



Morocco Now and Then

By Nick Levinge

The British Post Offices in Morocco existed mainly as a flag-flying exercise. They were established from the 1880s and had little commercial purpose. They were closed down, other than Tangier and Tetuan, mostly 2 years after our stamps were issued. Tetuan and Tangier survived until 1957, just a year after Moroccan Independence. The history of the opening and closing of the various offices is very complex, and the addresses from which they operated also changed in most cases, so sadly, it is not really possible now to trace the exact location of the offices where our stamps were sold and covers processed in 1935. In many cases, the Post Office was a room, and sometimes a very small one, in the Consul's Office, which could double as his residence.

Even if we cannot find the exact location of the offices, these places, Tetuan and Larache in the Spanish zone, Casablanca, Fez, Marrakesh, Mazagan, Rabat and Saffi in the French zone and Tangier itself, have a wonderful romantic ring to them, and the towns themselves are still marvellous to visit. Dr. David Stotter has written a superb book on the British Post Office Service in Morocco, published by the GB Overprints Society, and what follows is taken from his book and my trip round Morocco in April and May 2012.

It is logical to start in Tetuan; with Larache, the two Post Offices in the Spanish Zone of Morocco, which is the North Eastern part,

where Spanish is still spoken today, and where Spain still holds the towns of Ceuta, and Melilla. Ceuta is a small town on a peninsula, with a port and a lot of fine military architecture. Tetuan is slightly inland, only 25 miles to the South. As with all Moroccan towns, it has a “Medina” which is taken to mean “old town”, but is simply the Arabic word for town. Dr. Stotter has published information about the population of the various towns in 1907, when the French invaded, after interfering, with other powers, for some time.



Tetuan, the Medina on the side of the hill

In 1907 there were 30,000 people in Tetuan, with 250-400 Europeans, but the British contingent consisted of just a few missionary ladies. It is likely that the population figures for all places would have grown somewhat by 1935, as the population was 80,000 in 1951. From 1890 to 1903 the Post office was in a Street known as Post Offices Road, but the location of the Office from its reopening in 1907 is not given. There were two cancellations in use in 1935, the standard single ring cds and the oval registration canceller. Nowadays Tetuan is a large



*50 centimos pays the UPU rate (after June) on
this Spanish Bank (Tetuan branch) cover to
Holbaek (Denmark), tied Tetuan 1 Sp 35*

Larache is one of the first places one reaches when going South along the Atlantic coast, about 40 miles from Tangier. In 1907 it was the major port for inland Fez, but had a population of about 15,000, of whom only 200 were Europeans. By 1935 the population had grown to 30,000. The small size is reflected in the Medina which stretches from a small Portuguese fort by the sea to a Spanish fort about 200 metres away. It runs along by a river estuary, and the Atlantic on the West side of the town creates something of a

town. The Medina is enclosed by a wall for the most part, with ancient gateways leading to narrow alleys full of all kinds of shops with everyone anxious to sell things, and especially to tourists, who are by definition rich. The Medina is at the foot of a hill, and the area takes in the slope, which goes up to a very dilapidated one time palace, which now looks far too dangerous to explore. The “Nouvelle Ville” has plenty of buildings which must have been around in the 1930s, but most of it is modern sprawl, and not very pleasing to the eye. My own visit was marred by rain, which probably prejudiced me against its charms.

In 1935 there was a one single ring cds and an oval registration canceller current.

peninsula, so that expansion has been ever Southward. The Spanish colonised from 1911 onwards, so the town and population would have expanded by 1935, and it is likely that the Post Office, which worked from the Vice Consul's office would have been in the new town. It is a very picturesque town, with a relaxed feel to it.

In 1935 there was one single ring cds and one oval registration canceller current.

A further interesting feature in Larache was the Spanish air mail service which commenced in 1921. By 1935 the service was Larache-Tetuan-Seville operated by Compañía de Líneas Subvencionadas S.A. (CLASSA). However, this was used for mail to Spain only, and mail to Britain would have been taken to Tangier for transmission by the *French service* (see later under *Tangier*).



Larache, the Portuguese fort and the Medina

Undenominated overprints were used for airmail and parcels. Here 6d worth pays the ½ oz airmail rate to London (via Paris) and is tied by a Larache cancel for 30 Jy





Rabat, the modern road along the river, the old post office was somewhere here. The old town and the Kasbah (castle) are in the background



French currency stamps totalling 50c pays the

The relevant towns in the French sector are mainly on the Atlantic coast, and the first one reached after Larache is Rabat. As now, Rabat was the Capital City in 1935. The population was 47,000 in 1907, but that included the neighbouring town of Sale, across the River estuary which separates the two towns. The European population was very small and the British contingent numbered 20. It was probably more by 1935. The original Post Office was situated in the Vice Consulate, which was adjacent to the River. The area where it probably stood has now been turned into the site of a major road into the town, and around it there is very little building at all. It was across the entrance hall at the foot of stairs to the first floor. It had windows overlooking an open patio, and from the back of the building, steps led down to the riverside beach. It sounds quite romantic, but the building was so unhealthy that it had to be abandoned in favour of a new site in 1931. Not much business was done and the canceller lasted from 1907 until 1934 when it was replaced. The cancellation to be found on Silver Jubilee stamps is a double ring cds with the town name at the bottom, between the two rings with the words British Post Office around the top. The date appears in the middle. There were two single ring oval registration cancellers in use, both having the same wording; registered at the top and British Post Office Rabat around the bottom with the date across the middle. The only distinction between the two is the distance between the two sets of lettering. In one, introduced in 1908 there is a gap on both sides and on the other introduced in 1912, the words almost run into each other.

Nowadays Rabat is a very pleasant and interesting City of about one million people. The old City can still be seen by the River. There is a fortified Citadel at the head of the estuary, the major tourist site with ancient architecture, shops, museums and cafes to keep people busy for hours. The railway station has just two platforms which are immaculately clean, as is most of the town. The City

20g rate to Edinburgh - cancelled Rabat 26 No

35

also has one of the best historical sites in the country. The Chellah was the main Citadel and port in the fourteenth century, and was built on a Roman site. Extensive remains have been excavated and can be explored within the fourteenth century walls.

It is hard to think of Casablanca without the Bogart/Bergman film, but of course that was made in Hollywood and the sets were based on Algiers. Even in 1935, the City was more about wide boulevards and large art deco creations than narrow alleys of mud walled, whitewashed low rises. In 1907 when the French invaded, the population was a mere 25,000, but it became the centre for administration and economic activity and grew very fast. By the 1930s 90% of export trade passed through Casablanca, eclipsing the other Atlantic ports. The British Post Office in 1907 was in a little room in the Consulate, situated in the old town which dated mainly from the nineteenth century. The old town is by the sea, with the new areas inland of it, and now to North and South as the town is a huge City of 3 million people today. By 1935 the Post Office had moved twice and in 1933 had settled in rooms in the Bank of British West Africa. There was sufficient business to justify 3 clerks. Even by then the population had risen considerably and was 250,000 by 1937. In the fiscal year 1935-6 the British Post Office sold £2,776 worth of stamps, £635 more than all the other agencies together, other than Tangier, and produced a good financial surplus. It was nevertheless closed in 1937.

The French currency Silver Jubilee stamps had very low denominations. None of them paid any postal rate in Morocco at the time, and it took 2 of the 25 centimes stamps to pay the letter rate to the U.K., whereas it cost 1 ½ d. in British currency stamps. On the basis that 50 centimes was the same as 1 ½ d, and that the figures in Alastair Hacket's book for numbers printed are correct, and that all those printed were sold, the total value of the French currency stamps was about £1,000. One interesting point is that small stocks of Spanish denominated stamps were kept, as in the other Post Offices, but sales were very small, for philatelic purposes only. Tangier sold stamps in all three denominations, as we know from the covers with mixed frankings.



Nowadays, Casablanca is a huge City, extending many miles along the coast. An enterprising person has opened a café called Rick's and from 1980 to 1993 one of the biggest mosques in the world was built, it has a 200 metre minaret and tourists are permitted to enter, which is not always the case in mosques. The colonial art deco architecture has to be the most interesting attraction.

There were 4 cancellers used in the currency of Silver Jubilee stamps. There were 2 double ring cds cancellers, fairly similar with a time in one which also has narrow wedges as spacers in the ring. The cover below has that cancel. The other one was used for bulk mailings, such as the Coronation issue of 1937. There were two oval registration marks, one has smooth and the other ragged edges.

Casablanca - Hassan II Mosque with its 200 metre minaret



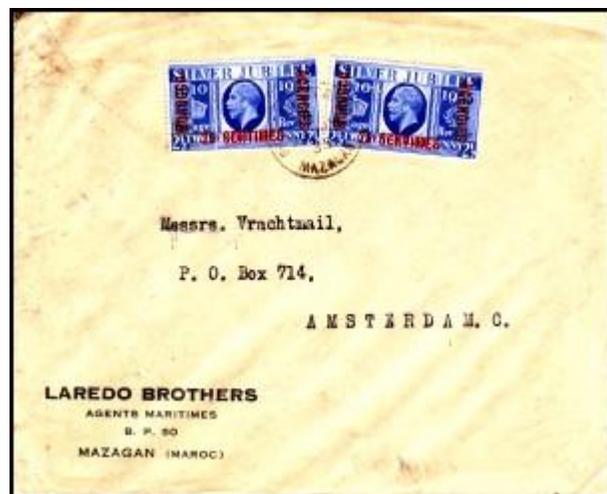
The Fr1.25 pays a double weight air cover to non-UK/France Europe but, to the UK, it could have been sent for Fr3.50



Mazagan from the citadel wall, looking inland. The P.O. in the Consulate was probably behind the boats on the far left

Next down the coast comes Mazagan, a Portuguese enclave from 1506 to 1769. The Portuguese built a walled citadel by the coast. The town was renamed El Jadida which is Arabic for The New, but a delightful remnant of the old town survives, including a cistern which has a thin film of water on the ground which provides impossibly photogenic reflections of the columns and arches.

The British Post Office was situated in the Vice Consul's office, in his home, one of the best in the town, just outside the walled town, near the sea.



50c would pay a 20g letter to France but, to Holland, it should have been Fr.1.50. These 25c stamps are tied by a Mazagan single ring handstamp for 22 Jy 35

Mazagan was a fairly important port, and had a population of 25,000 in 1907. The main exports were agricultural products. There is no sign of great economic activity today, and it remains a pleasant fairly small seaside town. Stamp sales in 1930-34 were about 10% of those in Casablanca, and half of those in Rabat, and it remains one of the more difficult postmarks on Silver Jubilee stamps and covers. There was one single ring cds current in 1935 and an oval registration canceller, both of which lasted from 1922 until the office was closed in 1937.

The final coastal town is Saffi. Again a port, with a population of about 20,000 in 1907, and a British Post Office in the Vice Consulate, which was in the main market place, outside the old walled town. There is no indication of the precise location. The town has always been important for pottery, and one of the old Portuguese origin forts houses the national ceramics museum. There is a large portion of the town devoted to the production and sale of ceramics, and as techniques are largely traditional it is likely that visitors in 1935 were offered pottery souvenirs.

Saffi had the smallest stamp sales of any office open in May 1935, in the period 1930 to 1934, sales in total amounted to only £200, approximately two thirds of the sale of Mazagan.

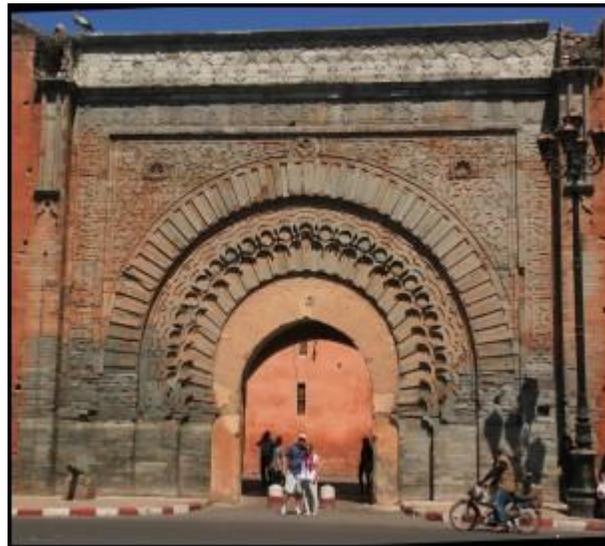
The 50c alone would have taken this to London.



Saffi - the Medina (old town)

Consequently Saffi is without doubt the most difficult of the cancellations to find on Silver Jubilee stamps and covers. There was one single ring cds and an oval registration canceller current in 1935.

The cancels are of Saffi for 2 De 35 though one has an inverted "De"



Marrakesh - Bab Agnaou, one of the gateways to the old city

Marrakesh is about 150 miles inland and South East of Saffi. Nowadays it is a very large City, with all kinds of economic activity and a substantial tourist industry. Few tourists visit Morocco without seeing something of Marrakesh. There are plentiful hotels and restaurants, at all standards and costs, interesting shopping opportunities, and a lot of history and culture to explore.

In 1907 Marrakesh was the second City of Morocco, after Fez, with a population of 60,000. A British Post Office first opened there in 1909. By 1935 the population had risen to 190,000 and the Post Office, still within the Consulate, had relocated to Avenue Bab Djedid, near Hotel Mamounia, the best known hotel in



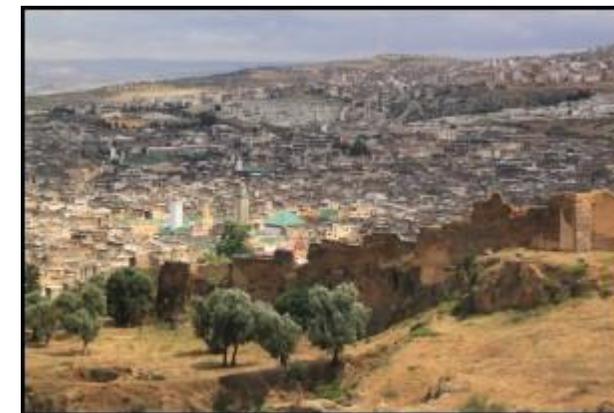
A commercial rate cover to the UK with a single ring Marrakesh cancel for 14 Au 35

Marrakesh.

One single ring cds has a last known usage of 8 May 1935, so of course, should only be found on Silver Jubilee FDCs. The other was current from 1928 to closure, and is distinguished by smaller lettering. There was an oval registration handstamp.

The final town in the French sector is Fez, about 100 miles SSE of Tangier, but with mountains and a lot of beautiful scenery in between. It is the only place in Morocco that people from 1935 would recognise today. It has been described as the most complete mediaeval city in the Arab world. Today the old City is bounded by the ancient walls and gates in large sections, and within there are labyrinths of narrow alleys and souks where the donkey is the most practical and used form of transport. One can wander there, enchanted, for days. In 1907 the population was 100,000, making it the largest town in Morocco. The population had no doubt grown by 1935, as the town expanded outside the old town, mostly to the West. There are more than a million there now. The British Post Office was in one of the alleys of the old town, separate from the Consulate which was in the new residential area. Fez was considered to be important and

Fez - the ancient city and part of the wall surrounding it



A Fez registered cancel on an airmail cover.

had two British Post Offices, although the one in the Jewish Quarter had closed well before 1935. Stamp sales from 1930 to 1934 were only one fifth of those in Casablanca, but three times those of Saffi.

There was one single ring cds and one oval registration handstamp current in 1935.

It shows that airmail could be paid by French currency stamps



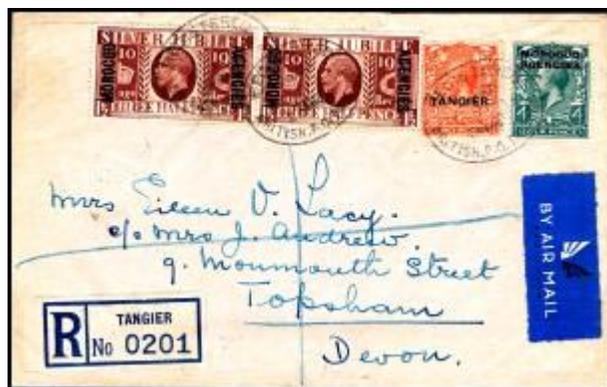
Tangier was an international City from the carve up of Morocco between France and Spain, through to independence in 1956. It had its own laws and institutions. In the 1930s the foreign population was about 60,000, one half of the total. The laissez faire regulatory system and free port status made it home to vast numbers of banks and businesses. The International status was agreed in the a 1923 Treaty, and inaugurated in 1925. It was decided that stamps from all nationalities should be overprinted Tangier. GB stamps were dealt with in this way from the first issue in 1927. As a result of the considerable foreign presence, there was plenty of need for foreign Post Offices. Sterling denominated stamps had to be sold at all the Agencies to cover parcels and Air mail, but 80% were sold at Tangier in the period 1930-34, and Tangier accounted for almost one half of all Agency sales of stamps in that period. The Post office moved twice in the early years, in search of bigger premises. The first two offices



Tangier - Rue de la Marine from the Petit Socco in the old city. The building on the dog leg corner is the British Post Office 1908-38

were located in the Petit Socco, a Square in the Old Town dominated by cafes and hotels, and it is to this day. In 1908 the Post Office was moved a short distance down a road out of the Square which leads to the sea and is now called Rue de La Marine. It was still there in 1935.

Air mail from Tangier was thanks to the French Company Latecoere, which operated a service to Toulouse from 1923. British Mail was accepted briefly in 1923-4, then refused until a general international agreement on freedom of transit in 1929. Some of the Silver Jubilee stamps were actually used for air mail on this route. However, philately had always played its part in the stamps of the Morocco Agencies, and this seems to have taken off in 1935. The Postmaster S.E. Allsop went on leave, and when he returned in 1935 he complained that he had been absolutely



6d pays the airmail and the other 3d for registration and the stamps are cancelled by a Tangier reg. handstamp for 4 Jy 35. Backstamps include a French Tangier one

Due to the volume of business, handstamps did not last as long as in the other Agencies. There was one single ring cds current from 1931 to 1943, and one oval registration handstamp.

Nowadays Tangier is a huge sprawling place. The suburbs start several miles before one reaches the City centre. It has lost most of the international flavour of its colourful past, but still seems to be more easy going than other Moroccan Cities. The old town is near the sea, but much of it has been rebuilt over the years, so there is none of the old-fashioned atmosphere of Fez, and most of the streets look modern. There is still plenty for the visitor to explore, and cafes to relax in when feet or enthusiasm wears out.

N.L. - November 2014

Tailpiece

inundated with work, requests for Silver Jubilee stamps were pouring in from almost every country in the world and he did not know which way to turn, and his Deputy had been working into the early morning hours in his absence. Perhaps this explains how most examples of the Silver Jubilee stamps of the Morocco Agencies are encountered mint, or used on philatelic envelopes with used singles probably having been taken from other philatelic mail.

A cover that recently came on the market appears to show a non-philatelic use of mixed currencies. The 15c & 25c would pay the pre-July foreign registration fee of 40c. This leaves the 10c to perhaps be taken to add 1d to the 11d in sterling for a double weight (6d per 1/2 oz) airmail letter to Europe.

