

8 additional pillar and receiving boxes have been established, and 2 closed. There were 20 iron pillar and 45 receiving boxes open at the end of the year.

Several Post Offices have been transferred to railway stations, and the duties of Station Clerk combined with those of Postmaster and Telegraphist.

59 additional stamp licenses were issued in 1876, and 14 cancelled. The total number of licensed stamp vendors on the 31st December last was 239, who received £767 14s. 11d. by way of poundage on the sale of stamps. Country postmasters, not on the permanent staff, were also paid poundage amounting to £204 11s. 4d.

For the carriage of inter-provincial mails by unsubsidized vessels, £532 1s. 4d. was paid; and £1,724 18s. 7d. represented the amount disbursed on account of inter-colonial mails conveyed by vessels not under contract.

The number of private boxes occupied was 1,715, producing a revenue of £1,778 10s.

A revenue of £251 was received from the holders of 129 private bags.

From the 1st of January last, the fee for the use of a private bag for six months was fixed at half the annual charge.

The block of Government buildings in Blenheim, which included the Chief Post Office and other Government offices, was totally destroyed by fire on the morning of the 2nd November last. The Post Office being contiguous to that part of the buildings in which the fire originated, everything was destroyed with the exception of four bags of mails, and the contents of the safe. Temporary premises were at once secured, and business was resumed without delay. New and substantial offices are being erected, and the work is progressing most satisfactorily.

POSTAGE STAMPS AND POST CARDS.

A very large reserve stock of postage stamps was printed during the year.

Post-cards were issued on the 1st November last, and the number printed in 1876 as an advance supply was 1,002,500.

DEAD LETTERS.

59,070 unclaimed or dead letters were disposed of in the Dead Letter Office during the year 1876. The table underneath enumerates the number of this class of letters dealt with, year by year, since 1872:—

Manner of Disposal.	1872.	1873.	1874.	1875.	1876.
Opened and returned to the writers	17,707	20,602	26,153	39,051	44,067
Returned unopened to other countries	5,512	5,393	6,828	10,321	9,703
Re-issued	85	75	105	78	83
Destroyed	2,884	3,801	4,227	6,081	5,217
Totals	26,188	29,871	37,313	55,531	59,070

The following particulars show the number and articles of value enclosed in letters dealt with at the Dead Letter Office for the year:—

	£	s.	d.
105 money orders of the value of	401	18	3
48 bank drafts, representing	2,648	3	8
21 cheques, for a total amount of	455	9	8
Postage stamps amounting to	0	17	3
Duty stamps	2	7	6
Bank notes	93	0	0
Gold	7	0	0
Silver and copper	1	5	5½
Representing a total of	£3,610	1	9½

In addition to the above, 6 gold rings, 1 gold pin, 7 pairs gold earrings, 2 gold brooches, 1 pair gold sleeve links, 2 gold locketts, 2 sets gold studs, 1 gold chain, 1 hair bracelet, and 2 parcels gold dust were also received in the Dead Letter Office.

641 registered letters were received and dealt with.

36 letters were posted without addresses; 4 had valuable enclosures to the amount of £1,506 10s., and 2 contained other articles of value.

16 letters were posted with previously-used postage stamps.

637 letters were detained for postage, 49 of which were subsequently prepaid by the writers, and forwarded to their respective addresses.

787 books, newspapers, and other articles without addresses were received in the Dead Letter Office during the year, 55 of which it was found practicable to deliver to the persons for whom intended.

REGISTERED LETTERS.

52,866 letters of all classes were registered, being an increase of 4,936 over the number registered during the previous year. Of these, "officially-registered" letters, which are authorized to pass through the post free, formed a not inconsiderable number.

BUILDINGS.

After a series of delays, the erection of the new buildings intended for the use of the Chief Post Office and other departments in Christchurch has been commenced. The building should be finished by the 1st July, 1878.