INFORMATION SHEET No 31

Postal Districts

1   House numbering

For centuries houses bore no numbers, just the name of the house, shop or inn as
guidance to the postmaster, or his servant if a delivery service was being
provided for a small extra charge over and above the postage. As late as the
1850s, despite the provision for the numbering of houses in London in an Act of
1765, many houses remained un-numbered; and, at one time building was at the
rate of 11,000 a year. Then, as now, responsibility for allocating numbers to
houses was that of the local municipal authority, not the Post Office. By 1855,
with the heavier volume of letters resulting from the introduction of Uniform
Penny Postage in 1840, the lack of house numbering in London, and the duplication
of street names, had become a major problem for the Post Office. By now, too,
the former distinct forces of Letter Carriers in London, ie those of the London
District Post (handling London's letters) and the General Post (handling letters
to or from beyond London) had been amalgamated to form a unified workforce. This
was based at the GPO in St Martins le Grand, which operated a centralised sorting
system for mails to and from the metropolis.

2   Division of London into Postal Districts 1857-1858

Rowland Hill's plan to divide London into ten separate Postal Districts was
authorised in 1856. The plan was for two central offices (ie West Central and
East Central), with the Thames as their southern boundary; and for a number of
adjacent district offices (all within the 12 mile circle forming the London
District). The ECDO was based at the GPO in St Martins le Grand and the WCDO
was established at 126 High Holborn. Each of the two new central sorting
offices was responsible for its adjacent areas and for exchanging mails with the
other. This, with a utilisation of suburban rail services, accelerated the
circulation of London's mail. The scheme began to come into operation in 1857
and division took place as follows:

District Office	Date of introduction*
South Eastern	1857 April 1
Western	" " 16
Western Central	" September 1
Eastern Central	" September(**)
Eastern	1858 March 29
South Western	" August 25
Northern	" October 27
North Western	" October 27

* Source: Post 30/171 Eng 3725/1865   ** precise date uncertain

ARC57

Southern	1858 October 5
North Eastern	" November 29

3   Subsequent changes

Later, several changes in London's Districts were made:

1866 (Dec 31)   NE District abolished and assimilated into that of the EDO.

1868 (Mar)   S District abolished, and its area divided between the SWDO and the SEDO

1879   New Districts formed: Paddington, Ealing, Norwood, Putney and Wimbledon.

1881   Putney and Wimbledon Districts abolished and their areas included in the newly formed Wandsworth District.

1896   Ealing District abolished and its area absorbed by the Paddington District.

1897 (Nov)   Wandsworth District re-named battersea.

1926 (Feb 6)   Norwood District abolished and its area absorbed by the SEDO.

4   Numbering of Sub-Districts

In March 1917, as a wartime measure to assist the new, inexperienced women sorters who were regarded as needing help with the task of sorting mail correctly for the several District Offices, the sub-districts were each given a serial number. These formed a suffix to the District's initial and were allocated in an alphabetical sequence, eg under the EDO (E1) Bethnal Green became E2 and Bow E3.

5   Provincial Districts

Later, the Postal District system was extended to other major cities:

Liverpool: 1864-1865 (divided into four districts)

Manchester: 1867-1868 (into eight)

Dublin: 1873

Sheffield: by 1912

(Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Leeds and Newcastle had followed by 1932).

Glasgow became (in 1923) the first city to follow London's example and adopt district numbering.