

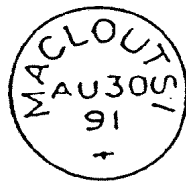
THE MACLOUTSIE POST OFFICE
AND ITS POSTMASTER
BECHUANALAND PROTECTORATE
1892

J.E. Symons

Edited & Introduced By

Peter Thy

Second Edition



Krone Publications
2002

Note to the 2002 Edition

This edition has been updated with
new information about J.E. Symons.
The illustrations have been improved
and a pdf version released.

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Second Edition, 2002
pdf Edition, 2002

Krone Publications, P.O. Box 73112, Davis, CA 95617, U.S.A.

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Content


1.	Macloutsie and Its Postmaster.....	1
2.	Lines From Limpopo	11
3.	Making for Macloutsi	14
4.	The Mail Coach	20
5.	The Macloutsi Mail	22

Illustrations

1.	Sketch Map of Bechuanaland, 1891-92	2
2.	The Tuli-Macloutsie Coach.....	4
3.	1892 Passenger Tickets to Tuli.....	5
4.	Sitwell Cover Mailed from Macloutsie.....	6
5.	J.E. Symons	7
6.	Unclaimed Letters at Vryburg	9
7.	St. Martin's-Le-Grand	10
8.	Mail Coach Leaving Johannesburg	21
9.	Macloutsie Post Office	23
10.	The Mashonaland Mail Coach Leaving Macloutsie	23

1

Macloutsie and Its Postmaster

he settlement of Macloutsie was a small border police station located in the northeastern part of Bechuanaland Protectorate near present day Bobonong. The short and interesting story of this settlement and its post office is worth telling for two reasons. First, its history is closely related to the late Nineteenth Century expansion of the British Empire northward from the Cape of Good Hope Colony and, therefore, intimately part of the early postal history of south and central Africa. Second, its postmaster during a brief period in early 1892 wrote and published a detailed account of his postal duties and travels.

In 1889, Cecil Rhodes and the newly Royal chartered British South Africa Company prepared for the imminent occupation of Mashonaland, a large ‘uninhabited’ tract between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers. A pioneer column and supporting police force were organized by the Company and congregated in May and June 1890 at a location near the Maklautsi River in the eastern-most Bechuanaland Protectorate. The arrival of the ca. 1000-man strong pioneer and police force soon led to the establishment of a significant settlement, later known as Macloutsie (Figure 1). The settlement came to serve as training ground, supply, and communication center for the Mashonaland raid. The advance occupation force crossed the Shashi River on July 6th. The full column reached the Hunyani River on September 11th, completing the invasion of Mashonaland and leading to the establishment of police forts at Tuli, Victoria, Charter, and finally Salisbury.

This development naturally raised the need for handling and conveying large quantities of mail. Prior to encampment of the pioneer column at Macloutsie, the only mail service through Bechuanaland was John Moffat’s runner post between Mafeking and Bulawayo. The runner post was replaced in 1889 by a weekly post of mule drawn carts operated by the Bechuanaland Exploration Company between the end of the rail head (Vryburg) and Shoshong/Palapye. After the arrival of the pioneers at Macloutsie, this service was extended by the British South Africa Company using ox drawn Scotch carts to Macloutsie, later continuing on to Tuli. In 1891, the Bechuanaland Exploration Company took over the

operation of the mail transport between Palapye and Macloutsie, but left until 1892 the 80-mile troublesome route between Macloutsie and Tuli to the British South Africa Company, when the Bechuanaland Exploration Company also took over this segment. In late 1892, the mail contract between Mafeking and Macloutsie passed on to the Wirsing Brothers of Vryburg. Shortly after, the Zeederberg Brothers accepted the Macloutsie-Tuli mail in connection to their already operating Transvaal-Tuli service.



Figure 1. Sketch map showing the mail/coach route between Vryburg and Macloutsie in 1891-92 as described by J.E. Symons. The runner post route between Macloutsie and Tati and Bulawayo is also shown.

The mail transport was organized by relay post stations at regular intervals of 10-20 miles along the route where fresh mules or oxen were inspanned. The route from Mafeking to Macloutsie was about 440 miles long and, therefore, required about 30 post stations. Since an average of 10 mules or oxen was used to draw the coach/cart, a minimum of 300 animals were required at all times in order to

offer the weekly post service to Macloutsie and Mashonaland. We can assume that the animals, as well as the personnel maintaining the posts, were locally recruited. Reflecting their resistance to the various deceases, horses were used to draw the coach until Mafeking, mules between Mafeking and Palla Camp, and oxen hauled the mail cart beyond Palla Camp. The difficulties of maintaining the Mashonaland route is illustrated in a letter (1891) from the Postmaster-General of British Bechuanaland dealing with complaints about irregularities in the post: "The service from Mafeking through the Protectorate to Macloutsie is however subject to considerable delay at times owing to the difficulties to be encountered during one portion of the year, these consist of scarcity of water and horse-sickness, and other times swollen rivers and heavy roads. The mail contractors lost over 350 horses and mules from horse sickness alone in four month last year. This will give you some idea of the difficulty in maintaining a punctual service." (cited by Proud, 1996, p. 264). Mail services further north along the pioneer route were provided by dispatch riders until more permanent arrangements were made.

In contrast to the postal services that appear to have been developed as need materialized, the telegraph had Cecil Rhodes' and the British South Africa Company's highest priority from the very beginning. Consequently, the line north from Mafeking was started in May 1890 prior to the departure of the pioneer column. The telegraph line reached Palapye in October and the extension to Macloutsie was completed in May the following year. Finally, the line passed through Tuli and reached Salisbury in February 1892. The construction of the 820 mile long line, at a total cost to the British South Africa Company of £70,000, allowed telegrams to be sent, for example, from London to Salisbury for a mere 9s 2d per word. As a result of the 1894 Matabeleland campaign, the main telegraph line through Bechuanaland was extended from Palapye to Bulawayo via Tati and Mangwe. At the same time a light line was erected from Macloutsie to Mangwe.

As space was available, the post carts accepted passengers (Figure 2). The Bechuanaland Exploration Company operated coach and cart passenger service from late 1891, connecting Vryburg with Fort Tuli, for a fare of approximately 1 shilling per mile (Figure 3). A few years later in 1896, a journey through Bechuanaland was described by R.S. Godley: "Our road from Mafeking ... lay along the old coach road On this road ... coaches, with their spans of twelve mules apiece, used to travel with passengers and mails. Such coaches were huge 'Buffalo Bill' affairs, swinging on enormous leather springs and carrying twelve passengers, the driver, and a Cape boy to assist him. Teams were changed every seven or ten miles ... A Journey in one of these conveyances meant days of trial and tribulation. Passengers were of all sorts and conditions. Ladies of doubtful reputation, commercial travellers, prospectors, business men, and parsons were packed like herrings for days on end. Inside there were no room to move or stretch one's legs; one was also choked with dust. Outside one was surrounded by mail bags, and exposed either to glaring sun or torrents of tropical rain." (cited by Sillery, 1965, p. 165).

The first official postal office established in Macloutsie was a suboffice/agency shortly after the arrival of the pioneers. In 1891, the agency was upgraded to a post office and a postmaster appointed. A circular date stamp inscribed 'MACLOUTSI' was issued in early June 1891, or shortly before, and



From Tuli to Macloutsie.

Figure 2. The coach between Tuli and Macloutsie from Randolph Churchill's description of his 1892 visit to Fort Tuli. Note that mules were used and not oxen.

another date stamp inscribed 'MACLOUTSIE' was issued probably in December 1892 (Figure 4). The postal functions at Macloutsie were in the beginning performed by members of the Bechuanaland Border Police who had manned the fort since the departure of the pioneer column. In late 1891, the postal communication between the Mashonaland frontier and the Cape Colony had increased to such an extent that it was decided by the Postmaster-General of British Bechuanaland that the appointment of a postmaster was required to organize the mails and undoubtedly to train the local members of the police in the basics of the postal profession.

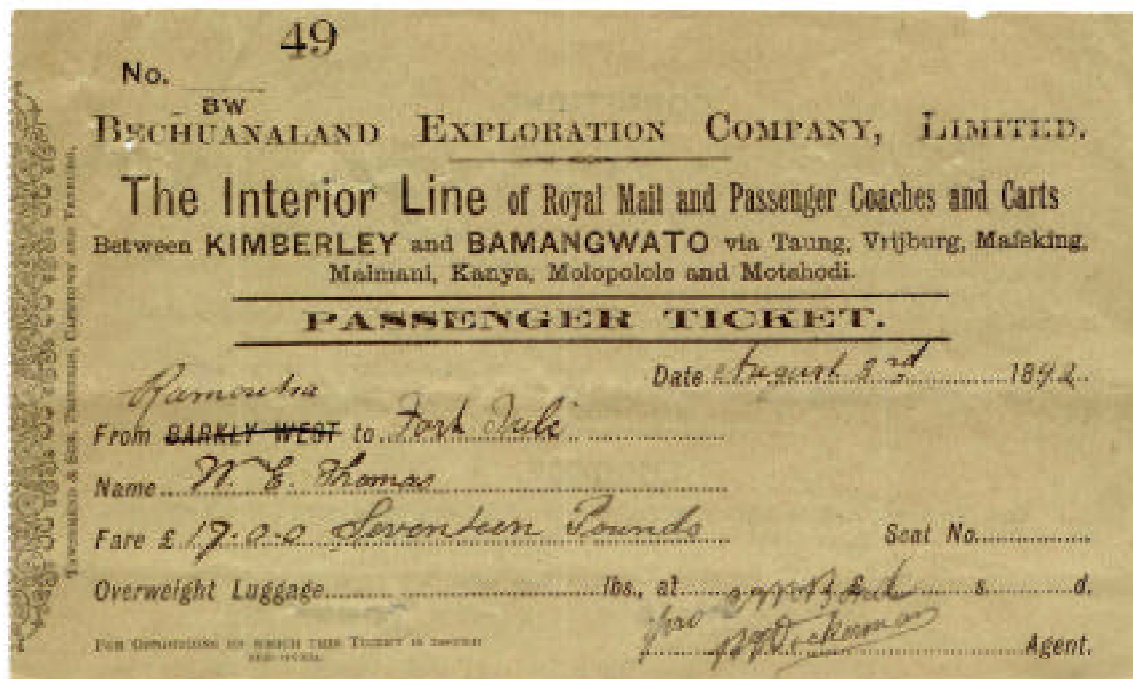


Figure 3. 1892 Bechuanaland Exploration Company passenger ticket between Ramoutsa and Tuli (The Runner Post 6, p. 11).

On Monday 28th of December 1891, the newly appointed postmaster at Macloutsie boards the stage coach in Vryburg to accept his new assignment. Detailed information on the Macloutsie post office and the workings of the Mashonaland mail are relatively well known because this postmaster wrote several articles for a British postal magazine detailing his experiences and his travels. Much less is known about the Macloutsie postmaster himself. His name was J.D. Symons (Figure 5), and was in-between-jobs in December 1891 after having completed a term at the post office of Mafeking in British Bechuanaland. After the Macloutsie assignment, he accepted the position as Postmaster in his home-town of Vryburg in September 1892; therefore, he only spent about 9 months in Macloutsie.

Shortly after his arrival in Macloutsie, Symons wrote his first letter to the British post office magazine 'St. Martin's-Le-Grand' requesting a sample copy. After its arrival, he immediately wrote

back and ordered his subscription. At the same time, he promised future contributions to the pages of the magazine. The editors, clearly excited about receiving correspondence from the frontiers of the Empire, printed the full text of the letters in their magazine. In the next few months, Mr. Symons mailed several small contributions to the magazine that were printed often with editorial comments. Because of their postal history interests, the entire correspondence between Mr. Symons and the Editors is reprinted here as it appeared on the pages of 'St. Martin's-Le-Grand.'



Figure 4. A Sitwell cover mailed from Macloutsie in 1892 and likely cancelled by J.E. Symons. Captain W.H. Sitwell of the Bechuanaland Border Police was stationed at Macloutsie 1891-93.

During 1892, it was decided to prepare the Mashonaland mail in Vryburg (and later in Kimberley) instead of in Maclousie. After only a year as a post office, Macloutsie was downgraded to an agency and the postmaster was no longer required. At that point, Mr. Symons left for his new position in Vryburg. During early 1893, the Cape Colony took over responsibility for the Bechuanaland mail services. As part of a contract renewal with the Wirsing Brothers, the end-terminal for the main mail



J. E. SYMONS
(*Postmaster, Vryburgh*)

Figure 5. Postmaster J.E. Symons of Vryburg. This portrait was published in St. Martin's-Le-Grand vol. IV (pp. 444, 447) with the caption "SYMONS, J. E. - Postmaster, Mafeking, British Bechuanaland, 16th September, 1890; postmaster, Macloutsie, B. B., April, 1892; postmaster, Vryburg, B. B., September, 1892." The April 1892 date for his appointment at Macloutsie must be an error. It is probably also not correct that Symons was Postmaster at Mafeking.

route was changed to Bulawayo instead of Macloutsie. The Rhodesian mail thereby bypassed Macloutsie that now received a much reduced mail from Palapye. The reason for this was clearly a political wish to avoid the alternative (and shorter) mail route via Pretoria and the Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (Transvaal).

The railway reached Vryburg in December 1890; then three years later, in October 1894, the line between Vryburg and Mafeking was officially opened. In 1897, Bulawayo was finally reached. The rail line transected Bechuanaland Protectorate and linked the Cape with Rhodesia, again bypassing Macloutsie. With the construction of the rail, the main telegraph line was relocated to the rail line. A sideline was maintained between Palapye and Macloutsie to Tuli. During 1917/18, the telegraph office at Macloutsie was closed, thus ending a chapter of postal history in Southern Africa.

On the 1912 Ordnance Survey map of the Protectorate, Macloutsie (Siding) is a stop on the rail line located where this crosses the Macloutsie River. The 'real' Macloutsie is now referred to as Macloutsie Camp. On the 1935 edition of the Ordnance map, Macloutsie Camp is replaced by Maklautsi after the original name of the nearby river. Finally, in the 1974 Botswana Place Name Commission's report Macloutsie (or Maklautsi) is no longer listed.

The next time we come across Postmaster J.E. Symons is when he testifies for a select committee appointed by order of the House of Assembly to 'inquire into and report upon the alleged griev-

ances of the Employees of the Postal and Telegraph Departments.’ The interview of Mr. Joseph Edmund Symons occurs on Monday, 17 September, 1900. Some details revealed during this interview cast new light on J.E. Symons. At the time the interview is conducted, Symons had the rank of first-class assistant in the Post Office at Kimberly. Although not stated, he is probably at the telegraph section of that office. We are also told that Symons in 1900 has had a total of 20 years service, although not continuous, with the Cape Postal and Telegraph Departments. If we assume that he had been in the Cape services since appointed in 1890 to Mafeking, we can calculate that he must have had about 10 years additional service somewhere in the Cape Colony. He tells the committee that between 1888 and 1890 he was in the Transvaal service. It is known that Hamilton Flowers was appointed in 1890 as Postmaster to Mafeking after the amalgamation of the postal and telegraph services. Symons appears to have been appointed at the same time to Mafeking, probably as assistant to the Postmaster. Symons never was postmaster at Mafeking. When the offer to go to Macloutsie reaches Symons, he grabs the opportunity with excitement as documented in his writings. Why one can ask. The Macloutsie assignment could hardly have been considered as an opportunity for advancement. Symons must have accepted the offer because of a desire to be part of the northward expansion and colonization that was sweeping the colony at that time. The information Symons gives during the hearings can be used to estimate his age when he travels to Macloutsie. We can assume that if he had entered the telegraph service at the age of 15 years, not uncommon for a telegraphist in those days, he would then have been about 30 years old when he boards the coach in Vryburg on that memorable day in December, 1891.

A final note pointing forward. In 1900, Symons had been lobbying for permission from the Cape Postmaster-General to accept an offer from the Transvaal Service as inspector of their telegraphs. At this point in his career, he appears to have reached a point when the services offered him very few opportunities for advancement. It appears that because of an agreement between the Colonial Government and the Imperial authorities to prevent a drain of qualified personnel from the Cape Colony, following the end of the Boer war, he had been unable to accept the offer. It is plausible that the restriction was lifted and that Symons accepts the inspectorship with the Transvaal Postal and Telegraphs Services.

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Lists of Unclaimed Letters.

LIST of unclaimed Correspondence lying at the Vryburg Post Office, on the 30th November, 1894:—

Brets, Dolf, 2d	Mail, G
Clark, W	Martin, F
Campbell, M	Munnis, E L, 2d
Coetsee, S	Orstenach, B
Coetsee, G	Odendaal, J H, 2d
Coetsee, T P	Pretorius
Caldesotti, C H	Potgieter, Freddie
Dait, R E, G	Pretorius
Dalport, J	Pretorius, P B
De Villiers, M	Pienaar, D, 2d
Drysch, W W	Roseburg, D T
Steyn, W M, c/o A de Klerk	Rooyen, van, H G
2d	Van Zyl, Maria, c/o Roscher
De Prees, H H, 4d	Rotieff, D
De Beer, J H, 2d	Rood, P J
Rechts, Henry	Strydom, N J, 2d
Fourie, J D, 2d	Stebbech, M H, 2d
Gosen, S	Struiker, Mrs
Gardner, C W	Swart, P J J
Shwanepoel, c/o R van der	Smith, C H H
Hoff	Shent, C
Haggard, J (2)	Strydom, G I
Herbst, M J H	Scholtz, G
Haury, W H	Swarta, S
Joubert, B H, 2d	Tait, R, 2d
Johnson, Moses	Troloope, Watie W
Klotte, J	Townsend, G (nani)
Jacobs, Moses	Venter, D J, 2d
Lloyd, G T (2), 2d	Vangham, Arthur
Labbe, P	Vyver
Lettering, D L	Volgt, Albert
Laroux, G J, 2d	Wernhardt, V
Lettering, G, 2d	Whitlston, Gordon, 2d
London, v d, Gert, 2d	Wyk, van, J W J, 2d
Larne, J G	Wessels, J F C
Louw, J H	Waitt, C.
Marwa, v d, A J	
	NATIVES.
Baveditse Hanes	Catherine Montwano, 2d
Momonilbo Layegera	Beland Zoni Ulebi, 4d
Mothelo Pungor	Martsebe Seloke, 2d
Mphl Roberoto	M Mureder, 4d
Mora Moropha	Nellie Spandee, 2d
Tandies Khosimay	James Nxosana, 2d
Poonzale	Chebele Mukwa, 2d

J. E. SYMONS, Postmaster.

Vryburg, 30th November 1894.

Figure 6. List of unclaimed letters at Vryburg Post Office signed by postmaster J.E. Symons. Published in the British Bechuanaland Government Gazette, November 1892.

ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND.

The Post Office Magazine.



ST. MARTIN'S-LE-GRAND, 1837.

VOLUME II.

(Containing Nos. 5, 6, 7, & 8, being the Four Parts issued in 1892.)

PRINTED FOR THE HONORARY SECRETARIES BY
W. P. GRIFFITH & SONS, LIMITED, GENERAL PRINTERS,
PRUJEAN SQUARE, OLD BAILEY, E.C.

1892.

Figure 7. The front page of St. Martin's-Le-Grand vol. II, 1892, containing Symons' first contribution.

2

Lines from Limpopo

J.E. Symons

MACLOUTSI (British Bechuanaland, South Africa). - The postmaster, Mr. J.E. Symonds, writes: - "Specimen magazine received last post. Thank you. Money Order branch not instituted here yet; and have send down to Mafeking for orders. As I am remitting this post to Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1, Amen Corner, London, E. C., I have requested them to forward to Mr. F. J. Beckley 3/- for my subscription to magazine, this will save me a lot of trouble. I will try and do my *duty* in contributing to the P. O. Magazine pages occasionally; this week I have no time. I wish the magazine the success it deserves." We commend this example to others. (II, 164)

It is with much pleasure that we present our readers with our first colonial contribution. It comes from a place which we must confess we had never heard of until we received from the Postmaster of Macloutsi the letter which we published in our last issue. Macloutsi is situated on a river of the same name which flows east into the Limpopo. The rest of the geographical and biological facts connected with the place will be gathered from what follows.

One word more - and we are quite certain that our good friend Mr. Symons will not be offended with us for saying it. He has "dropped into poetry" as a natural, pleasing, and graceful way of expressing his ideas and giving his readers all over the world a picturesque idea of one of the most remote post offices on the globe. The rhyme may occasionally halt, but we shall all overlook it in regarding the dramatic atmosphere with which his lines invest the scene. "Sir," said the Autocrat, on a similar occasion, "I am gratified with your remark. It expresses with pleasing vivacity that which I have sometimes heard uttered with malignant dulness."

"Macloutsi, British Protectorate, South Africa.

"27th March, 1892.

"The Hon. Secs., P. O. Magazine, London.

"Sirs,

"I enclose a few verses, which if you think fit you can insert in magazine. It will give an idea of the office (?) I had to work in for a few months - the most northern post office under the Bechuanaland Administration. I think I shall send you occasionally a description of some of the post offices I have seen and worked in in South Africa, which to you Britishers should prove interesting and amusing.

"Yours, truly,

"J. E. Symons,

"Postmaster."

The Macloutsi Postmaster.

The P. M. sat on his old camp chair
And indulged in a very modest swear,
For he never let out a great big whooper,
Never cussed like a first class trooper.

Only a mild and a modest swear,
Nothing more than a girl might hear,
But he had reason enough I trow,
Working in such a sad P. O.

He sat at a table that shook and groaned,
He sat on a chair that creaked and moaned;
He worked in a hut that was three years old,
That let in the heat and retained the cold,

The thatch of which had long since decayed,
Where scorpions, rats, etcetera, played,
And the rain, when it rained, came thro' in streams,
And the wind rushed through with such startling screams.

And snakes crept around in the stilly night
To obtain a mouse - their favourite mite,
And all around in the bushy veldt,
Which circled the camp somewhat like a belt,

The wolves, of a night, would stand and howl,
Hyænas and jackals would sadly prowl,
For they had little to satisfy them,
Only the P. M. to defy them.

Who stood outside, with his head all bare,
And levelled at them a mild, mild swear,
Which slowly raised the hair on their backs,
Which caused them to falter, and then "make tracks."

The P. M. sat on the cold, cold floor,
The chair was defunct - it would moan no more,
The table collapsed and was ruined quite,
And part of the roof gave way in the night.

The rain poured on his devoted head
And saturated his rough camp bed,
So pass the night on the floor he must,
And he struck a light while he mildly cussed.

He sorted the mail bags - some were dry -
And passed the night in damp misery,
Vowing he'd alter the state of affairs
And get a new hut and table and chairs.

The P. M. sat on a stump and smoked,
His long moustaches and beard he stroked;
He thought of the pitiful tale that he
Had woven and sent to the powers that be,

Which brought him the longed-for power to build
Another hut, and his heart was filled
With content, and he said it will keep out the draught,
And the rain, and the rats - and the P. M. laughed.
(II, 242-3)

3


Making for Macloutsie

J.E. Symons

MACLOUTSI. - We have just received a further letter from the Postmaster, dated May 14th. The article which he encloses was recieved too late for publication in the present issue, but we hope to insert it in our October number.

“SIRS, - Enclosed you will find an effort of mine which I hope will prove interesting enough to insert in your Magazine, but, as I have previously remarked, I am not ambitious; I merely contribute from a sense of duty, as I take an interest in my work; and as the P. O. Magazine tends to lighten this work and make me more fully acquainted with it, so must I naturally take an interest in the P. O. Magazine, and I will do all I can, though it may be little, to make it a success.” (II, 259)

[We are sure that our readers will be glad to know how Mr. Symons got to that terrible Post Office which he so graphically described in our last number, and we have great pleasure in giving his account of the journey thither.]

RYBURG is the capital of British Bechuanaland, and, comparatively speaking, it is but a village. Some people consider it a dull hole, but some people are never satisfied. In my opinion villages are preferable to great cities, and Vryburg is a dear little village; dear because I *know* it. In comparative quietude I studied it; the long stretches of undulating countr, extending far away to the misty horizon, are peopled now with ghosts of the past, and in fancy I roam again o'er the veldt with a book in my hand; I reach a little eminence and lay me down on a granite boulder, and as I puff up huge clouds of smoke from my pipe I look at the patches of vaalbosch, at the thread of a stream which trickles along in the valley below, the tiny hill on which the fort is built, and then away to the village where I catch glimpses of friends who are dear to me. I had time to see them often, to study their ways, their dispositions; every trick of expression I knew, and, from constant communion, I learnt their longings, their ambitions. Without a friend, what a dull place is London! I was there once, ill in bed for nearly a week, without a soul to care me. I heard the rumble and rush of the life in the street below, but for me it was oh! so dull, and I longed for one of my sweet little African villages, so small, so quiet, and

yet so full of friends. At 2.30 p.m. on the 28th December, 1891, the coach stood near the Vryburg Post Office, ready to bear me away; I shook hands with those who had to come to see me off, entered the coach with two other passengers, the door slammed, the whip cracked, the driver gave an ear-piercing yell at the horses, and we were off. As we mounted the rising ground, north of the village, I looked back, and it was only then that I fully realised how I had become attached to the little place, and how sorry I was to leave. But I always bow as cheerfully as possible to the inevitable; so with a sigh I gathered up the rugs belonging to the other passengers (I had left mine behind), distributed them around and behind me as comfortably as possible, and lay back to enjoy a smoke and a reverie.

A heavy storm overtook us just before arriving at Setlagoli towards midnight, and the darkness was so great that we had to remain four hours. Supper was served up cold - as the coach had arrived late - with no tea or coffee, but with myriads of flies. I took an Englishman's privilege, and grumbled. Setlagoli was originally an out-station during the expedition under Sir Charles Warren; it boasts now a post and telegraph office combined, a store, a house, and a hut, the remains of a fort, and a couple of members of the Bechuanaland Border Police. The acting Postmaster, Mr. Knott, sorted his mail - a few minutes' work - and retired again to rest. We reached Mafeking at 12.30 p.m. on the 29th. Chief Montsioa's head kraal is a mile away from the European township, and looks very picturesque, situated as it is on the banks of the Molopo, the huts built in between the trees and great granite boulders. I paid a visit to the Post Office, where the officials were working in their shirt sleeves, sorting the Mashonaland mail - a heavy one. I clambered over a mountain of newspapers to shake hands with my colleagues, nearly maimed myself by tumbling over the parcels, and was thankful to escape by a back door. Mafeking is about the same size as Vryburg, its great ambition is to have a railway and a bonded warehouse. If you want opinions on railways and bonded warehouses, go to Mafeking; if you do not want these opinions don't get within sight of the place; they have railways and bonded warehouses for breakfast, luncheon and dinner, and it is *the* subject of conversation during the day. When anyone there has nightmare, he, or she, dreams that the Government has decided not to extend the railway and not granted Mafeking a bonded warehouse, and then the dreamer awakens in a terrible fright.

Here we left the American coach and eight spanking horses behind, and took on a square box on wheels with a couple of springs and eight mules. This box, dignified by the name of coach, is a very emphatic concern; it has not the lazy, easy roll of a well-made coach, but a sharp sudden jerk that almost dislocates one's limbs, and throws one against the roof and then back again in a heap among portmanteaus, parcels, rugs, broken pipes, and burning ends of cigars. We left Mafeking at 6.0 p.m., and arrived at Ramathlabama about 8 o'clock, having crossed the borders of Bechuanaland and arrived in the Protectorate. At the store here, which is also the hotel, we had a cup of tea while the mules were being changed. We had a capsize about 500 yards beyond the store, but, fortunately, no one was hurt, and we soon had the coach righted and on its way again. About midnight we arrived at another store, where they gave us a hot meal, very welcome after our eleven hours' fast. On starting again I fell asleep, and woke about 5.0 a.m. to find that we were travelling over a very rocky road; my follow

passengers were “cussing” loud and deep at the terrible jolting, and looked with bloodshot, envious eyes at me, so refreshed after my long sleep. The country here is known as Boulder Pits, from the great number of granite boulders and water pits in the vicinity; it is hilly and well wooded. We arrived at Ramoutsa at 9.40 a.m. 30th December; this is a large Kaffir stad (town), containing some 10,000 natives, a few traders, and the British South African Company’s Telegraph Office, a small galvanised iron building. Breakfast had been ordered for us from Mafeking, but it was a miserable failure, as they only placed eight chops in front of five hungry travellers. Two of the passengers paid their half-crowns simply for a cup of coffee; while the other three, myself included, did away with the eight chops, all the available bread, and as much coffee as we could get; we then went to the Telegraph Office and ordered a meal for five hungry travellers at Gaberones. There are no Post Offices at these small places in the Protectorate; a storekeeper is generally appointed postal agent and does the little postal work that is to be done; Macloutsie indeed is the only Post Office in the Protectorate. We arrived at Gaberones at 1.45 p.m., where they had hot chops and green peas awaiting us, in sufficient quantity to appease our appetites. Fort Gaberones is a police station, manned by K Troop of the Bechuanaland Border Police. Our next stage was Mochuli, about 30 miles distant, and the last place on the road that boasted a house of accommodation of any description, consequently we were particularly anxious to get a good square meal there before starting on the tinned provisions which we had brought with us, and I asked the telegraphist to advise Inspector Osborne, an old friend of mine, at Mochuli, to agitate and try his best to have a good spread for us when we arrived. A wearisome six hours’ trek with one team of mules, without water, through sand and bush, brought us to Mochuli, about 9.0 p.m., ready to do justice to a good supper; but alas! mine host apologised, and said it was utterly impossible to get anything, all he could place before us was tinned herrings; we were certainly disappointed, and fell to sadly and silently. Mochuli is the head kraal of the Protectorate chief, Linchwe; it was too dark to see much of it; but it appeared to be surrounded by hills. An hour’s delay, during which time they transferred our luggage and the mails to a smaller coach, and we were off again. I was shaken down into a fairly comfortable position very soon, and went off to sleep, and awoke at daylight; my fellow passengers told me that we had passed over the worst bit of road we had had since leaving Vryburg, and that the jolting was frightful. They marvelled greatly at my ability to sleep over such a terrible road, and packed up as we were; but I explained that I had travelled a great deal in coaches, and that I could sleep anywhere and anyhow.

Our new conductor was called Baby, because of his gigantic proportions. He stands 6 feet 4 3/4 inches in his bare feet (he doesn’t wear socks), and is broad and strong in proportion. A recalcitrant mule stood little chance with him, as he pulled it up to the traces without any apparent effort, boxed its ears, and inspanned it. He would even hold up the coach while the boys greased the wheels. An old Hottentot woman gave us a pannikin of coffee each at one of the outspans, early on the morning of the 31st December, for which we paid sixpence; and about mid-day the boys made coffee, and we took a stale loaf of bread, some biscuits, and a variety of tinned meats, and had luncheon under a tree - the flies

and the ants helping themselves. Towards 5.0 p.m. we arrived at Palla Camp, on the Limpopo River; I walked a couple of miles over to the store at Notwani Junction to get a loaf of bread, and on my return we had supper.

Here we changed again, and took on a two-wheeled cart on springs, drawn by oxen, as the horse-sickness is too bad for horses or mules to go further. The two-wheeler turned out to be easier and more comfortable than the small four-wheeled coach we left behind; the oxen were put into a trot, at which they were kept by the application of a long wagon whip, and a leader ran in front to keep them in the road. The leaders are natives, and have no very pleasant time of it, as they have to run eight miles (a stage) through the hot tropical sun; and sometimes more if the next stage leader happens to be ill. I've noticed some of them trotting in front of the oxen, chanting their weird Kaffir songs and whistling almost all the way, just as if they were having a quiet stroll.

New Year's Eve in a post-cart, far away from civilised habitation; hardly a sign of life; only the vehicle and its leader hurrying along. The land seemed to lie very low and was shrouded in utter darkness, the stars flickered faintly through a thin haze, and everything seemed so far away; we forgot the sounds of cart as it travelled along; we heard only the swish of the river, as it lashed its banks; and from far away o'er the bushy flats came the low soft wail of the wind as it seemed to tell a weird tale of something we knew not of; but a yearning sadness was in the sound, and we all grew till; in a sort of a mystic dream we heard soft peals of musical laughter, and caught sweet glimpses of merry faces of the dear old friends of long ago, of the New Year's Eves of long ago. How dreary it was on this vast bushy veldt! Everything seemed so distant, so far away, and even the echoes seemed to come from another and distant world. The others roused themselves and asked me to sing, and I sang "Home, Sweet Home," and all the dear old songs that the echoes had brought to me, and at midnight I launched out into "Auld lang Syne," and was joined by the others; the chorus rang out on the still night air, and presently we heard it taken up a long way in front of us; it was the "down" cart; we stopped the cart and sang another verse; then we stepped into the darkness and greeted the others and wished them a Happy New Year.

I considered I had done my duty in watching the old year out; and when we started again I laid my head against the side of the cart and went to sleep. At mid-day on 1st January, 1892, we got our first opportunity for a wash since leaving Mafeking; as the oxen were outspanned on the banks of the Limpopo we hurried down to the river, feeling sorely tempted to plunge in, but restrained by the knowledge that the Limpopo River is famous for crocodiles, so we contented ourselves with a good wash, which was refreshing. The next morning we came upon myriads of locusts, which were doing great damage to the trees, grass, and the Kaffir lands. About 8.30 a.m. the driver advised us that we were changing oxen for the last time before reaching Palapye. As the road was very sandy I determined to walk on, knowing the oxen could travel but slowly; so I took the telegraph line for a guide and started off at a smart pace; it was a very warm day, but I managed to arrive 55 minutes before the cart. Mr. Watt, the British South African Company's telegraphist, asked me to have luncheon at his place; so I

had a good wash, and soon after the cart arrived I and another passenger, who was going on to Macloutsi, had a good meal. I think my appetite must have given rise to some little astonishment. I always have a fair appetite; but the long walk had added to its keenness, and the way I put away the edibles would have made a man with a bad digestion turn green with envy. Palapye is a very large Kaffir stad - Khama's chief town - and boasts some 20,000 inhabitants, including perhaps some 30 white people. It is a deadly looking place, and fever claims many for its victims during the summer season. There is no house of accommodation of any description, and woe to the poor traveller who arrives there knowing nobody; he is left to squat on his portmanteau, and look bewildered. A telegraphist in South Africa is fortunate, for wherever there is a telegraph office he can count on one friend at least. On resuming the journey from Palapye after an hour's rest, we were pretty comfortable, as we had had a grand feed, and there being only two of us in the cart, we arranged things rather differently. In the evening I noticed the storm clouds gathering, and it grew very dark, but I went to sleep; when I awoke at 4.0 a.m. the boys were just inspanning, and I learned that we had been stuck for five hours by the rain, which had come down in a continuous downpour during that time, and made it so dark that the road could not be seen at all.

Sunday, 3rd January. We travelled along at a rattling pace, trying to "make up time," and the jolting over the rocks, ruts, and stumps of trees was something awful. Saw some good specimens of the Baobab tree (Cream of Tartar), which raise their massive trunks high into the air, and seem to spread their mighty limbs in a protecting sort of way over the other trees. Arrived at Macloutsi, 8.0 p.m.

The journey altogether was one of the worst I have ever had, travelling as we were night and day for nearly a week, over roads that were by no means light, and there being but few houses of accommodation our meals were very unsatisfactory and irregular. I can put up with much as long as I have plenty to eat; but an empty stomach causes me to grumble. The heat was very oppressive at times, and the country is not an interesting one to travel through by post cart; it is one great undulating plain, covered to the southward with vaalbosch, a low scrubby bush, and to the northward with large trees; here and there a range of hills, or a lone kopje rises, to vary the monotony somewhat. To enjoy a trip through Bechuanaland and the Protectorate one wants to take one's own time, and with gun and dogs to wander out of the beaten path, or on horseback to chase the wildebeeste, the eland, and other big game over the great flats. The poet, too, might linger in leafy glades, in cool and beautiful retreats on the banks of some trickling stream, or near to some sandy river, for there are many spots in Bechuanaland and the Protectorate almost unrivalled for beauty. Macloutsi is the most northerly camp of the Bechuanaland Border Police in the Protectorate, and is manned by three troops, viz., E, F, and G, some 250 men altogether, who mostly live in huts, but some few in tents. The Macloutsi River is four miles north of the camp, and runs from east to west. To the westward of the camp, and a mile distant, runs the Big Matlaputla River; to the eastward, and not half a mile distant, runs the Little Matlaputla, both of them are small streams, and both run northward towards the Macloutsi. The post office *was* a round hut, somewhat larger than the ordinary Kaffir hut, but totally unfitted for postal work, and I found that

it leaked somewhat after the manner of a vegetable strainer. The wind troubled not to go round but came right through, and there were no conveniences for the performance of postal work. Macloutsi is a busy office on mall days, as the whole of the mail going into British South African Company's territory is dealt with here; and the manner in which letters, papers, parcels, mail bags, &c., were strewn over the floor was thoroughly distracting. This has, however, been altered, and Macloutsi now boasts a very decent post office, with pigeon-holes, sorting table, and necessary office gear. It is a longish, roomy hut; and for the place and the times it is sufficient. A money order branch will, I think, be opened here before this reaches you.

We had a 'Bonfire Sing-song' here not long after my arrival, which was quite an interesting affair to me, as I had not seen one before. A few waggon loads of wood were piled up on the square near the forts, and towards 8.0 p.m. it was lighted. Half an hour afterwards the glare of a great fire was lighting up the country for miles around, and showed, not far off, the officers seated at a table, while close to them gathered the men. A little distance off were collected the native servants, forming altogether an almost complete circle around the fire. It was quite a treat to hear a popular chorus swelling out from about 200 manly throats, and go echoing away down in the shadows beyond.

These "Sing-songs" are of rare occurrence, and life at Macloutsi is terribly dull; nothing but the deadly routine of camp life, far away from civilisation. It is appalling when one considers it thoroughly, but I try not to consider, for I have made up my mind for a few months of martyrdom, and I'm going through with it somehow.

MACLOUTSI.

J. E. SYMONS.

(II, 287-93)

4

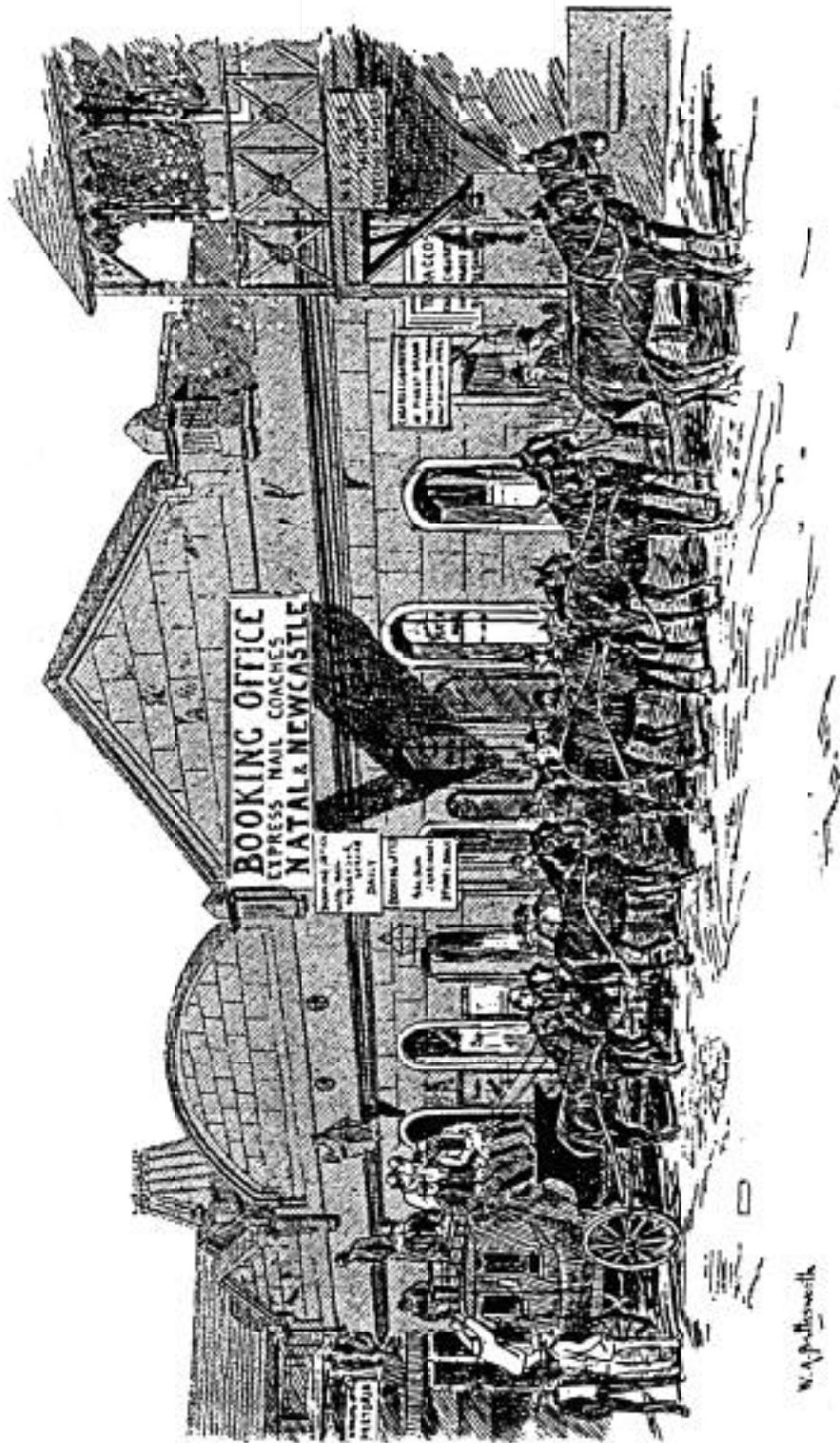
The Mail Coach

R.S. Churchill

[The accompanying engraving of the Natal mail-coach about to start from Johannesburg has been made from a photograph kindly lent by Miss A. Jarvis. It appears to be a vehicle similar to that in which Mr. Symons performed the first portion of his journey. The following account of a similar machine is extracted from Lord Randolph Churchill's recently published book: -

“This kind of coaching is an experience which at the present day can only be tried in Africa. The coaches themselves are the most curious productions of human skill. Intended to hold twelve passengers inside, half-a-dozen outside, besides large quantities of heavy baggage, they are constructed of very solid materials hung upon thick springs of leather, and present the most unwieldy, lumbering and old-world appearance. They are drawn by ten or twelve mules or horses, harnessed in pairs. Two men are required to guide the team, the one holding the reins, the other the long whip, with which he can severely chastise all but the leading pair. When driving a team of mules the whip is in operation every minute, constant flogging alone inducing these stubborn animals to do their best. At times one of the drivers is compelled to descend from the box and run alongside the team, flogging them all with the greatest heartiness and impartiality.

“In spite, however, of all this effort and apparent harsh treatment, an average speed of about six miles is all that can be realised. Roads there are none; deeply rutted tracks are followed. When the ruts get too deep for safety the track turns slightly aside, and to such an extent does this sometimes occur that in places the track occupies a width or a quarter of a mile or more. Swinging, bounding, jolting, creaking, straining over this extraordinary route, the coach pursues the uneven tenor of its way, sometimes labouring and plunging like a ship at sea, constantly heeling over at angles at which an upset seems unavoidable; now descending into the deep bed of a ‘spruit’ (creek), now sticking fast in heavy ground, now careering over masses of rocks and stones. The travellers, all shaken up inside like an omelet in a frying-pan, never cease to wonder that the human frame can endure such shaking, or that wood and iron can be so firmly riveted together as to stand such a strain. It may be mentioned that the life of a coach does not exceed two years, that upsets are frequent, and casualties not uncommon.”] (II, 286, 293-4)




5

The Macloutsi Mail

J.E. Symons

[Our readers, we are sure, must by this time be well acquainted with Macloutsi and its late Postmaster. In our July issue he described, in mournful numbers, the old post office there, and the curious effect which it produced on the hyænas of the surrounding veldt. Since Ajax defied the lightning, few pictures have exceeded in sublimity the defiance of the jackals by Mr. Symons. We don't like to criticise such a scene, but, for ourselves, we think that a pot shot would have been more useful in raising the hair on their backs than any amount of objurgatory language. As we announced in our last, Mr. Symons has now been promoted to Vryburg; but before leaving Macloutsi he sent us the following interesting account of the new office, in the erection of which he himself took a useful if subordinate part. We can assure Mr. Symons that we indeed envy the celerity with which they knock up a new post office in the Protectorate. There is one being built outside our official window which has already been four years in hand, and which will not be ready for occupation for another two years at least.]

he Macloutsi Post Office may not appear a very magnificent pile, and in comparison with St. Martin's-le-Grand would perhaps make it appear somewhat insignificant; but I will warrant that the pictures of this office, which I enclose, will arouse more interest than would a picture of your G. P. O. I wish you to bear in mind that I saw to the building of it myself; I was the architect, and watched its growth with keen interest; it took nearly 14 days to build, and every day I sat on a stump close by, smoking and watching and listening with gentle approval to the builder as he coined choice epithets for the lazy native workmen. I even went so far as to help kick the niggers when the deliberation of their movements was more pronounced than usual; so you can imagine how proud I am of this

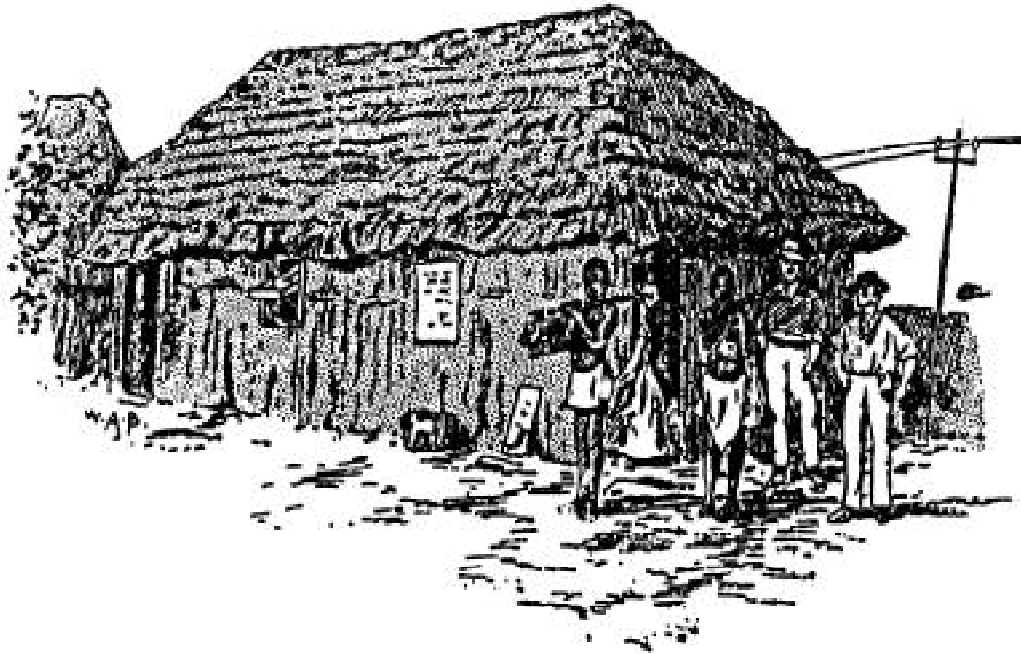


Figure 9. The Macloutsie Post Office (IV, 57).



Figure 10. The Mashonaland Mail Coach at the Macloutsie Post Office (III, 171).

my office!

One of the views was taken from the south-west, and shows the most beautiful part of the new building; the nearest door is for the public, and that farthest away leads into my sanctum. The two natives are runners, who convey the Tati and Buluwayo mails from here. Standing up against the building is my assistant - a trooper in the Bechuanaland Border Police - and to his left, and a little in advance, appears your humble servant (the beard mown off), dressed in the usual tropical manner - white trousers, light shirt, open in front and sleeves rolled up above the elbows, a sash round the waist, and a broad-brimmed felt hat. The open shirt is for coolness and convenience, for it answers in lieu of pockets, as I generally carry my tobacco-pouch, matches, and pocket-handkerchief therein.

The office is a large hut 30 feet x 14, and is rather well built; the walls being of strong poles smeared over with clay and cow-dung; the roof is of dried grass. The windows are small wooden frames covered with canvas, as glass is scarce up here owing to the great distance it has to be transported by ox-wagon over a rough road. I cannot get the interior of the office photographed or sketched, or I would send you copies for reproducing in the magazine. The telegraph instrument is on a small, roughly-made table in the one corner, alongside of which is the safe, and next to that my office table, under which is arranged the Daniell's battery, so that I have to be careful with my feet. On the other side is the sorting table, about 10 feet in length and two feet wide; and 20 feet from the front door are arranged the pigeon-holes running nearly across the room, leaving just space enough for a small doorway leading into my chamber beyond. For the public there is a space inside about six feet square, the barrier consisting of boxes piled to a convenient height, and a small light table which I can move on one side to allow a passage to and from the public entrance; a very primitive letter box, four shelves, and two chairs complete the furniture and adornments of the office, barring some lengths of limbo from one rafter to another, arranged as a ceiling to keep the dust and straw from the roof from falling on the tables.

My private apartment is rather snug, 14 feet by 10. In it I have my stretcher, an easy chair, a table which contains my small but select library; a trunk, and another chair; and looking glass, photos and knick-nacks arranged on the walls. I have covered the floor with carpeting, and the walls with blue limbo to hide the back of the pigeon-holes and to cover the naked walls.

The mail from Vryburg, including English and Colonial mails, arrives once a week, and up to the end of July brought me a large amount of work, as all the Mashonaland mails were made up on this office; running from 8 to 13 bags, and containing some 3,000 to 4,000 items, including letters, papers, parcels, and book-packets, each item carrying an "additional postage" debit; letters 2d. per $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.; papers 1d. per 4 ozs.; parcels and book-packets 3d. per lb. The letter bills carried the total debits, and all the items had to be checked to avoid errors; so that if the letter bill stated "913 letters, 1,014 rates" ($\frac{1}{2}$ ozs.), &c., &c., I had to see that I received letters, &c., agreeing with this. I used to empty all the mail bags on to the floor, placing the papers, parcels, and book-packets in distinct heaps, and the letters on the table; the letters I would first check, then stamp and sort (for I was alone for some months), and pacify the "madding crowd" by delivering them first; then I would check all the other items and sort

them, and nearly always managed to deliver the whole local mail under three hours; and I can assure you I worked hard, and perspired freely, only muttering a naughty word when I heard some voice outside complaining to the crowd about the terrible delay in the delivery. The voice was a recruit's, and he assured the bystanders that "in London they would finish the whole thing in half-an-hour" (this is a positive fact, I can assure you), and then I would laugh - a demoniacal laugh - and I am afraid my tuneful voice was heard telling him to go back to his smoky old London. I give below an example of the "additional postage" letter bill: -

800	letters,	912	rates
1,000	papers,	1,610	"
48	parcels,	138	"
50	books,	60	"

I had to count the letters and weigh those which were over a $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. to arrive at the correct number of rates, and in the same way I had to deal with the papers, &c., and their rates. Items originating in the Protectorate had to be carefully put on one side, as they were not charged with additional postage.

Then the local delivery, and miniature letter bills (for I had to collect the additional postage). Example: -

3	letters,	4	rates ...	8d.
6	papers,	7	" ...	7d.
1	parcel,	1	" ...	3d.
1	book-pkt.,	2	" ...	6d.
				—
Total...				2s.

When the local delivery was finished, I made up the Mashonaland mail on Tuli, making a slight addition to his letter bill as under: -

				£	s.	d.
800	letters,	912	rates..	7	12	0
1,000	papers,	1,610	"	6	14	2
48	parcels,	138	"	1	14	6
50	books,	60	"	0	15	0
				—		
				£	16	15 8
				=====		

For this he would forward me a cheque by the following mail. And at the end of the month my "additional postage" schedule showed total number of letters and rates, papers and rates, &c., &c., and their total value, which I remitted. I generally despatched the Tuli mail about eight hours after the arrival of the mail from Vryburg. The mail arrived Sunday morning, as a rule.

The mail from Tuli and other Mashonaland offices arrived Sunday night, late, and I sorted and checked it on Monday. The down mail, including England, Colony, &c., left here at noon on Tuesdays.

On the first of August, the British South Africa Company joined the South African Postal Convention, and from that date the mails have been made up on the Mashonaland offices direct; and the Mashonaland offices make up their mails on the different offices; so that Macloutsi, now, have only its local mail to deal with, which makes a very considerable difference in the amount of work done at this office.

The mail for Tati and Gubuluwayo (Lobengula's Kraal, Matabeleland) leaves here on Mondays at 3 p.m. It is carried by native runners, who do not boast of much raiment; one carries the bag for Tati, and another the Buluwayo bag. They arrange the mail bag on the one end of a stick, and on the other end they fasten their blanket, sandals, "tin billy" for cooking a piece of meat (sometimes), and some mealie-meal tied in a piece of cloth; the stick is put on the shoulder, they bid me "Dumela" (good day), and the mail leaves. Tati is about 120 miles from here, and they do the journey in from 3 to 4 days. Other runners are engaged from Tati to Buluwayo, which is about 120 miles further. The telegraph line from Mafeking to Salisbury belongs to the British South Africa Company, and is splendidly constructed, iron poles nearly the whole way; the charge for telegrams is - minimum, 10 words 2s. 6d., and 3d. for each additional word. South of Mafeking an additional rate of 1s. for 10 words and 6d. for every additional 5 words is charged, which goes to the Bechuanaland Administration for transmission over their wires. There is not such a vast difference in the working of this line from any other, so comments would be wasted. We use the ordinary Morse instruments. There are some "duffers" on the line, and some very smart clerks.

J. E. SYMONS.

(III, 171-5).

MACLOUTSI. - We have had another letter from Mr. Symons, who, we are glad to learn, has been appointed postmaster of Vryburg, that "sweet little African village" which he left with such regret only a year ago. We hope to publish in our next a sketch of the Macloutsi P. O. taken from some photographs which he has sent us. (III, 106)

British Southern Africa Monographs

"The Northern Mails and Telegraphs: Bechuanaland and Rhodesia in the Annual Reports of the Postmaster-General, Cape of Good Hope, 1885-1909." This volume is the first in a series that will contain basic source material for the postal historian of southern Africa. The first volume has been extracted from the Postmaster-General's annual reports to the Cape of Good Hope Parliament. The volume details the critical years of the development of the postal and telegraph services of the northern frontiers of southern Africa. The volume is 42 pages and is available in a 'pdf' version.

"The Development of Postal Rates in Southern Africa: Annual Reports of the Postmaster-General, Cape of Good Hope, 1882-1909." This volume is in preparation and is expected during 2002. It contains extracts from the Postmaster-General's annual reports to the Cape of Good Hope Parliament as they related to the development of rates in southern Africa. The volume will be approximately 100 pages and will include an introduction.

"The Macloutsie Post Office and its Postmaster, Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1892" provides an important source text to the early postal history of Bechuanaland and Mashonaland. The central part of the booklet (30 p.) is a reprint of the contemporaneous writings of the last postmaster of Macloutsie post office detailing his duties and travels. The Editor has provided a general introduction placing the Post Office into a postal history context. A second updated edition was published in 2002 and made available in 'pdf' format. "... try the 'Macloutsie Post Office' by JE Symons whose adventures in reaching this remote border police station are chronicled with easy charm .. (American Philatelist, 1997)."

"The Introduction and Usage of Postal Orders in Bechuanaland Protectorate" is an important contribution to the postal history of the Bechuanalands. It traces the history of postal orders from their introduction in 1907 to independence from the South African Post Office. The booklet (34 p.) presents original research and will appeal to the specialist, as well as the general interest postal history collector. "Masterly Bechuanaland research.. (South African Philatelist, 1995)." Awarded Silver-Bronze at ORAPEX & C4NPLE in 1997.

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