Synopsis: Ceylon Too Late Markings
1864 - 1903

Purpose and Scope:
This one frame exhibit shows the variety of Too Late markings used by individual post offices on the island, beginning with the first known use in Ceylon, and ending when the markings were withdrawn. The exhibit provides an original study, categorizing the single boxed markings into Blunt, Soft Squared and Rounded Corner Boxed types, using a census.

Too Late markings were applied to mail received after the 5 pm cut off time for mail processing, and when a fee for late processing was not paid. Mail most often found with the Too Late markings are single rate letters, post cards and postal stationery envelopes. The exhibit details all marking attributes, and presents differences in marking types and condition as degraded in use.

This exhibit does not include steamer markings or late fee applied markings as both are decades beyond the dates in scope.

Material shown emphasizes marking types and post office locations of use, rather than strict clarity of the best strikes. Too Late markings were haphazardly applied, and that is the story here, examples of poor application are shown intentionally, and causes described.

In the 1890s, Ceylon’s postal network was growing rapidly to serve great growth in tea plantation business in the island’s interior. New remote post offices were operating, and use of Too Late markings increased to demonstrate accountability to published delivery schedules. At this time, the marking had the greatest variation, and this is shown types of markings, placement, and ink color selected.

Rarity and Condition:
A specific challenge to collecting Ceylon is that significant collections of Victorian Ceylon are sold only every decade or so. Material is held by few collectors. This exhibit presents key and unique items from the Joseph Hackney and the advanced Ted Proud Ceylon collections.

The survival rate of early mail is low, and affected by the tropical climate and age. Rural post offices processed little mail, often less than a dozen letters a day, so few examples exist. That said, the best examples of typical use come from these remote towns. Mail receiving the Too Late strikes is generally the less important mail, therefore less likely to be kept.

Exhibit Research:
This exhibit creates a naming scheme for the different variations of Ceylon’s Too Late markings, provides measurements to categorize, and a generally chronological organization used to explain how the change in markings occurred in use over time. The exhibitor’s own research has lead to the identification of a number of new earliest and latest uses of the Too Late marking, and prior unidentified differences between similar markings. Earlier works have only categorized boxed and unboxed marking types, and dates of individual markings used by different post offices on the island. This study provides a taxonomy for the study of these markings and their use, and provides a context for why usage, care in placement and volume changed.

Highlights:
- 1 Manuscript “Too Late” Marking
- 4 Only Known Uses by Post Office
- 4 Earliest Uses & 7 Latest Uses by Post Office

New Research Findings:
- Earliest Known Ceylon Too Late Marking
- 1 New Post Office Location of Use
- 4 Extensions to Dates of Recorded Use
Ceylon Too Late Markings
1864-1903

Exhibit and Scope
This exhibit provides a study of the entire period of Ceylon Too Late postal markings, organized by marking type. In 1864, Too Late postal markings began being used in Ceylon for mail brought to post offices after an established 5 pm cutoff time for next day delivery. The post offices advertised scheduled delivery capabilities, and used the Too Late markings to counter complaints of delayed delivery. The specific handstamps used at post offices on the island varied in format, but have been traditionally described only as boxed or unboxed types. The exhibit focus is only the use and types of Too Late markings. From an original census of all covers known to the exhibitor, this exhibit provides a categorization and naming system for the different types of Too Late markings in use. Further, it explains how and why the markings evolved and saw increased usage in the 1890s. Too Late markings remained in general use until 1903, when they were withdrawn. A new marking type and fee for service were later established in 1915.

From: Nuwara Eliya
To: Kandy
September 15, 1864
Earliest known use of any Ceylon Too Late marking. Lady cover with 1864 one pence stamp and red cds. Pre-dates known use by six months.

Historical Background
Ceylon has an extensive postal history because of its important location along early shipping routes, and its successful trade of crops. In the 1860s through mid 1880s, population and mail was limited. By late the 1880s, Ceylon found new wealth growing tea. The island rapidly developed an extensive rail and postal network.

Format
Marking information is bolded. Headings are in Green. Unique items are indicated with a maroon border. Earliest, Latest and Only uses of Too Late markings in Ceylon post offices are indicated with a side text box. Original research is typed in maroon and underscored.

Philatelic Plan of Exhibit
Introduction and
Early Use of Markings 1

Types of Markings:
A. Double Boxed 2 - 5
B. Single Boxed
   1. Blunt Corners Box 6 - 7
   2. Soft Squared Corners Box 8 - 10
   3. Rounded Corners Box 11 - 12
C. Unboxed 13 - 15

Conclusion & Epilogue 16

The exhibit extends the recorded research of Ceylon Too Late markings by:
- Categorizing markings by type
- Measuring fine differences in markings
- Extending dates of use by location
- Identifying new locations of use
- Relating the advent of rail services and their impact on mail delivery service

←From: Galle
To: Colombo
May 9, 1859
Forerunner: Manuscript "Night Jaffna" front and reverse "2 o'clock Steamer in Sight" backstamp indicates letter missed same day delivery.
A. Double Boxed Markings

While individual post offices had slightly different formats of their Too Late handstamps, early markings uniformly had a double box configuration and were applied in red ink. The individual handstamps were of local Ceylon or Indian origin. At this time in Ceylon, mail was generated from missionaries, coffee plantations, and local correspondence. Post offices operated in the larger port cities, while the interior of the island had limited postal access. Too Late markings from the 1860s and 1870s are infrequently found.

From: Nuwara Eliya
To: Kandy
February 19, 1866
Too Late handstamp used in Nuwara Eliya from 1865 to 1901.

Inverted Double Strike ➔
Double Boxed Too Late Marking

Earliest Known Use From: Colombo GPO
Double Boxed Too Late Marking
January 9, 1866
Significantly Predating Prior Earliest Known Use

From: Colombo GPO
To: Bordeaux, France
January 9, 1866
Prior recorded use of this Too Late marking in Colombo General Post Office from 1869 to 1870 only.
This cover pre-dates known usage by three years of the Too Late marking used at the Colombo GPO.
A. Double Boxed Markings

**Confirming the Too Late Mailing:**
Colombo, Ceylon receipt Oct. 1st., delivery to Panadura on October 2nd.
Scan partial of reverse at 80% of size.

From: Pinner, England  
To: Panadura, Ceylon  
October 2, 1871
At Colombo GPO, October 1, 1871. Note cover addressed as Civil Service, Ceylon. Delivery town name added, Too Late marking applied, letter destination marked next day. Delivery cds for destination Pandura, October 2, 1871, originally sent from Pinner, England September 7th.

**Only Recorded Use in Agrapatna**
Double Boxed Too Late  
July 17, 1879

Manuscript “Too Late”

From: Agrapatna  
To: London, England  
July 17, 1879
Front with Too Late handstamp in gray black ink, and Too Late also in manuscript. Only recorded use of this double boxed Too Late handstamp in Agrapatna. This cover has the only known manuscript Too Late marking used.

Stamp at this time were sometimes cancelled by the sender with manuscript “stamped”. This was done to discourage dishonest removal of stamps by postal runners.
A. Double Boxed Markings

**Distance Between Words:**
**Too ↔ Late**
Each Too Late markings here has a different distance between the words Too and Late:

- **Galle Too Late:** 4 mm
- **Nuwara Eliya Too Late:** 5 mm
- **Gampola Too Late:** 1.5 mm

**From:** Galle  **To:** Kandy  **May 6, 1874**
Distance of 4 mm between Too and Late. Full strike with unclear impression, handstamp worn. First use of Too Late in Galle was in 1871, this marking likely made from a three year old handstamp.

**From: Nuwara Eliya  To: Kandy  March 31, 1881**
Distance of 5 mm between Too and Late. Full strike of Too Late marking with careful placement.

**Earliest Known Use in Gampola**
Double Boxed Too Late  **January 29, 1883**
One of two known usages.

Distance of 1.5 mm between Too and Late. Over-inked and inverted marking.
A. Double Boxed Markings

Distance Between Words:
Too ↔ Late
Each of these three Too Late markings has a 3 mm distance between the words Too and Late.

Earliest Recorded Use in →
Jaffna Kachcheri
Double Boxed Too Late
April 28, 1883

Unusually clear impression of Too Late →
marking found on wrapper front.
One of three wrappers with Too Late markings
known to exhibit.

From: Pussellaya To: Colombo ↑
September 2, 1880
Early usage, first recorded use of this
handstamp was August 8, 1880. Remote
post office in Central Ceylon.

Latest Recorded Use in Matara ➔
Double Boxed Too Late
May 6, 1886
Marking known in use July 16, 1883
until May 6, 1886.
B. Single Boxed
1. Blunt Corners Boxed Markings

By the late 1880s Too Late markings showed yet more variability in placement and quality of strikes, and new Too Late markings framed with a single box came into use. This exhibit provides a taxonomy for the single box markings, naming them by corner types: Blunt Corners, Soft Squared Corners and Rounded Corners. As Ceylon’s mail volume and postal network grew in the late 1880s, Too Late markings were used more often.

↑From: Gampola  March 19, 1888
Single Box Blunt Corners Too Late marking.
Lower left strike, an uncommon placement.

Latest Recorded Use in Lindoola ➔
Blunt Corners Too Late
May 10, 1888

Increased Use -Too Late Markings

Too Late markings increasingly used as an accountability indicator as more post offices were opened.
Too Late indicated that a sender:
* Missed the scheduled collection  
* Elected not to pay a the late fee
The Post Office charge fees for late processing services.
Mail of lower importance to the sender would more often be Too Late.

←From: Pundul Oya  April 16, 1891
Single Box Blunt Corners Too Late marking, inverted strike.
In the 1890s, Ceylon acreage of plantations under cultivation for growing tea had doubled from 200,000 acres in the late 1880s to over 400,000. With business growing rapidly in the island’s interior tea growing areas, the postal network experienced growth in mail volume, much of it routine business communications. Evidence of the stressed postal network shows in the hasty placement of markings and lack of care taken for quality of strikes.

**District Letter Envelope, price 2½ cents.**
This Envelope will not pass through more than one Post Office, will only be delivered when called for, and will not be re-directed.

From: Watawala  
To: Colombo  
January 3, 1894  
Used on District Letter stationery, inverted strike.

Latest Recorded Use in Mannar  
Blunt Corners Too Late  
August 18, 1891
In the 1890s, Too Late handstamps appeared in greater variety. Markings from different post offices had common attributes. Covers shown here have Soft Squared Corners Boxed markings of the 1890s. These markings were struck in black ink.

Length of Too Late Marking
Comparing marking length on these three “Too Late” Markings:

Dickoya: 35 mm
Rackwana: 39 mm
Pundul Oya: 40 mm

↑ Only Recorded Use in Rakwana
Soft Squared Corners Too Late
March 12, 1892

Unevenly inked and partially → inverted strike.

↑ From: Dickoya  To: Colombo January 24, 1896

From: Watawala  To: Kotagala  July 14, 1895
Differences in Height & Width

Jaffna Kachcheri: 7 mm high, 36 mm wide
Dickoya: 8 mm high, 36 mm wide
Pandul Oya: 7 mm high, 40 mm wide

Difference in Type Style

Jaffna Kachcheri: Sans Serif
Dickoya: Serif
Pandul Oya: Serif

↑ From: Dickoya  To: Kandy
November 30, 1895
Marking: 8 mm high, 36 mm wide.

← From: Pandul Oya  To: Colombo
February 25, 1894
Marking: 7 mm high, 40 mm wide.

Only Recorded Use in
Jaffna Kachcheri →
January 28, 1897

Soft Squared Corners Sans Serif Too Late
Marking size smaller at 7 mm high, 36 mm wide.

Replacement handstamp, format differs from
Jaffna Kachcheri’s earlier double box format.

Letter Card crossed into India at Point Calimere
January 29th, arriving at Pamban February 2, 1897.
As mail volume increased, quality and care of mail processing suffered. These 1890s examples of Too Late markings show the poor placement and application of the Too Late markings. In addition, each of these Soft Squared Corners Boxed Markings are of slightly different size, box shape and box frame.

Latest Recoded Use in Pundul Oya
Soft Squared Corners Too Late
July 21, 1899

From: Pundul Oya To: Colombo
This cover extends known usage by two years. Poorly applied handstamp providing partial double image also inverted.

Latest Recorded Use in Pandura
Soft Squared Corners Too Late
November 25, 1894

↑ Large format Soft Squared Corners handstamp, poorly applied.

Hasty Application or

Degraded Handstamp Condition or

Poor Quality Handstamps

Each may be a factor in Poor Strike Quality found in the 1890s. Increased mail volume strained the postal network with this visible outcome.

From: Nuwara Eliya To: Colpetty ➔
January 21, 1899
Small format Soft Squared Corners handstamp, applied upside down.
New Railway Post Offices also used Too Late markings. Markings indicated mail received too late for processing before rail departure time. With new wealth found in tea export profits, more people came to Ceylon. Rail lines were built to bring the tea out from central Ceylon plantations, and new post offices were opened late 1880s to the early 1900s. Too Late markings from the new offices were applied in both red and black ink. Comparing dates, the Rounded Corners Boxed marking came in use as railway postal service expanded. Much of Ceylon’s mail at this time was not from the earlier missionary groups or coastal business, but was instead generated by the island central and remote tea plantations to coastal merchants, banking and shipping businesses.

Ceylon Rail Network 1890s:
1000 miles of new island coverage.

From: Kurengala  
To: Colombo  
Railway Post March 4, 1895  
Railway Post Office collection and marking, single boxed Too Late applied. 
Letter Card with Kurengala cds and 32 mm large Railway Post Office transit marking. Train schedules published, and Too Late marking would be an additional accountability indicator, mail processed after the train departed could be so indicated with a handstamp.

Scan of Reverse:  
December 1, 1893  
Railway Postal Marking.

From: Matale  
To: Colombo  
October 31, 1893  
From tea plantation highlands, marked Too Late. On reverse Railway Post 22 cm transit marking next day delivery. Sent to largest merchant store in the capitol, Colombo.
B. Single Boxed
3. Rounded Corners Boxed Markings

From: Haputale To: Calupulani March 18, 1894

Markings varied by individual Post Offices. This exhibit's research finds Single Box Markings fall into three categories.

Comparing Single Box Markings:

Blunt Corners

Soft Squared Corners

Rounded Corners

Too Late Handstamp Mail Types

Studying the Too Late Handstamps of the 1890s and beyond finds that lowest cost and most routine domestic mail received the marking. This mail was okay for the sender to accept later delivery.

Low Cost Mailing Choice: Number %
Post Cards 9 32%
Letter Cards 6 21%
Stationery Envelopes 11 39%

Subtotal 26 93%

Standard & Premium Choice:
Standard Letter 2 7%
Registered & Premium 0

From: Haputale To: Colombo October 27, 1895
With the expansion of the postal network in the late 1880s and into the 1890s, unboxed Too Late markings also came into use. These were applied in both red and black ink. While the unboxed Too Late markings may appear all the same, a closer look reveals differences in the handstamps between post offices.

**Distance Between Words: Too ↔ Late**

- Agrapatana Too Late: 4 mm
- Nanuoya Too Late: 4+ mm
- Avissawella Too Late: 1 mm

**Earliest Known Use in Agrapatana →**
Unboxed Too Late
February 7, 1887

↓ Marking Below
Appears as TOOL ATE

O and L are only 1 mm apart

↑ From: Nanuoya To: London
May 22, 1894
Distance of 4+ mm between Too and Late.

← Latest Known Use in Avissawella
Unboxed Too Late
October 6, 1894

Appearing “TOOL ATE” Avissawella’s marking has a distance of 1 mm between Too and Late. Handstamp made with setup error. This marking in use for less than one year.
C. Unboxed Markings

1888-1894 Nanuoya:
A Study of States of Wear

Nanuoya Too Late Marking Wear:
Too Late Markings on Four Covers:
- April 17, 1888
- November 6, 1891
- February 8, 1892
- August 28, 1894

↑ Earliest Known Use in Nanuoya
April 17, 1888

↑ 1891 Cover with faint inverted strike

Progressive State of Deterioration
- 1888: Clear Marking
- 1891: Faint Strike
- 1892: Debris in Strike, Weak “T”

↑ Debris in “OO” in 1892 marking.

↔ Poor Condition of “LATE” in 1894 marking.
Unboxed Too Late Differences:
Height of Marking

Marking size difference on these three Too Late Markings:

- Kegalle Too Late: 3.5 mm
- Talawakele Too Late: 4.5 mm
- Nanuoya Too Late: 5 mm

From: Kegalle
To: Colombo
October 17, 1895

Degraded condition of the marking: “Late” has three misprinting letters.

↑ From: Talawakele
To: Kotagala
July 23, 1895

Marking has three incomplete letters on this strike.

Latest Known Use in Nanuoya →
February 15, 1897

This cover extends known usage by over two years.

Prior recorded latest October 10, 1894.

From: Nanuoya
To: Colombo
February 15, 1897
Few Too Late markings are found after the late 1890s, and officially Too Late use stopped in early 1903. These covers capture the ending use of the marking, and two surprising after era uses.

†From: Kegalle →
To: Jaffna, Redirected
February 2, 1901

Backstamped Jaffna
arrival February 6th.

†From: Trincomalee To: England May 28, 1905
Two years after withdrawn from service, the Too Late used in 1905 at a remote island location in northeastern Ceylon.

↑Reverse of cover below
“Experimental P.O.” marking of Colombo Registered to India

Unseen for over 20 years, the Too Late marking was applied for testing purposes in 1927.

The Too Late marking used as an indicator in tracking transit time for the mail to an Experimental Post Office established in India.

Sent Registered May 11, 1927 received May 13th, 1927 at “Experimental P.O.” India.

From: Colombo To: South India May 11, 1927