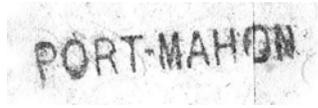


An Old Sheffield Post Office

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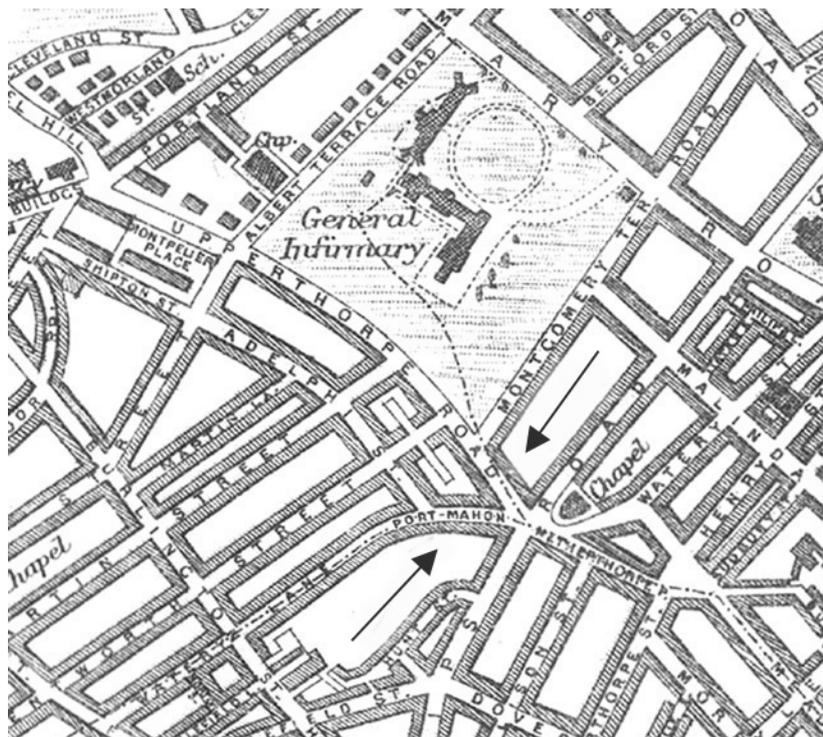
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The name Portmahon (also found as Port Mahon or Port-Mahon) does not appear on modern maps of Sheffield, and few people are familiar with it as a locality. The name applied to a small area in the Netherthorpe district, behind the old Royal Infirmary near St Philip's Road, and it can be found on older Sheffield street maps. There was a Baptist chapel known as Portmahon Chapel, built in 1839, which stood near the present Medico-Legal Centre in Watery Street, and which was demolished in the 1960s. The name "Watery Street" refers to the stream (once spanned by the long-gone Portmahon Bridge) which came down the valley from Crookes, but which since the early 1800s has run through an underground culvert before emptying into the River Don.

Originally, Portmahon was the name of a short street which ran in a westward curve from the junction of St Philip's Road and Upperthorpe Road. It apparently acquired its unusual name in the 18th century, when on two occasions the British fleet captured Mahón, the largest town on the island of Menorca. The street was evidently first laid out during a wave of patriotism that swept the country after one of these naval victories. Portmahon was later extended south-westwards, but the extension had the name Watery Lane. This can be seen on the portion of an undated (probably early 1890s) "Kelly's Directory Map of Sheffield" shown here. Some time in the 1890s the name Watery Lane began to apply to the whole street, and so the name Portmahon disappeared as a street name, but it was still used for the adjacent district.



The whole area was redeveloped in the 1960s, when Watery Lane disappeared completely, its site now being part of a recreation ground. It is interesting to note what was told me by an old friend, whose grandmother lived in the Netherthorpe area. She always pronounced the place-name "PortmaHON", with the emphasis on the last syllable. This agrees with the Spanish pronunciation of "Mahón", unlike, for example, the Irish surname "MAHON".

PORT-MAHON



As regards the postal history, a receiving house opened at Portmahon in 1852. In their book on Sheffield postal history, R. Ward and W. Sedgewick give a proof book illustration of a straight-line handstamp issued on 30 June 1852. The February 1856 example (below), from the collection of the late Bill Sedgewick, has this mark struck in green.

Ward and Sedgewick note that the mark had been recorded used from 26 June 1853 to 1856. The proof book also records an undated double-arc postmark issued on 12 February 1857, a single example of which has been seen dated

14 November 1858. A smaller (22 mm) dated mark was issued on 4 March 1874, which was evidently the result of the status of the office being upgraded, as Post Office records indicate that Portmahon became a "Money Order and Savings Bank" office on 1 April 1874.

As stated above, the name Portmahon disappeared from the street in the 1890s. Its post office also closed some time between 1943 and 1946, and only Sheffield's older inhabitants will remember the district being known as Portmahon. However, the name did survive until the late 1990s on a pillar box at the junction of St Philip's Road and Watery Street. In accordance with current Royal Mail practice, the name of the locality is no longer stated on the collection time plate on this box, though it may perhaps still be found in Post Office records. However, the name Portmahon still survives on a very few covers which may be found in our collections. Does anyone have any covers with Portmahon postmarks, especially ones that will extend the known period of use of the marks?

Reference:

Ward, R., FRPSL and Sedgewick, W.A. (1984). Sheffield Postal History to 1880. Yorkshire Postal History Society Publication No 17.



You can find more articles on Sheffield's postal history at our web site.

The Sheffield Philatelic Society meets at 7.15 pm on the 2nd and 4th Thursday of each month (except August) at the Central United Reformed Church, 60 Norfolk Street, Sheffield, S1 2JB.

For a programme of events please visit:

www.sheffieldps.org.uk