

The Early History of the Postal Service in Botswana, 1847 to 1889

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The purpose of this article is to summarise the steps taken by early European visitors in Southern Africa to communicate with their friends and relatives in their homelands. It should, of course, be borne in mind that prior to the arrival of Europeans, Africans had their own systems of letter-delivery which operated in conjunction with the delivery of spoken messages between African communities. Within these systems, a central role was played by African rulers, European hunters, and traders. As literacy was adopted by more Africans, many of them wrote and sent letters themselves, such as letters from African writers (in Setswana) to the editors of mission-published newspapers during 1857-1859 and 1883-1896.

Early letters written by Europeans

By 1821, the London Missionary Society (LMS) had established a mission station at Kudumane (Kuruman) in the northern part of the Cape Colony (forerunner to the Cape Province of South Africa starting in 1910 to 1994). To Europeans, the mission became known as the 'gateway' to the interior, a place that passing hunters, traders and travellers invariably visited to take advantage of the hospitality provided and to exchange information. Most letters written at the mission were taken to Cape Town by those going that way. In Cape Town, mission correspondence was handled by the Reverend John Philip, the LMS representative, who acted as a forwarding agent and facilitated its delivery to Europe or America. Other letters were carried south bypassing travellers and would have entered the postal system of the Cape Colony at the post office in Colesberg, some 300 kilometres away.

The earliest surviving letters known to the author which were written from the land that is now Botswana are those of the renowned Scottish missionary-explorer Dr David Livingstone. 21 such letters have been traced by the author, written between November 1847 and September 1885. Most of these letters were written at Kolobeng in the territory of Kgosi Sechele of the Bakwena and are addressed to Kudumane, or to the LMS headquarters in England or to Livingstone's family members in Scotland. The letters to Britain took on average just under five months to arrive. The longest took six and a half months, and the fastest three months. His last letter is remarkable because it was written further north at Lake Ngami, and Livingstone records that it was entrusted to 'the kindness of a party of Griquas who leave this river tomorrow and proceed directly to Philipolis' (Schapera 1961:174). These Griquas probably originated from an area north of the Orange River and were on a hunting expedition to the Okavango. The letter was presumably put into the postal system of the Orange River Sovereignty (Orange Free State and now the Free State Province) upon arrival at Philipolis. Most of Livingstone's other letters to Britain were routed via the mission at Kudumane. Letters from Kolobeng via Kudumane usually took three or four months to reach Cape Town.

Some of Livingstone's letters were received from or passed to trusted African carriers: 'By the recent arrival of Monye Mabole we were favoured with communications from the South, and by the arrival of Montseabona & party from the Bamangwato we have an opportunity of returning you thanks' (Schapera 1959:252).. 'Sechele's brother Basiamang took the letter on towards the Bamangwato Sechele sent a particular request to Sekhomi to forward it punctually' (Schapera 1959:100). Another letter includes an intriguing statement: 'This goes early tomorrow We had written [a previous letter] some time ago and intended to send it out by an express, but as that would have cost us a calf and we thought [of] it better'

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[Schapera 1959:28]. Whilst at Linyanti in the far north, Livingstone arranged for his letters to be carried to the west coast. On 11 October 1853, he wrote: 'I think this goes by Walwich [Walvis] Bay'. And on 27 September 1885, he begins a letter: 'I have just learned that my Arabian post-office man is detained at Sesheke by the sickness of one of his party, so I am glad of the opportunity to write a little appendix to that hurried note of the 13th Only think of the way this letter goes - by an Arab from Zanzibar who takes charge of a party of Makololo with ivory for Loanda [Luanda]' (Schapera 1961:255 and 285).

A variety of goods such as vegetables, books, cheese, oranges, and preserves were sent in boxes and parcels to Livingstone in Kolobeng by members of his family in Scotland. Such parcels generally took about a year to arrive in Kolobeng (Parsons 1997:71). Travellers at this time also utilised 'letter trees' to deposit mail addressed to other places in the region. The trees had notches or holes in which letters could be deposited. Sometimes a tin box was attached to the tree. There was an expectation that someone travelling in the appropriate direction would carry the letter with him to the nearest place hosting some type of postal service. There were at least three such letter trees, situated near Molepolole and near Shoshong; the third – a giant baobab – was located on an island not far from Gutshaa Pan. This giant baobab was utilised by Livingstone as a rudimentary 'post office'. African 'runners' bearing letters for Livingstone would bury the mail bag under the tree, to be eventually collected on his return trip. Thus, Sir RI Murchison, president of the Royal Geographical Society, posted a copy of an address he had made to the Society on 25 May 1852 to Livingstone. On the inside page of the address is written in Livingstone's hand:

This address was sent by the author to me through the cape colony (sic) and was delivered by the Revd. Robert Moffat to some Matabele who laid it down on the south bank of the Seeanibye just above Victoria Falls. It was taken by the Makololo and placed on the island about 14th September 1854 and remained there till me returned from Loanda when I received it from the Mokololo about the same date in 1855. It was then brought home and delivered by me to Sir Roderick Murchison 19th February 1858. David Livingstone (Murchison 1852).

The Missionary Post

In 1859, the LMS established a northern mission station at Inyati, 'the place of the buffaloes', situated near Gubulawayo (Bulawayo in Matebeleland). An unofficial postal system was introduced between Inyati and the main mission at Kuruman, passing via the smaller missions at Shoshong and Molepolole. This service utilised passing travellers, and operated initially on an *ad hoc* basis, as described in 1861 by Robert Moffat, then heading the Kudumane mission, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary in Cape Town:

We receive the post regularly at this place [Kudumane], and the letters and papers for the missionaries at Inyati are either forwarded direct by parties going in that direction or sent to the care of [the missionary at Shoshong], who again embraces opportunities of persons going to Inyati. It is now more than five months since the date of last letters from Inyati brought by people of this station (Wallis 1945:257).

Another early traveller passing through and around the Tswana territory was Frank Oates, an explorer, and Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. The discovery in 1961 of the Oates correspondence has provided, as Wright and Drysdall (1988:28) comment, 'unique information relating to mail originating in the territories then known collectively as the 'far interior', which had no formally organised postal service'. Oates corresponded with relatives in England from 1873 until his death in 1875. His letters include several references to mail carried by a passing ox-wagon returning from a hunting trip. These wagons generally

averaged only 15 kilometres a day over long trips. From time to time, Oates himself acted as the postman for other travellers; he also refers to resident traders and missionaries hiring runners to carry their mail. Letters from Pandamatenga or Bulawayo in the north were ‘sorted’ at the Shoshong mission station and despatched by runner or wagon to Marico (Zeerust) in the South African Republic or the Transvaal where a formal post office had been established in 1860. Although there is no direct evidence as to how the senders of such letters paid the postage for carriage of their mail to Cape Town or Europe, it seems likely that the sender either gave the carrier the appropriate payment, or – more probably – established an account with the mission at Shoshong.

Confirmation that a regular missionary postal link between Shoshong and the South African Republic had been established before 1875 is provided by Major Henry Stabb of the Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry who travelled via Shoshong and Tati to the Victoria Falls. In a diary entry dated 18 June 1875, he recorded that:

McKenzie ... acts as a postmaster here [Shoshong] Between this and the Transvaal I found that letters were received and despatched every fortnight, being conveyed through Secheli’s [Kgosi Sechele] country by runners from one missionary post to another, and that beyond Shoshong as far as Gubulwayo (sic) there was a monthly post. The postal arrangements are managed principally by the missionaries and supported by annual subscriptions from among the traders and white residents (Tabler 1967:24).

At around this time, the LMS’s Reverend James Hepburn of Shoshong attempted to establish a monthly post between Shoshong and Kudumane, via the mission stations at Molepolole and Kanye. By mid-1875, this had become a fortnightly service supported by subscriptions. Hepburn’s successor, the Reverend McKenzie, improved the service to operate on a fortnightly basis by 1876, with mail despatched northwards to Bulawayo every month. By 1888, it was reported that between 7,000 and 8,000 letters *per annum* were being handled in Shoshong,

Another insight into the organisation of the mails at this time is provided by a letter written by a Jesuit priest in Bulawayo to Fiesole (near Florence in Italy) in late September 1879:

I received your note on the 20th. It was dated 15 July. So letters from you arrive here in a little over 2 months. There is now a fortnightly post from here to the [Cape] Colony. The Europeans had reduced the post to a monthly one from want of funds. But now the government gives 100£ a year and our party gives 18 guineas a year – 3 for each priest – so now they are enabled to have a fortnightly one. It would be quite sufficient to direct [by writing on the face of the cover] ‘Zambesi mission – Gubulawayo. Via Cape Colony – Transvaal and Marico’ but at present we add ‘Care of Francis and Clarke Shoshong. Francis forwards them at once by the same post – so there is no delay (Gelfand 1968:129).

This quotation merits three comments. Firstly, regarding the length of time the letter from Fiesole took to arrive in Bulawayo. Mail from Italy to Southern Africa at this time went via Britain (usually 3 days in transit), by packet post to Table Bay (approximately 30 days), by rail, cart, and runner to Marico (on average 9 days), and then by missionary runner post to Gubulawayo via Molepolole and Shoshong (in this case approximately 24 days). Secondly, the reference to a government subsidy. This remains a mystery, since it was surely not supplied by Ndebele King Lobengula’s administration (he had neither the funds nor the interest in subsidising the Europeans’ post), and if it was the government of the Cape Colony, it

is surprising that there is no reference to such payment in the Annual Reports of the Cape Postmaster General. The third is the reference to the role played by the firm of Francis and Clarke in Shoshong. The firm were prominent traders who are also known to have acted as interior forwarding agents.

Another leading figure in organising these early postal communications was Henry Westbeeche, one of the best-known traders and hunters in the ‘far interior’. Westbeeche lived in Pandamatenga from 1870 to 1888. At this time, Pandamatenga was a well-known stopping place and the point at which travellers turned to visit the Victoria Falls. From there, Westbeeche decided with passing travellers and ivory hunters to carry letters up and down the ‘Westbeeche Road’ between Pandamatenga and Tati. The Reverend CD Helm acted as the informal postmaster at Bulawayo from about 1875. He charged regular users of his runner post an annual subscription of between 30 and 50 shillings, and temporary residents five shillings per letter. In one of his own letters, Helm stated that runners between Bulawayo and Tati completed the return trip of 420 kilometres in a week, an average of 60 kilometres a day. The complete route of 800 kilometres from Bulawayo to Mahikeng was accomplished in 17 days, an average of 46 kilometres a day.

The Earliest Known Mail to Molepolole

The envelope illustrated in Figure 1 below is addressed to the Reverend John Smith Moffat of the LMS when he was stationed at the Molepolole mission in 1879. John Smith Moffat was the fourth son of Robert Moffat. He was born at Kudumane in 1835, and was also the brother-in-law of David Livingstone, who had married one of John’s sisters. John Smith Moffat was destined to play a pivotal role in developing the official postal system when later employed as an administrator for the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Figure 1: Letter addressed to Reverend John Smith Moffat



Source: In the author’s collection

The envelope was posted in Southwell, South London, on 24 April 1879, franked with a 6d stamp, being the rate for a ½ ounce letter to the Cape Colony. A transit stamp for Cape Town dated 26 May 1879 indicates that the envelope was carried from Plymouth on the *Taymouth Castle* which docked in Table Bay on the evening of 25 May 1879. The envelope was carried from Cape Town to Pretoria by train. From Pretoria, it was transported by cart to Rustenburg, and from Rustenburg to Zeerust by runners employed by the Transvaal post office. At Zeerust, another runner employed by the Transvaal post office carried the cover to the small postal agency which had been established at Dinokana (then written Linokana) () in February 1876. The postal agent at Dinokana was the Rev Thomas Jensen of the Hanoverian mission. From Dinokana, the envelope was carried across the Transvaal border and on to Molepolole by runners

employed by the LMS. The date on which the envelope arrived in the hands of Moffat is unknown

The Bechuanaland Expeditionary Force

The next step towards the development of an officially recognised postal system was provided by the arrival of the Bechuanaland Expeditionary Force in 1885. The Force had been despatched to secure British interests in the region. In 1884, Germany had formally annexed all the territory between the Orange River and the Portuguese colony of Angola, excepting Walvis Bay. And then, on 16 September 1884, President Paul Kruger of the Transvaal announced the annexation of the recently proclaimed ‘republics’ of Goshen and Stellaland. Confronted by these dual threats from both the west and the east, the British government realised that it was about to lose control of the strategic corridor of land north of the Cape Colony. The Expeditionary Force, under the command of General Charles Warren, was formed in Cape Town, and in March 1885 set off to establish control of this strategic corridor. The Force encountered no opposition from the Boers and the objective was achieved without a shot being fired. As the Expeditionary Force moved northwards, communication systems were established. Initially, heliographic communication was established, followed by a telegraph line (Proud 1996:242). Points were established along the line with military telegraphists in charge. The construction of a telegraph line north of Kimberley and into what would become Bechuanaland Protectorate (independent Botswana starting in 1966) was undertaken by a mounted troop of telegraph engineers under the command of Lieutenant RW Anstruther who supervised the laying of a line from Barkly West in the Cape Colony to Molepolole, via Mahikeng (then spelt Mafeking) and Kanye (see Figure 2). The line reached Molepolole in May 1885 and was dismantled following the withdrawal of British troops three months later.

Figure 2: Letter addressed to RW Anstruther



Source: In the author's collection

A despatch rider mail service was also introduced between Mahikeng and Molepolole via Kanye. This service operated three times per week. The despatch riders were estimated to travel through the rough

bush road at an average speed of only ten kilometres per hour. The personal correspondence to and from members of the Expeditionary Force was also carried by the military down this route to the nearest Cape Colony post office at Barkly West.

The Bechuanaland Border Police

Following the disbandment of the Bechuanaland Expeditionary Force in August 1885, a quasi-military force was established to patrol the borders of the new territory to prevent incursions by freebooters and to suppress any resistance by the Tswana dikgosi most of whom had reluctantly accepted British colonial rule. The initial recruits of the Bechuanaland Border Police came mainly from the disbanded mounted units of the Expeditionary Force. The Border Police headquarters were at Mahikeng in British Bechuanaland. The first Police camp within the Protectorate was established in December 1885 at Shoshong. Additional, smaller, camps were established at Kanye and Molepolole in early 1886 and later at Fort Elebe, Ramotswa, Motlouse (Macloutsie), Mochudi, and Gaborone (Gaberones). Although the primary role of the Border Police was to patrol the borders, the carriage of the administration's official mail was an important additional responsibility. In British Bechuanaland, the Border Police conveyed government and other official letters by horseback riders and wagons between Barkly West in the northern Cape and Vryburg. For a few months in 1885, the Border Police also conveyed the civil post on behalf of the Post Office in Vryburg. However, this task was not performed satisfactorily. There were numerous complaints about registered letters going astray, and of other irregularities which were all credited to the opening of the mail bags by the Police at their camp instead of the bags being taken directly to the Post Office (Jurgens 1945:26). In the Protectorate, the Border Police initially conveyed only government mail and despatches. This service was operated on an *ad hoc* basis, as the need arose and resources were available. Despatch riders journeyed between Kgosi Khama III's Bangwato base in Shoshong and Mafeking. The route passed through Molepolole, and Kanye. The Postmaster General of British Bechuanaland decided in early 1887 that the Border Police should cease to carry the mails between Vryburg and Mahikeng, and tenders were invited to operate this service. Mr Geering, the proprietor of the *Passenger Cart Service*, was awarded the tender for conveyance of the mails from Kimberley to Mafeking with effect from 1 March 1887. Little is known about the service offered by Geering, except that he abandoned the contract in July 1888, and the Border Police were instructed to resume their postal duties by carrying the Protectorate mail by post cart from Mafeking to Tati in the northern Trans-Protectorate (Eley 1977:37).

The Official Runner Post

On 30 September 1885, the territory north of the Molopo River as far as Latitude 22 degrees south was declared a British protectorate (Bechuanaland Protectorate). As Figure 3 demonstrates, almost immediately following this declaration, on 14 October, the Rev. SJ Wookey at Molepolole petitioned Colonel Carrington of the Border Police 'on behalf of the European residents in Sechele's country ... to ask you if there is a hope or prospects of any arrangements being made for the conveyance of the post through Mafikeng to this part of the country. At present, all postal matter comes via the Transvaal, and is purely a private post between this place and Zeerust. If you could see your way to making arrangements for, say a permanent weekly or even a fortnightly post, you would confer a great benefit on all the European residents throughout the country'.

Figure 3: Rev. SJ Wookey's Petition to Colonel Carrington

Molepolole
October 14th 1885

To Colonel Carrington C. In. G.
Sir

I take the liberty of writing on behalf of the European residents in Bechuanaland, Subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, to ask you if there is a hope or prospect of any arrangements being made for the conveyance of the post through Mafeking to this part of the country. At present all postal matter comes via the Transvaal, and is purely a private post between this and Deerust. If you could see your way to making arrangements for say a permanent weekly, or even a fortnightly post, you would confer a great benefit on all the European residents throughout the country.

Believe me
your obedient servant
A. J. Wookey.

Source: In the author's collection

In 1887, the administrator JS Moffat was deployed to Bulawayo to attempt the resolution of a dispute between Khama III and Lobengula of the Amandebele regarding the ownership of a tract of land lying between the (Shashe) Shashi and Motloutse Rivers. Moffat communicated regularly from Gubulawayo with Sir Sidney Shippard, the British Administrator in Vryburg, either through the missionaries' informal postal system or by personally paying runners to carry his letters and reports to Mafeking, where they were handed to the official post office for onward transmission to Vryburg.

The success of this unofficial runner service led Moffat in 1888 to suggest to Shippard that a regular mail system be introduced between Mafeking and Bulawayo. The proposal was approved, and the Postmaster General at Vryburg was instructed to investigate whether certain residents would be able to assist in the establishment of the project:

- a) To enquire from Mr Tillard, Postmaster at Mafeking, Mr John Williams of Kanye, Mr Boyne of Molepolole, Messrs Musson Bros of Shoshong, and Mr Samuel Edwards of Tati, the cost of a Postal Service from Mafeking to Shoshong, and from Shoshong to Gubulawayo via the Tati to be carried out by a system of native runners.
- b) Mr Tillard to say whether he could secure the services of trustworthy runners between Mafeking and Kanye to convey a post once a fortnight each way, and if so, what would be the cost.
- c) Mr John Williams to be asked whether he would be willing to act as Postal Agent and to undertake the sale of stamps without remuneration and also to find reliable runners for a post once a fortnight each way, between Kanye and Molepolole.
- d) Similar questions to be asked of Mr Boyne as regards a post between Shoshong and Molepolole and to Messrs Musson Bros with regard to a fortnightly post between Shoshong and the Tati, and Mr Samuel Edwards with regard to a fortnightly post between Tati and Gubulawayo, to which there is reason to believe the Chief Lobengula would be willing to contribute a small subsidy (Jurgens 1945:45).

Although some of the traders were reluctant to undertake the work of Postal Agent, the missionaries were all willing, and the necessary arrangements were finally made. In June 1888, Moffat was instructed to implement the project. The total cost of the mail service between Mahikeng and Bulawayo was under no circumstances to exceed the cost of £200 per annum. The mail service was to be limited only to letters and newspapers; books and parcels were not to be accepted for as long as the service was operated by runners (Holmes 1971:97).

The proposed remuneration for a Postal Agent was a commission of 2½% upon the value of postage stamps sold, and 25% upon the number of extra charges collected on correspondence delivered. Although the position was poorly remunerated, there were other factors that outweighed the meagre salary. The premises of the Postal Agents became a meeting place for the literate community, locations at which many were likely to call, and thus provided a captive audience for an otherwise 'lonely' European missionary or store owner. The Postal Agents appointed were based at Kanye (Mr John Williams), Molepolole (Rev. Wookey), Shoshong (C Austin), Tati (Samuel Edwards) and Bulawayo (Rev Helm). The son and heir of Barolong's Kgosi Montshioa, Kebalepele, agreed to arrange transportation of the mails between Mahikeng and Kanye at a cost of £1 per trip (Jurgens 1945:46).

As indicated in Figure 4 below, the introduction of the service was announced on 8 August 1888 by a notice in *The Bechuanaland News*, which stated that 'The arrangements which Mr. J. S. Moffat, Assistant Commissioner, has during the past month or two been making are now completed and the "Protectorate Post" comes into operation forthwith. The former route to the Interior, via Zeerust in the Transvaal, has been summarily abandoned, and the post will be conveyed by native runners through Mafeking to Kanya (Gasitsiwe's), Molepolole (Secheli's) and Shoshong (Khama's) *weekly*, and from Shoshong to Gubulawayo (Lobengula's) *fortnightly*'.

Figure 4: Government Notice of 8 August 1888

PROTECTORATE POST.

IT is hereby notified for general information that arrangements will shortly be completed for the establishment of a Postal Service, by Native Runners, between British Bechuanaland and Matabeleland *via* Bamangwato, when the following Rates of Postage will come into force:—

Correspondence posted within the Protectorate and Trans-Protectorate to be prepaid in British Bechuanaland Stamps overprinted with the word "Protectorate."	LETTERS		For each Newspaper not exceeding 4 oz. and for every additional 4 oz.
	Not exceeding $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	Every additional $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.	
1.—WHEN POSTED WITHIN THE PRESENT LIMITS OF THE PROTECTORATE—			
(a) Addressed to places within the present limits of the Protectorate	2d	2d	2d
(b) Addressed to Offices in Matabeleland, British Bechuanaland, the Cape Colony, and other parts of South Africa	4d	4d	2½d
(c) Addressed to the United Kingdom and Foreign Countries.— <i>The Rates specified in the existing convention between the Cape Colony and British Bechuanaland and an additional charge of</i>	2d	2d	2d
2.—WHEN POSTED BEYOND THE PRESENT LIMITS OF THE PROTECTORATE—			
(a) Addressed to Places within the Trans-Protectorate	2d	2d	2d
(b) Addressed to Offices within the present limits of the Protectorate	4d	4d	2½d
(c) Addressed to British Bechuanaland, the Cape Colony, and other parts of South Africa	6d	6d	4½d
(d) Addressed to the United Kingdom and Foreign Countries.— <i>The Rates specified in the existing convention between the Cape Colony and British Bechuanaland and an additional charge of</i>	4d	4d	4d
3.—CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESSED TO THE PROTECTORATE OR TRANS-PROTECTORATE FROM OTHER PARTS OF SOUTH AFRICA, THE UNITED KINGDOM, AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES SHOULD BE PREPAID AT THE RATES PROVIDED IN THE EXISTING CONVENTION BETWEEN THE CAPE COLONY AND BRITISH BECHUANALAND, and the following additional charges will be payable upon delivery—			
(a) When delivered within the present limits of the Protectorate	2d	2d	2d
(b) When delivered beyond the present limits of the Protectorate	4d	4d	4d

Postal Agencies are being opened at the undermentioned places:—

Within the present limits of the Protectorate at Kanye, Molepolole (Secheli's), and Shoshong (Khamé's).

Beyond the present limits of the Protectorate at Tati and Gubulawayo (Lobengule's).

No Articles will be transmitted at Book or Parcels Rates beyond Mafeking in British Bechuanaland so long as the Mails are conveyed by Native Runners.

ERNEST C. BAXTER,
Acting Postmaster-General.

Vryburg, British Bechuanaland,
July 28th, 1888.

Printed by Townshend & Son, "Government Gazette" Office, Vryburg.

Source: In the author's collection

The above illustrated Notice of 28 July 1888 (Figure 4) indicated that, as in the Cape, postal

charges were to be based on the weight of the letter and its destination. A letter addressed within the Protectorate cost 2d per half ounce, and 4d per half ounce when addressed to offices in Matabeleland, British Bechuanaland, the Cape Colony, and other parts of South Africa. The rate for mail addressed to Great Britain (and foreign countries) was the rate that applied to such places from British Bechuanaland plus a surcharge of 2d.

By these means, the Protectorate's first official postal service was introduced on 9 August 1888. The mails from and to Mahikeng, Kanye, Molepolole and Shoshong were served by African runners weekly. A fortnightly service operated northwards from Shoshong to Tati and Bulawayo.

The runner 'foot post' system worked satisfactorily for nine months. However, in May 1889, the main body of the Border Police was moved up from Mahikeng to Motloutse in anticipation of the invasion of Mashonaland by Cecil Rhodes' 'Pioneer Column'. This relocation led to a considerable increase in the weight of the mails to be conveyed through the Protectorate, and although the service was restricted to letters and newspapers only, the runners were unable to cope with the resulting demands, and responsibility for transporting the mail was transferred (temporarily) back to the Bechuanaland Border Police.

Conclusion

In 1871 Holmes asserted that 'there was no organised postal service in any part of the Bechuanalands until the Stellaland Republic started one in February 1884' (Holmes: 15). The information collated in this article begs the question as to what we understand as the essential characteristics of an 'organised postal service'. The arrangements that Livingstone made with his 'Arabian post-office man' and others surely do not qualify since they were personal, opportunistic, and lacking third-party facilitation. Similarly, the arrangements made by Oates to ensure his letters reached Shoshong.

One hallmark of an organised postal service is regularity of service provision. In this respect, the efforts made the missionaries Helm, Hepburn and MacKenzie to provide a fortnightly or monthly service qualify. The mission stations at Molepolole and Shosong may be regarded as intrinsic to an organised postal service in that they were places at which mail was received, sorted, and despatched. The missionaries' postal services could also be utilised by members of the public, unlike those of the Bechuanaland Expeditionary Force and the Bechuanaland Border Police.

There remains much to be learned about these early years, especially concerning the role played by the various missionaries and traders. Also, nothing appears to be yet known about the terms on which the various *dikgosi* supplied runners and other forms of cooperation to facilitate the postal services.

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