

# JOHN WARREN

## *Byways of Indian Philately*

*Byways of Indian Philately is a series of topics that may be considered as being interesting sidelines to the more general collecting or research areas of Indian philately.*

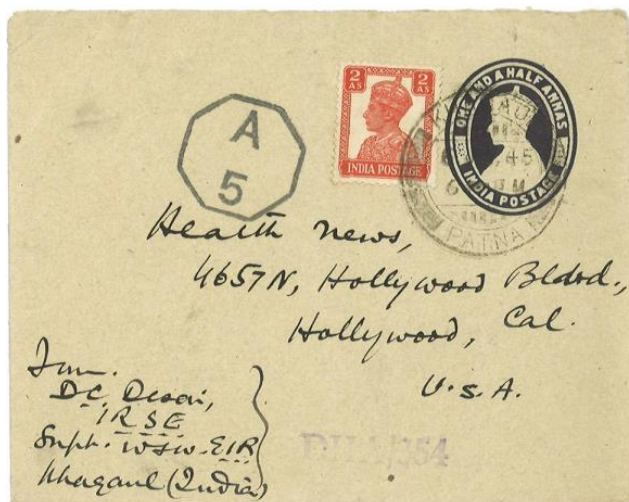
### **CIVIL CENSORSHIP IN INDIA 1939 – 1945**

Civil censorship during the Second World War can be readily seen on mail leaving India starting in early September 1939 and ending in late September 1945. In the early days of censorship there were a large variety of labels and handstamps used – Figure 1 shows a typical example.



*Figure 1*  
*Plain brown label, Calcutta Handstamp*

After a few months procedures were established where mail passed without opening received an octagonal marking of a letter together with a number (Figure 2), and mail opened and inspected was resealed with a label and tied to the envelope with an oblong octagonal handstamp (Figure 3).



*Figure 2*  
*Calcutta Octagonal Handstamp*



*Figure 3*  
*White Official label, Calcutta Oblong Octagonal Handstamp*

The majority of censorship activities took place at the capitals of the four Presidencies; Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and Madras, with smaller censor stations placed according to the anticipated volume of mail. The opening and closing of smaller censor stations were dictated by changes from a defensive war posture to an offensive one with military objectives in the east and southeast. Mail was censored irrespective of final destination but censors worked closely with postal staff in order to expedite the mail with minimal delay.

Military censorship was conducted separately from civil censorship with the exception that when expedient, military mail could be entered into the civilian mail system and censored as if it was civil mail. Civil censorship was conducted by a relatively small staff, mostly European women, required to live close to their assigned censor stations at their own expense; there were numerous instances of severe staff shortage throughout all of the six years of censorship.

Initially the censors were concerned with threats from the west through Afghanistan, east through Burma, and south through Ceylon with Bombay and Delhi added to provide complete coverage. Towards the latter part of the war as activities against the Japanese intensified and several original stations were closed and new ones established to ensure appropriate coverage – Figure 4 shows a rhomboid censor marking used for internal communications.



*Figure 4*  
*Censor Marking Controlling Internal Communications*

Censored covers from the four Presidencies of Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi, and Bombay, are not hard to come across, but some of the smaller stations can present some acquisition challenges. An extensive collection may be formed for a moderate outlay through use of the internet or purchases from local dealers. The principal reference to guide collectors is *British Empire Civil Censorship Devices World War II; British Asia*, 2008, by Konrad Morenweiser; it is inexpensive and readily available. For more information contact John Warren ([jw-kbw@earthlink.net](mailto:jw-kbw@earthlink.net)).