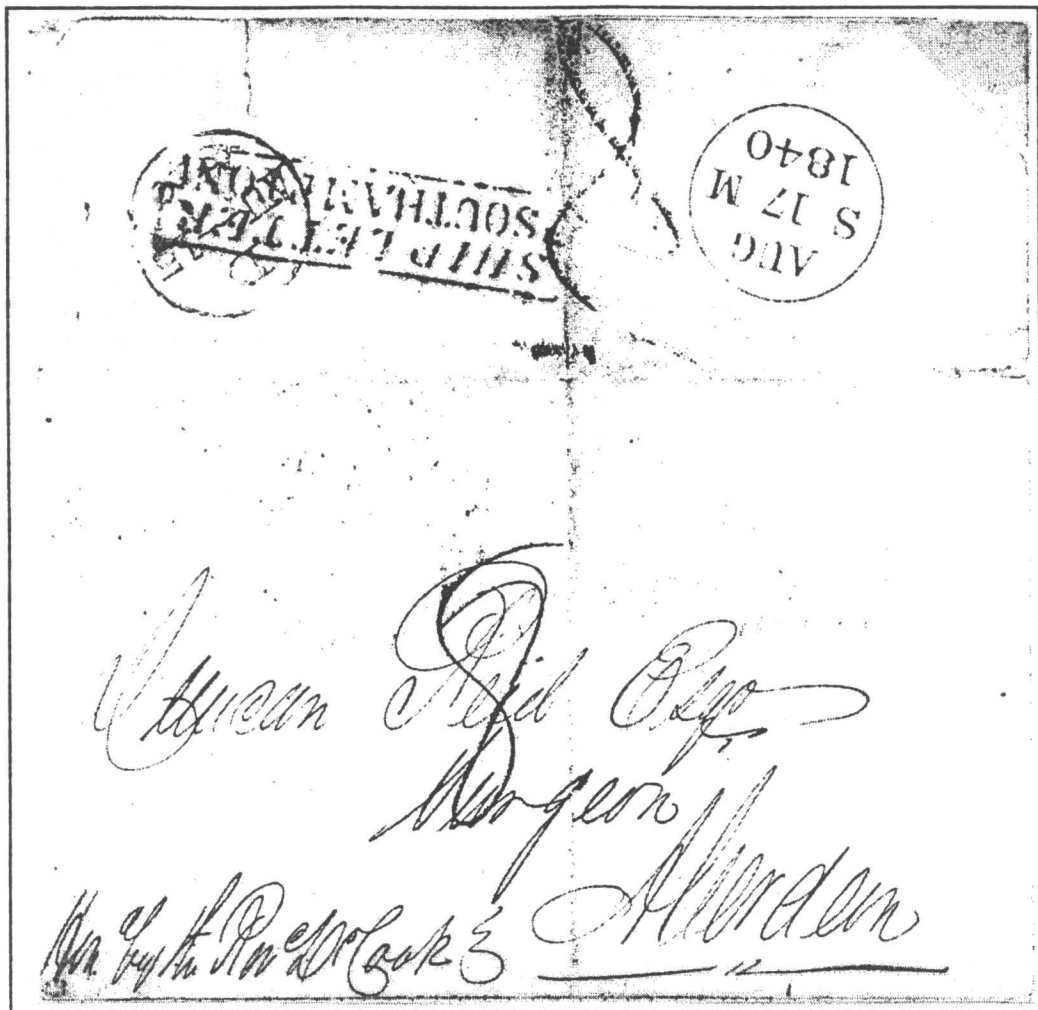


Figure 2: Voyage 6, return. Quebec to Aberdeen, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1840 (see also Figure 7).

The illustration above is of the letter which caused the original query. It was from Duncan Reid in Quebec, dated 27<sup>th</sup> July 1840, and was carried privately to England by the Rev. Dr. Cook (who had been 'appointed by the Synod of Upper Canada to proceed on a tour of 'begging' through Scotland, for the College now building at Kingston, U.C.'). Dr Cook, and the letter, travelled on the steamship 'British Queen', which departed New York on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1840 and made Portsmouth on the 15<sup>th</sup>. The letter was entered into the British mail at Southampton, where it was marked as a shipletter (reverse) and charged eightpence Sterling. It passed through London on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1840 and arrived at Edinburgh on the morning of the 17<sup>th</sup>. As the notes which follow will explain, on the return leg of her sixth voyage, 'British Queen' did not put into Portsmouth Harbour, but availed herself of the opportunity to land First Class passengers and some of the mails at the newly-constructed Ryde Pier, on the Isle of Wight. Passengers and

mails were then carried to Southampton on one of the new Solent steam ferries, and were landed close to the new railway station. From there, they were taken by train to Nine Elms station in London. Jack's letter was entered as a ship letter at Southampton. However, some mail may have continued on the 'British Queen' to Gravesend, for Allan Steinhart had a letter of this voyage which has a London Ship Letter mark for the 15<sup>th</sup> August. My first reaction was that Allan's letter was written on board between Ryde and London, but it was posted in Montreal, and it must be assumed that some bags remained on the ship, or remained closed for the journey from Ryde to London. Jack Arnell's letter, carried privately as he stated, must have been handed over and placed in the mail by the ship's Master on arrival, for it has no Canadian marks of origin, or North American charges. There thus appears to have been two classes of mail on this voyage, albeit informal, 'closed' (carried from North America), and 'open' (posted on board).

## FURTHER EXTRACTS

Season 1840 - REDUCED FARES  
Between Southampton, Cowes, Ryde  
and Portsmouth

By Her Majesty's Post Office Steam Packets  
*Passengers landed at Ryde Pier without  
the inconvenience of Boats.*

### THE DUKE OF BUCCLEUGH & PRINCESS VICTORIA

The Public are respectfully informed that  
the above-named steampackets will  
(weather permitting),  
run as follows, until further notice, viz:-

From	Morning	Afternoon
Portsmouth (calling off Ryde) for Cowes and Southampton	9	-
Cowes for Southampton	11½	-
Southampton to Cowes, Ryde, and Portsmouth	-	3
Cowes to Ryde and Portsmouth	-	4½
Cowes to Ryde and Portsmouth	10	-
Portsmouth to Ryde and Cowes	-	3½

#### FARES

	Aft Cabin	Fore Cabin
From Southampton to Cowes	2s 0d	1s 6d
From Southampton to Ryde and Portsmouth	3s 0d	2s 0d
From Cowes to Ryde	1s 6d	1s 0d
From Cowes to Portsmouth	2s 0d	1s 6d

Additional Accommodation at Reduced Fares:  
TO AND FROM SOUTHAMPTON COWES,  
RYDE AND PORTSMOUTH

By Her Majesty's Post Office Steam Packets:  
**GEM, MALMESBURY, MEDINA  
AND GEORGE IV**

The Public are Respectfully Informed  
that the new and much improved  
Steam Vessels  
are now running in the following manner:

From:	Morning	Afternoon
Southampton to Cowes at	6, 9	1, 2¼, 4½, 6½
Ryde direct	8½, 11	5
Portsmouth	8½, 11	5
Cowes to Southampton	6, 9, 11	2, 4, 6½
Ryde Do direct	8½, 12	3
Portsmouth Do	8, 11½	2½
<b>ON SUNDAYS:</b>		
Southampton to Cowes at Ryde	6, 9, 12 9	3, 4½ 3
Portsmouth	9	3
Cowes to Southampton Ryde & Portsh.	8, 12 10½	3, 5, 6½
Ryde to Cowes	10	5¼
Southampton	10	3½
Portsmouth to Cowes	9½	3
Southampton	9¼	3

#### FARES

	Best Cabin	Fore Cabin
Southampton to Cowes	2s 0d	1s 6d
Southampton to Ryde and Portsmouth	3s 0d	2s 0d

## RAILWAY TRAINS

*Start from Southampton at 8½, 11, 1½, 3, 6,  
Sundays, at 10, 5.  
And arrive at Southampton at 10½, 12½, 2, 4½,  
and Sundays at 1.*

The second newspaper (Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1840), under:

**London,**  
Wednesday, August 19<sup>th</sup> 1840:

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### UNITED STATES AND CANADA

The Post Office Steam Ship '*Britannia*', arrived at Liverpool on Friday night, in the extraordinary rapid passage from Halifax of ten days and two hours, being the quickest communication ever made between the two Continents. She left Boston on the 1<sup>st</sup>, and reached Halifax on the 4<sup>th</sup>, where she sailed the same evening. She brings very few papers, the bulk being forwarded from New York by the '*British Queen*', which also arrived at Portsmouth on Saturday, after a passage from New York of thirteen days and a half.

### PUNCTUALITY OF CUNARD'S STEAM SHIP BRITANNIA

Mr Hale, of the Merchants' News Room, New York, writing to his Liverpool correspondents by the '*Britannia*' steam ship, concludes his letter thus:- 'Hoping that this letter may meet your eye at about nine o'clock a.m., August 15, I am, &c, James W. Hale. Precisely at 9 a.m. on the morning of 15<sup>th</sup> August, the above passage was read by Mr Hale's correspondent in Liverpool.'

## THE SOUTH COAST OF ENGLAND

The maps which follow show the situation in the 1840s. Portsmouth had, until then, been a natural port of call for a ship inbound from the Atlantic wishing to land mails and some passengers en route to London. There was an advantage of 1-2 days in that option. However, events conspired against Portsmouth, in favour of Southampton: A new pier had been built at Ryde, on the north-east coast of the Isle of Wight, which could accommodate ocean-going steamships, thus saving the ships the delay incurred by entering the harbour at Portsmouth.

There had been significant improvements in the quality and regularity of the Solent/Southampton Water steam-ferry services. Finally, and probably most significant, the through train service between Southampton and London had been completed in May 1840; the extension from North Stoneham (now Eastleigh) to Gosport (anticipated on the map reproduced below) was behind schedule and had not been finished in 1840 (now we have the line, it's the trains which are late), and the direct line between London and Portsmouth had not been started.

### SOUTHAMPTON WATER, PORTSMOUTH AND THE ISLE OF WIGHT (1840)

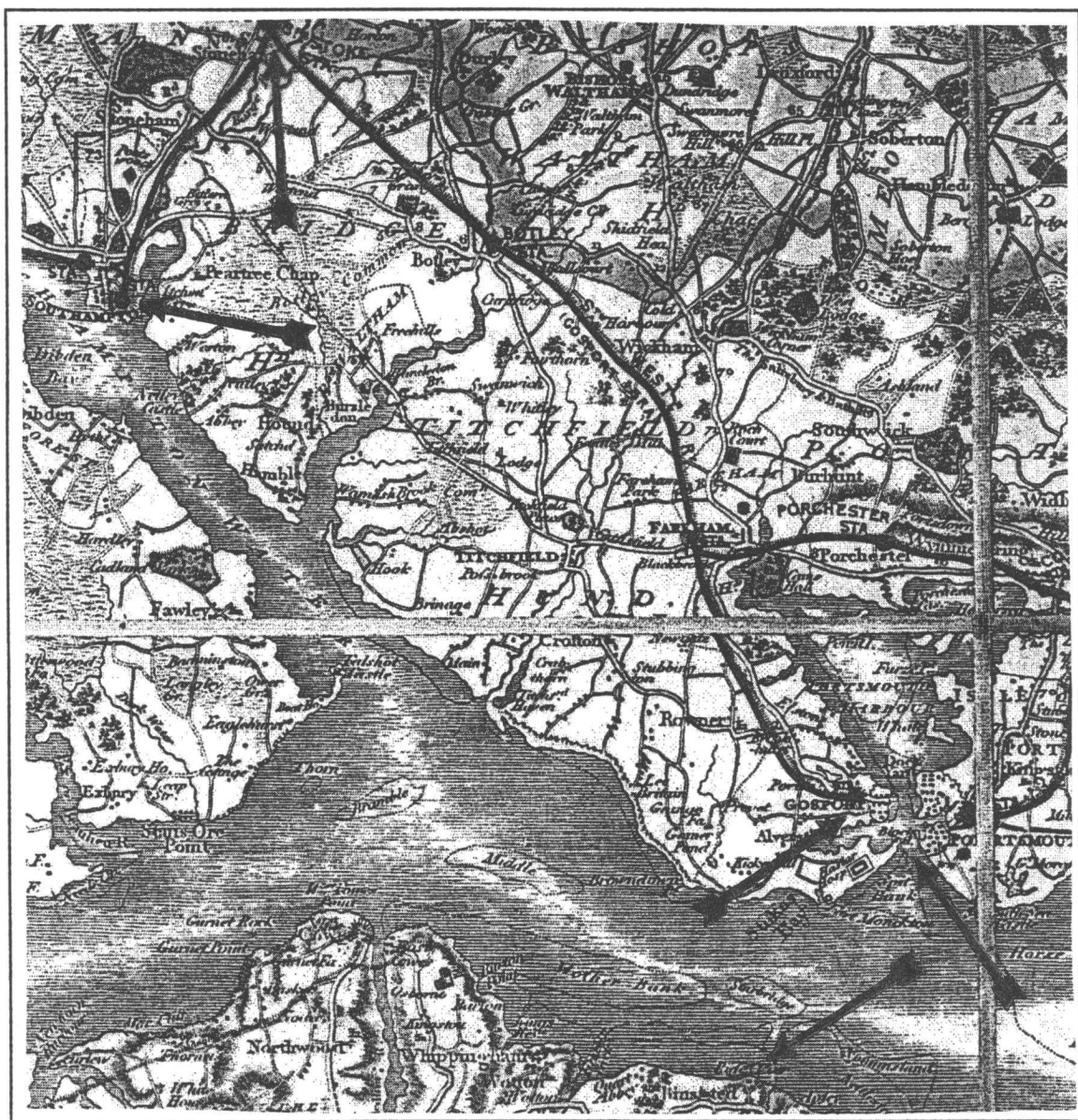
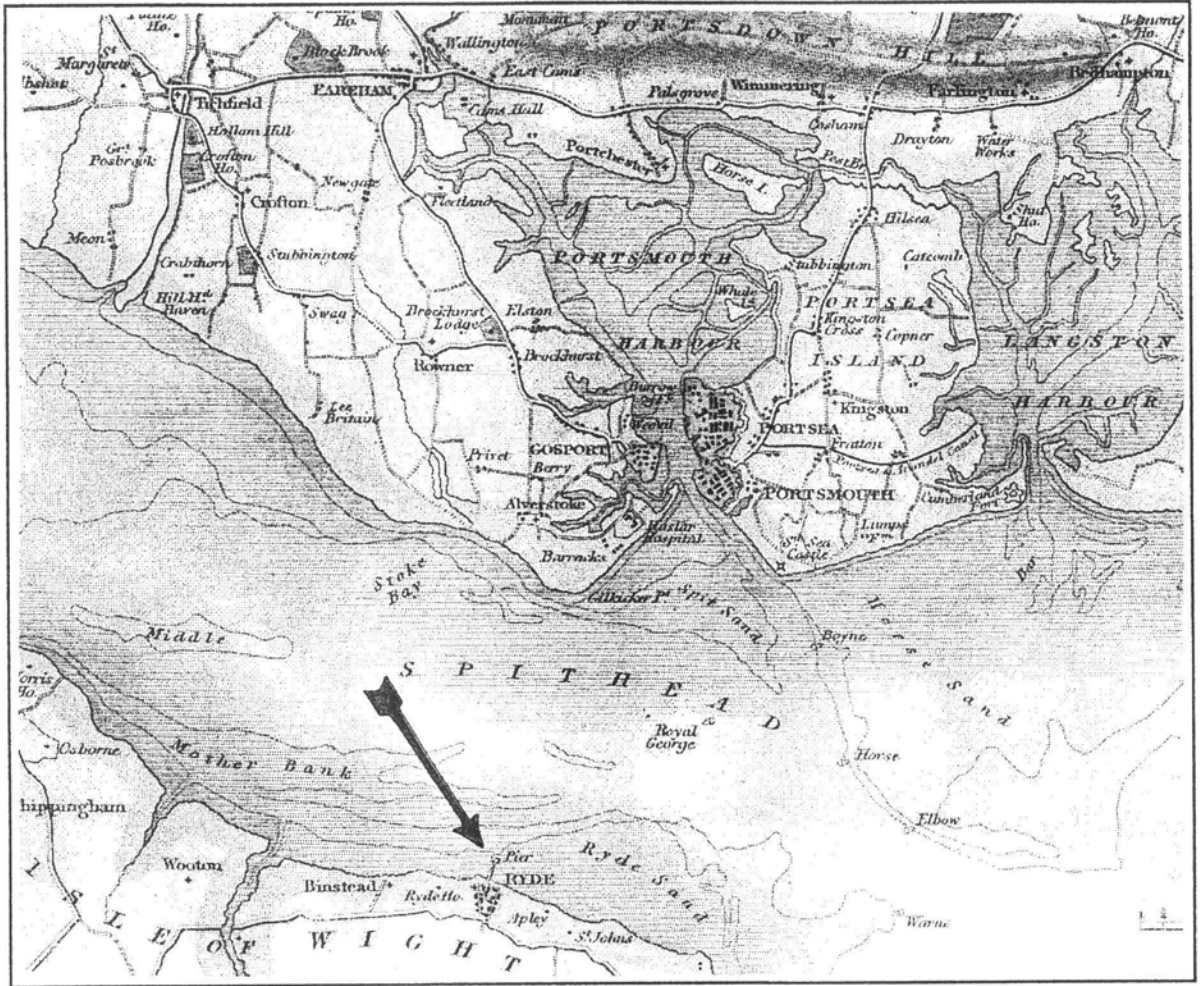


Figure 3: Extract from 'Crutchley's Railway and Telegraphic County Map of Hampshire'.

I have added arrows to highlight significant details: the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour; Ride Pier, on the Isle of Wight; Southampton Station and the docks (the new docks were still a developer's pipe-dream at this time); the

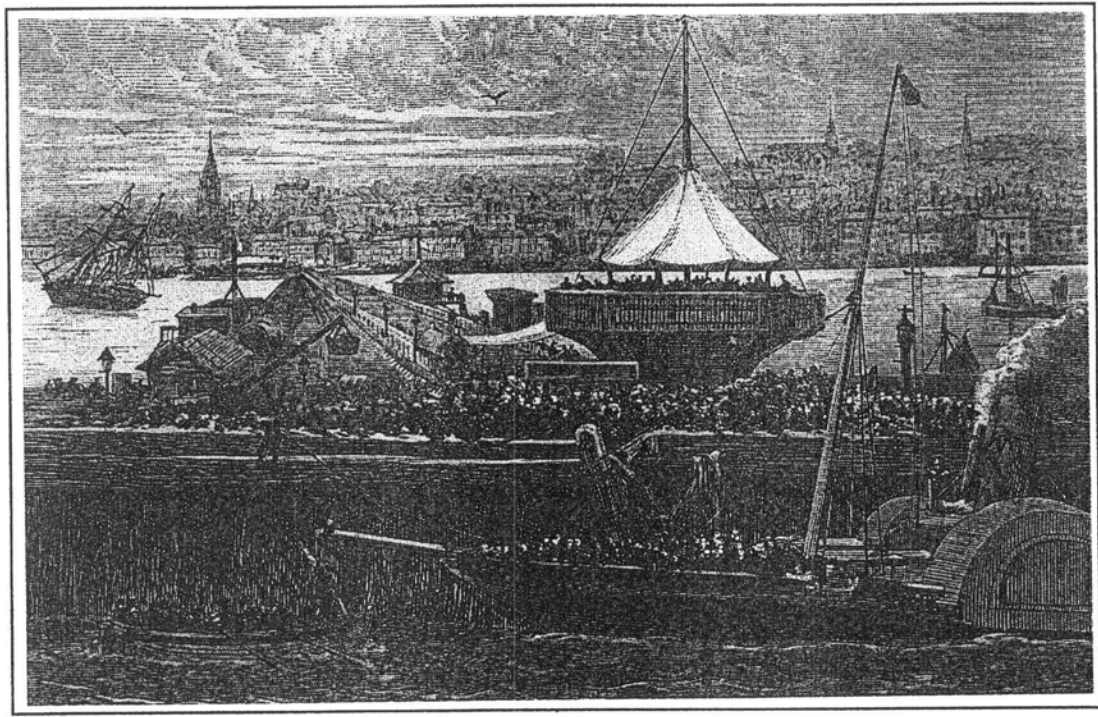
Southwestern Railway Extension from Bishopstoke to Fareham and Gosport was under construction, but then incomplete (as were the other railways shown to the West of Southampton).

# PORTSMOUTH AND RYDE PIER



The map above shows Portsmouth Harbour and the North Coast of the Isle of Wight; Southampton Water and Southampton are to the

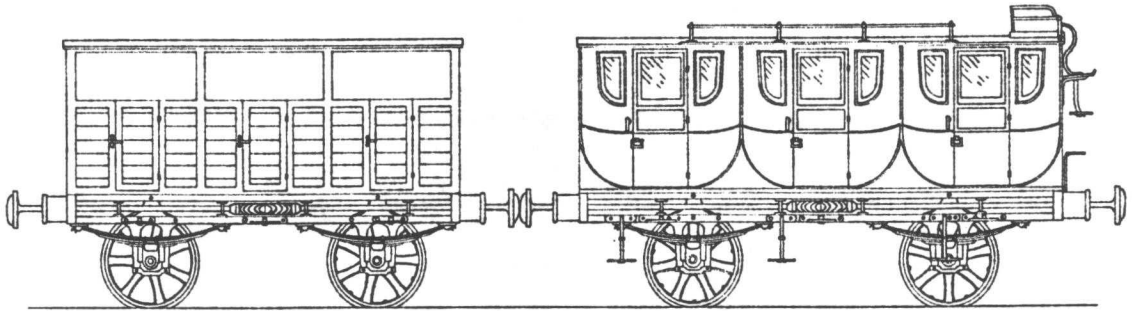
northwest of Spithead. I have added an arrow to mark the new pier at Ryde, shown in an 1840 engraving below.



## RAILWAY CARRIAGES IN THE 1840's

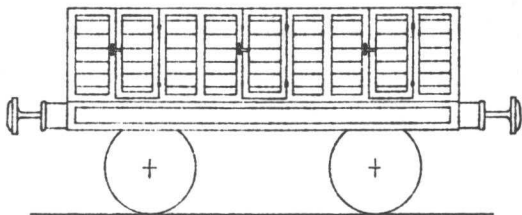
The first set of illustrations is taken from 'London South-Western Carriages', Volume 1, by GR Weddell, and shows the carriages used on the Southampton to Nine Elms line in 1840. Where the mail-bags were stowed is not clear, although facilities were provided on the roofs of some trains.

It was not until later that special arrangements were made for mails and their escorts. The picture, which may well have been pertinent to the letter in question, shows an early accommodation for mail coaches in the 1840's. It is reproduced from from 'The Mails', by Horace Soper.



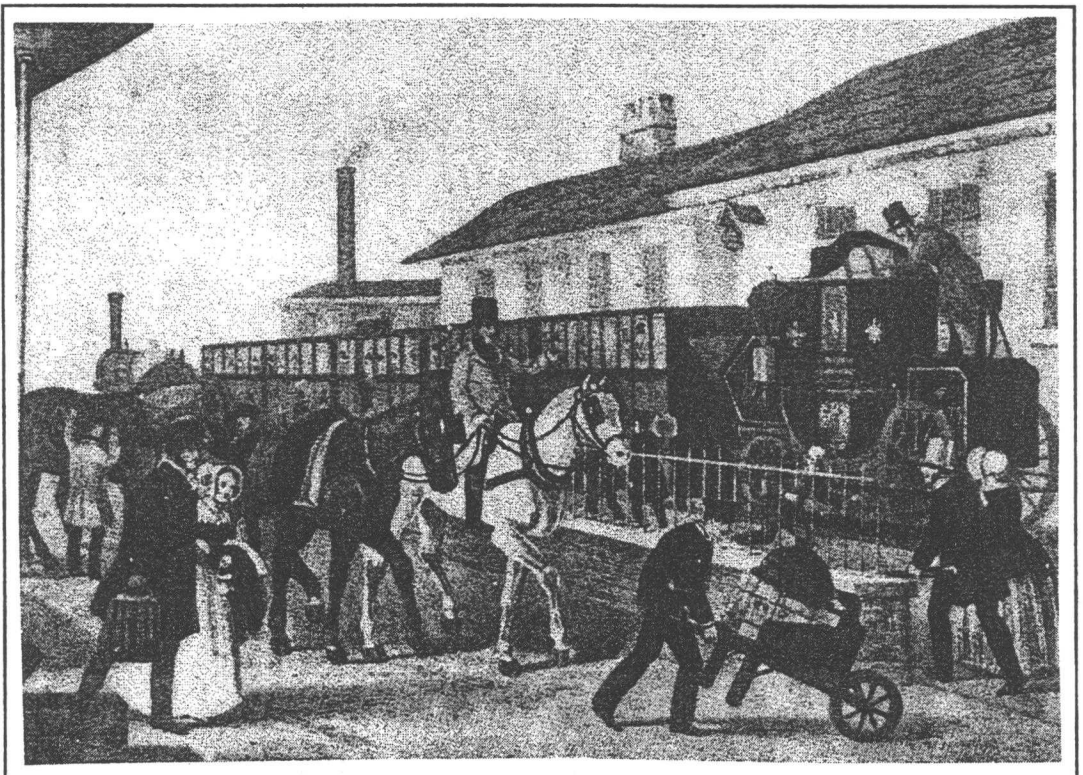
**SECOND CLASS**  
No partitions above the seat backs.

**FIRST CLASS**  
Might have had a guard's seat at each end.  
Weight 3 tons 16 cwt.



**THIRD CLASS**  
Underframe, etc. as for Second.

**LONDON & SOUTHAMPTON RAILWAY** – The original carriages of 1838 (an impression)



**Figure 6:** A mail coach being loaded onto a train, circa 1840.

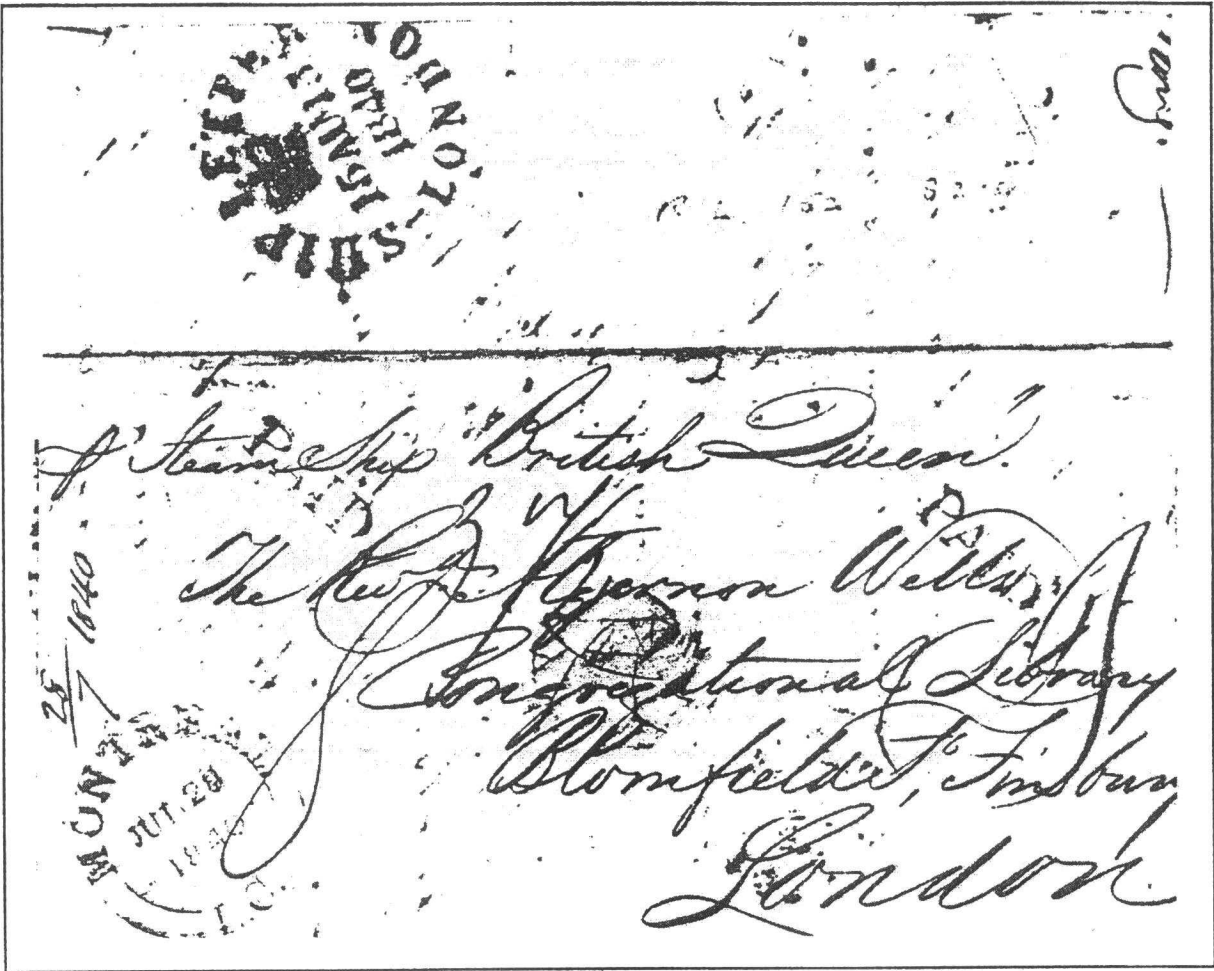


Figure 7: Voyage 6, return leg. A letter from Montreal, 28<sup>th</sup> July 1840, with no apparent freight charge, but, unlike lead story cover, with 'SHIP LETTER LONDON' (ex Steinhart).

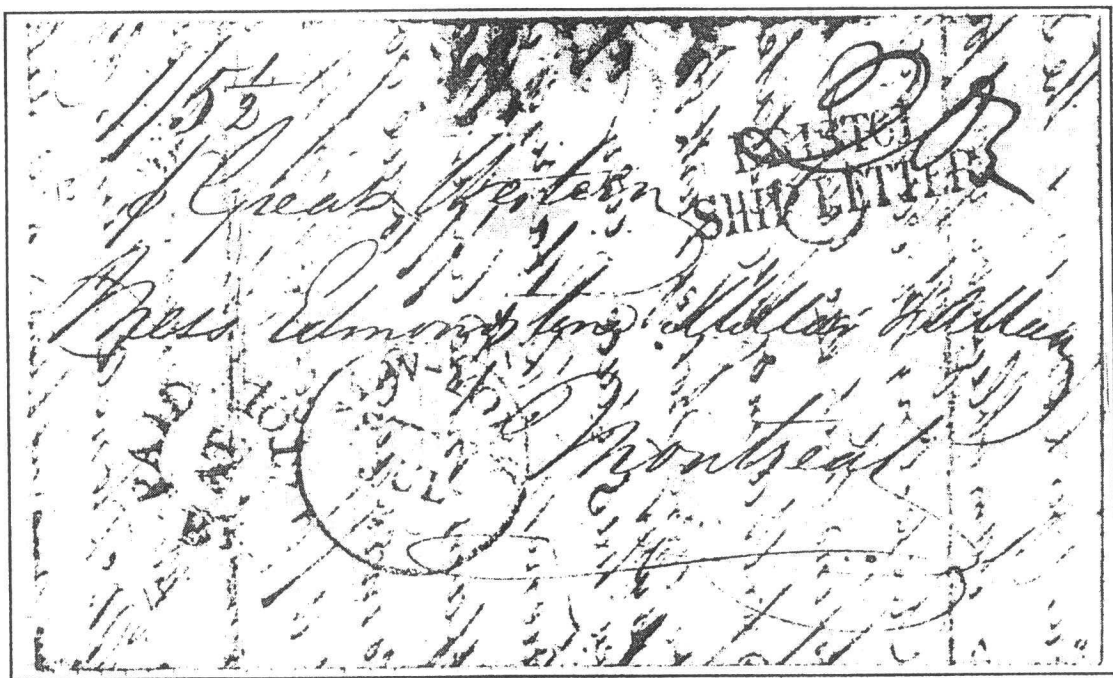


Figure 8: Maiden voyage. Paid at Bristol, 11<sup>th</sup> July 1839, for 'Great Western', but too late and sent to Portsmouth for 'British Queen' (ex Arnell).



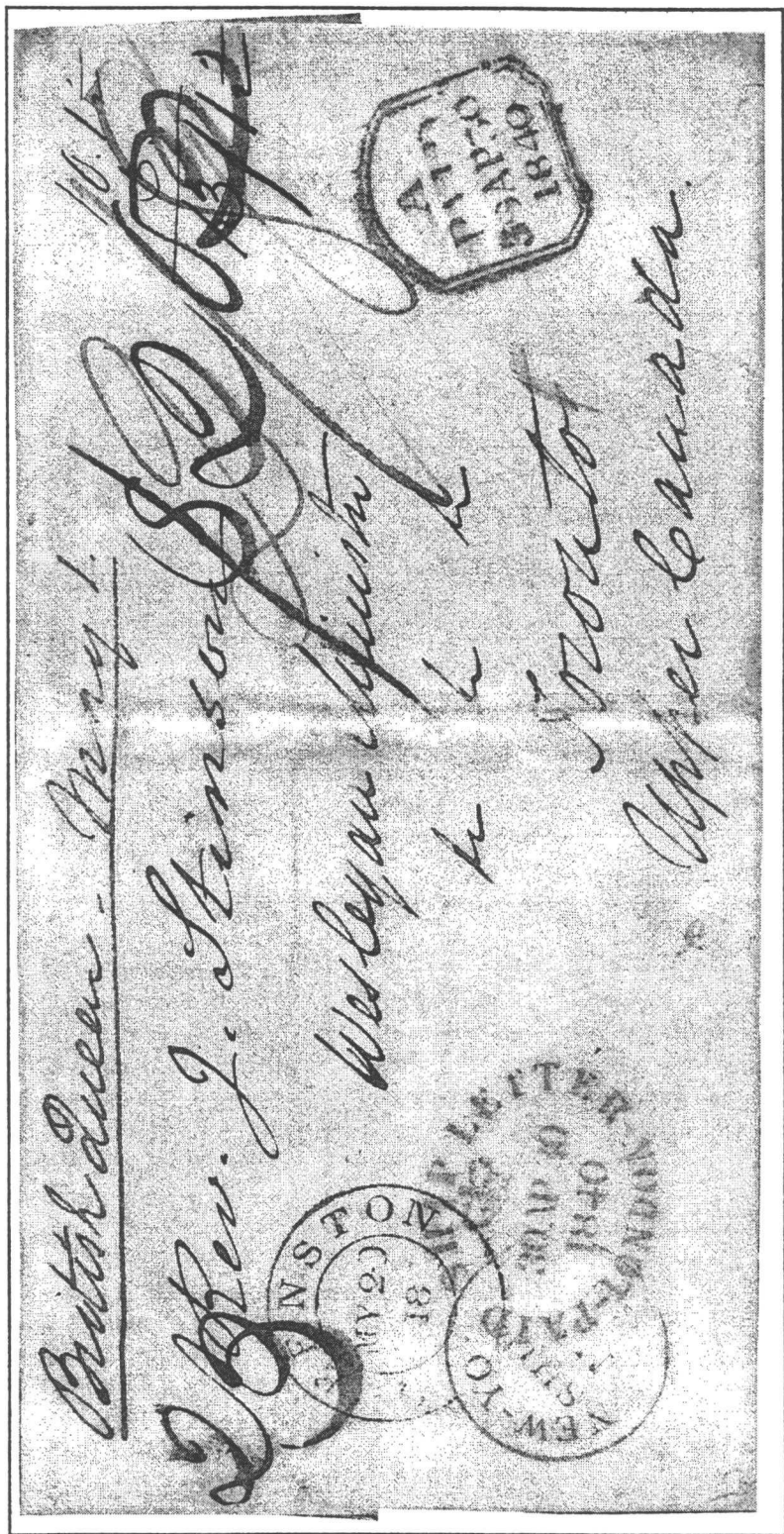


Figure 9: Voyage 5, out. Letter from London, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1840, paid four times rate and charged similarly in North America.



Figure 10: Final voyage. Southampton, 9<sup>th</sup> September 1842, to Upper Canada (ex Arnell).

I complete the story with two covers carried on the two legs of the final trans-Atlantic voyage of the 'British Queen', sailing under the Belgian flag.

I have seen only the one cover to Canada (and a couple to or from the United States) carried by the vessel after she entered the Belgian service. The one I have seen was in the collection of Jack Arnell and is illustrated above.

The extract which follows is taken from a letter carried on the 'Great Western' at this time, kindly lent by Bryan Hunt; it was written by a Mr Harman to his leader writer on the newspaper 'Independent' from New York on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1842, and refers to the 'British Queen' voyage:

*'I am happy to announce our safe arrival here after a voyage of 17 days during which we had every*

*reason to be satisfied with the capabilities of the BRITISH QUEEN, as a sea boat and with the captain and crew. We had strong winds throughout the voyage, but we made it in the time advertised. The crew were up to their task when we had a violent storm on the night of the 19<sup>th</sup>, that could have swamped the ship ... the sea was up to the height of the chimney ... orders were given with coolness, and obeyed with with alacrity .... the ship shipped water but without the slightest damage. That gale lasted ten hours, and sailors on board said they had never seen anything so violent.*

*I mention these facts as there is a prejudice among some parties in England against this vessel, which I believe to be unfounded. I think you should insert my report in the 'Independent' to remove the prejudice. I have also written to a New York paper. The ship's agents in London should also be informed, and send a copy to the Belgian Minister.'*

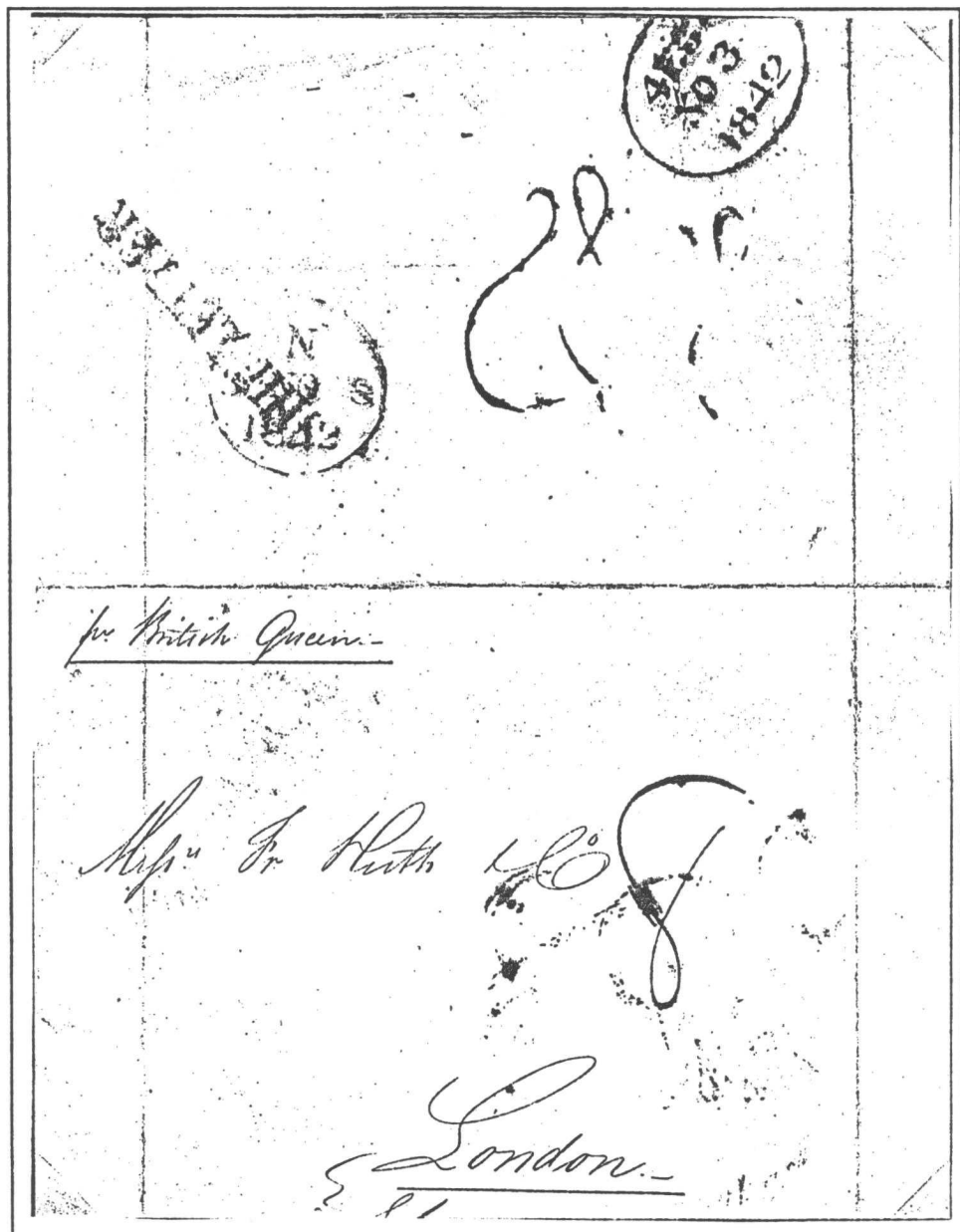


Figure 11: Final voyage. A letter from New York with an arrival mark for 3<sup>rd</sup> November 1842, and straight line 'SHIP LETTER' (courtesy Bryan Wood).

## POSTSCRIPT

When I decided to investigate further Jack Arnell's letter, I saw the task as little more than a quick visit to the reference section of Southampton Public Library. However, the quest was extended, and I feel that a formal acknowledgement to the library should be recorded. Southampton Library has one of the finest collections of maritime reference works in the country, supported by a selection of works covering every aspect of the southern counties history and geography, in depth. Thanks to the library, the quick visit developed into a much more interesting task. In the meantime, I have been given a new research contract, in a new site. I am writing this postscript in an office perched high on Portsdown (a few hundred yards

from the monument to Lord Nelson marked on the 1840's map, and not far from the spot where I understand Henry VIII stood as he watched the tragedy of the sinking of the Mary Rose). On a clear day I can see across Portsmouth, along the entire north coast of the Isle of Wight to open sea beyond. the entrance to Portsmouth Harbour is immediately below, and Ryde is clearly visible across the water. It is easy to understand why the 'British Queen' would have favoured Ryde Pier over entering Portsmouth Harbour, and not much has changed in 150 years, except that the sailing vessels and paddle-steamers have been replaced by remarkably inelegant container ships - I would rather be watching the earlier view!

*From:*

*MB Montgomery  
76, Glen Eyre Road,  
Southampton, SO16 3NL  
ENGLAND*

PRINTED MATTER  
AIR MAIL OUTSIDE UK

PRINTED MATTER  
AIR MAIL OUTSIDE UK