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## Early mail of the Imperial Post in Bückeburg

Around 240 years ago, specifically on 3 April 1784, the first official town postmarks were introduced by the 'High Princely Thurn & Taxis General Intendancy of the Imperial and Dutch Posts' through a circular, which mandated that all letters be stamped with a local postmark. This shows that despite technological advancements and rationalisation, such local markings still hold their importance today.

At the beginning of the 17th century there were initial attempts to integrate Bückeburg or Schaumburg-Lippe into the postal network of the Imperial Post operated by Thurn & Taxis.<sup>1</sup> These efforts were repeatedly



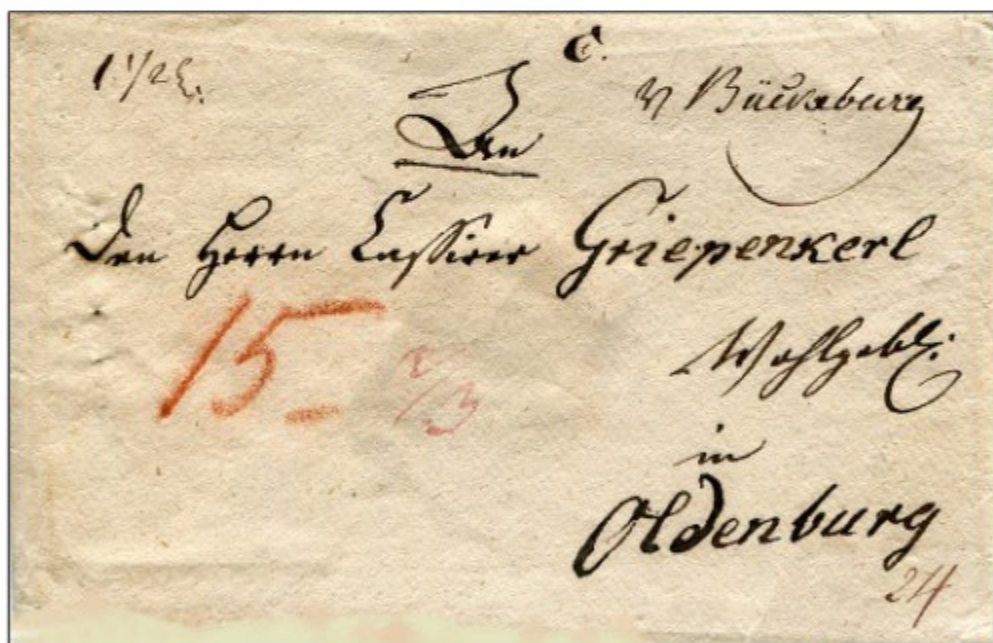
**Fig. 1:** Letter of the Taxis Post from Bückeburg (dated 4 June 1664) to Count Hermann Adolf zu Lippe in Detmold.<sup>2</sup> 'To the highly esteemed Herr Herman Adolffen, Count and Noble Lord Zur Lippe, my kindly, much-loved and respected cousin'.

This messenger letter bears no markings of the Imperial Post as the sender had a so-called 'postage-free' privilege. The postage exemption – 'as long as it is sent under the count's arms-seal'<sup>3</sup> – was sufficient to indicate that letters from the ruling count and his family were sent free of charge.

interrupted by the Thirty Years War. The 'Hamburg and Cologne Post' route operated by the Imperial Post since 1645 ran through Bremen, Nienburg, Bückeburg, Lemgo, Detmold and Paderborn. Some sources report that around 1618 – before the outbreak of the Thirty Years War – a Taxis post administrator was active in Bückeburg.

In the 18th century, alongside the Imperial Post, the postal systems of the Kingdom of Prussia, the Electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg and the Landgraviate of Hesse-Kassel established themselves in and around Schaumburg-Lippe. Schaumburg-Lippe favoured the Imperial Post because, in addition to the extra-regional routes, regional messengers to Detmold, Minden, Bodenwerda, Stadthagen and Rinteln were paid for by Taxis.

Since the postage for letters not covered by the 'postage-free' privilege was usually paid by the recipients based on weight and route, the sender's local designation was of great importance. For this reason the postal administrator or their staff marked handed-in letters with a handwritten place name (Figs. 2, 3).

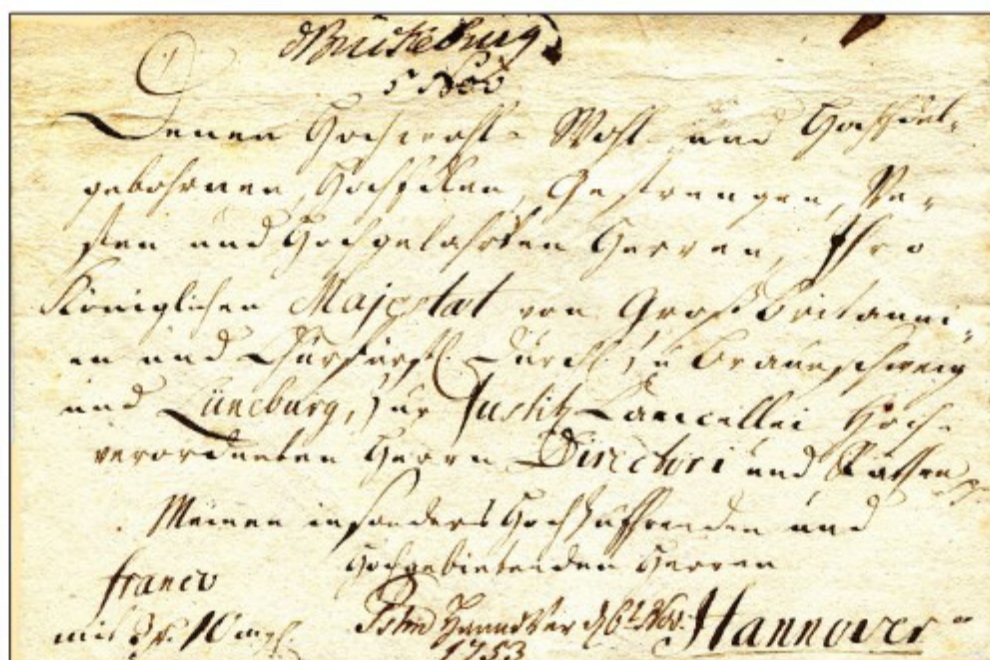


**Fig. 2:** Handwritten 'v Bückeburg' on a letter c.1740 to Oldenburg addressed to cashier Johann Conrad(?) Griepenkerl.<sup>4</sup>

'To Herr Cashier Griepenkerl Esq.'

Weight noted top left: 1½ Loth; fee: 15 albus (equivalent to 1½ groschen) plus ⅓ groschen (= 8 pfennigs) registration fee.





**Fig. 3:** Handwritten 'd Bückeberg' on a letter to Hanover dated

5 November 1753 addressed to the Director of the Justice Chancellery.

*To the highly esteemed, well-born and noble, most honourable and highly distinguished lord, His Royal Majesty of Great Britain and Elector of Brunswick and Lüneburg, To the Justice Chancellery, High Representative Herr Director and Councillors, My especially high friends and esteemed gentlemen.*

*Postage paid ('franco') with 3 talers 10 mgr (Mariengroschen).*

*Presentation note: 'Pstm Hannover d. 6 Nov. 1753'.*

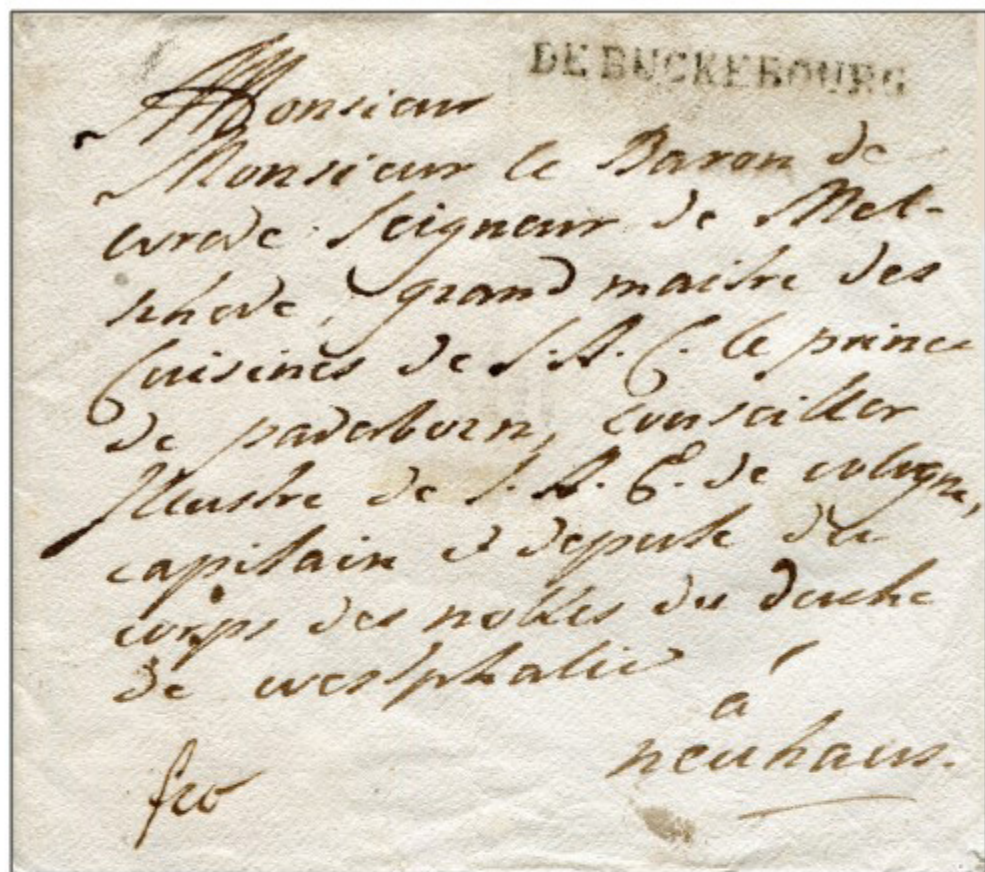
As the volume of postal traffic increased in the mid-18th century some postal administrators decided to introduce local postmarks. The postmaster of the Imperial Post in Bückeberg commissioned such a stamp (Fig. 4).

A general use of local postmarks for the Imperial Post was only ordered with a circular on 3 April 1784. In this the 'High Princely Thurn & Taxis General Intendancy of the Imperial and Dutch Posts' mandated that all letters be stamped with a local postmark.

The Bückeberg post station used a one-line stamp (36 × 5 mm) with the inscription 'BÜCKENBURG'. A distinctive feature of this postmark was the large 'B', which was taller than the other letters (Figs. 5, 6).

These postmarks of the Imperial Post remained in use until 1802. In 1801 France had taken over the entire Reich territory west of the Rhine. This fundamental change in political circumstances was also reflected in the organisation of the Imperial Post.





**Fig. 4:** The first known local postmark 'DE BUCKEBOURG' on a letter to Neuhaus addressed to Baron Wrede of Melschede (undated cover, c.1770).<sup>5</sup>

'Sir, Baron von Wrede, Lord of Melschede, Grand Master of the Kitchens of H.R.H. the Prince of Paderborn, illustrious councillor of Cologne, chief deputy of the body of nobles of the Duchy of Westphalia'.<sup>6</sup>

Postage paid ('fco').

On 14 December 14 1801 a postal treaty was signed between Thurn & Taxis and France, simplifying fee calculations for postal traffic with France. This included the establishment of so-called 'rayons' (territorial strips parallel to the Rhine). France had five rayons and Germany four (see the map in Figure 9). From then on each post office was required to include both the locality's name and the rayon in the postmark. Bückeburg was in rayon 3 and postmarks bore inscriptions such as 'BÜCKEBURG. R.3', measuring 36 × 3 mm with one measuring 33 × 3 mm (Figs. 7, 8).





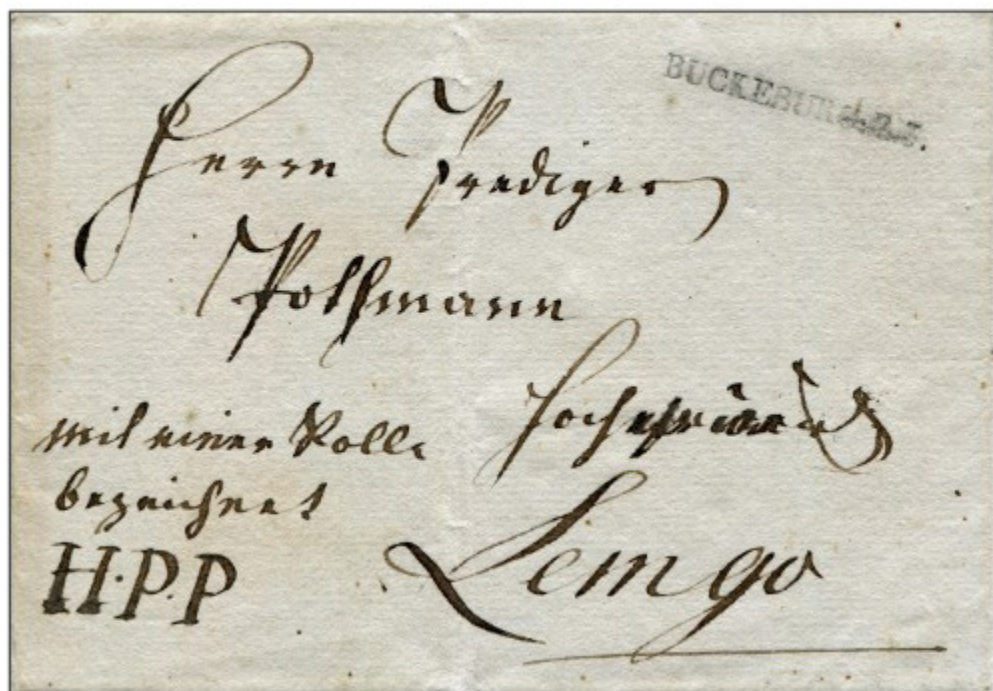
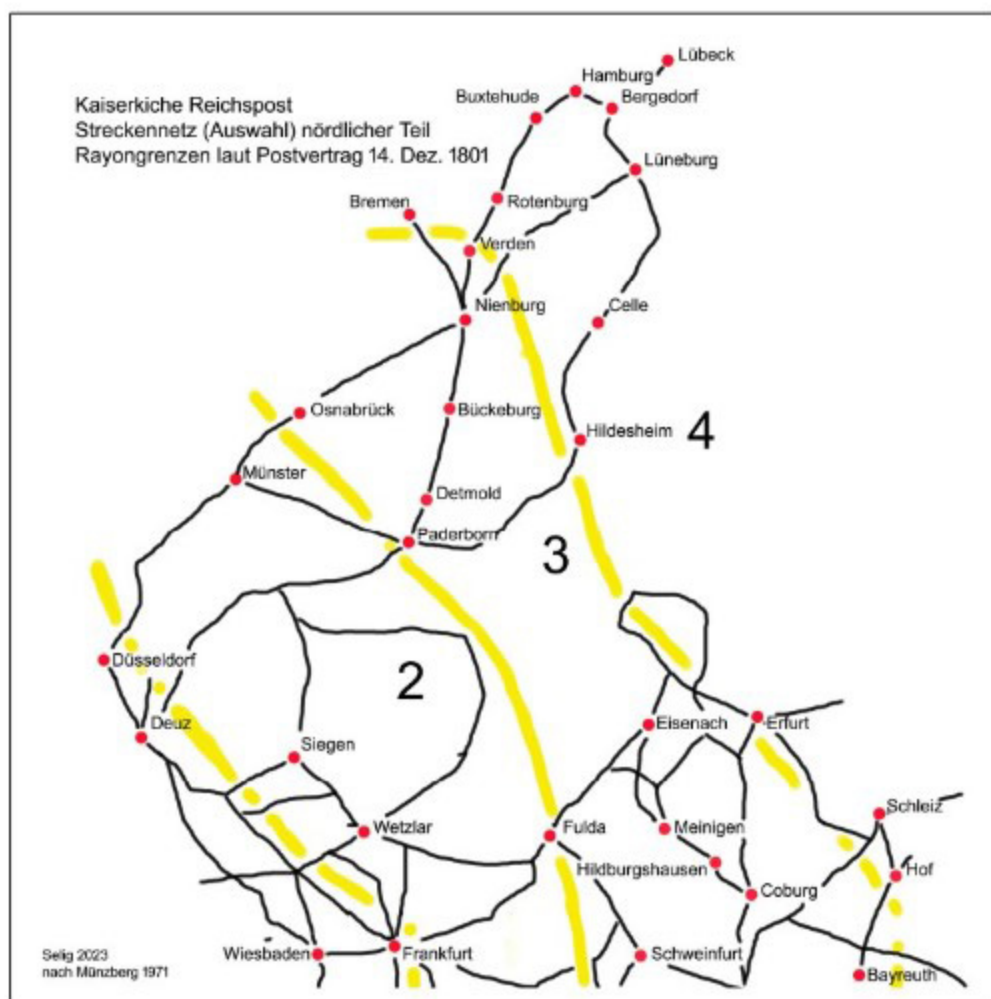


Fig. 7: Postmark 'BÜCKEBURG. R.3' (33 × 3 mm) on a parcel letter of 5 July 1803 to preacher Rev. Rothmann in Lemgo, the parcel being a roll marked 'H.P.P'.

Tax mark on the reverse '6 Gr.' = 6 groschen.



Fig. 8: Postmark 'BÜCKEBURG. R.3' (36 × 3 mm) on a cover to Herr Syndicus Gräver Esq. in Münster.



*Fig. 9. Rayon boundaries of the postal treaty of 14 December 1801, showing selected postal routes of the Imperial Post.*

With the cession of the Reich territory west of the Rhine to France, the Reichstag decided in 1803 to abolish most imperial cities and incorporate their territories into neighbouring western principalities. This increased pressure on Schaumburg-Lippe, as the Electorate of Hesse-Kassel was elevated to a kingdom, bringing territorial interests based on old feudal agreements back into focus. Prussia also declared the area between the Elbe and the Rhine as its military zone.

Under these conditions a Prussian post office was established in Bückeburg following a convention signed between the Royal Prussian General Post Office and Schaumburg-Lippe in 1804.



On 12 July and 1 August 1806 most principalities left the Empire and formed the *Rheinbund* (Confederation of the Rhine) under French protection. Subsequently Emperor Franz II abdicated the imperial crown on 6 August 1806 and declared the (Holy Roman) Empire dissolved.

On 1 October 1806 King Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia demanded Napoleon withdraw his troops behind the Rhine, which was effectively a declaration of war. This led to the War of the Fourth Coalition with Prussia alongside Russia against France. In 1807 Prussia lost the decisive battle. The Treaty of Tilsit ended this war, forcing Russia and Prussia to sign for peace on 7 July 1807. With this defeat Prussia's status as a great power temporarily ended. It lost nearly half its territory and had to pay high war indemnities.

The Electorate of Hesse-Kassel, elevated to a kingdom, did not join the *Rheinbund*. Napoleon dissolved the Electorate in 1807. Most of its territory, including Kassel, came under Napoleon's brother Jérôme Bonaparte as the Kingdom of Westphalia.

After Count Georg Wilhelm (1784–1860) took power in Schaumburg-Lippe in 1807 the principality joined the *Rheinbund* on 18 April 1807. The count was effectively elevated to a prince.

## Notes

1. Bückeburg was the capital of the small principality of Schaumburg-Lippe.
2. Hermann Adolf zur Lippe-Detmold (born 31 January 1616 in Detmold, died 10 October 1666 in Detmold).
3. Ludolph, K. *Die Postgeschichte des Landes Lippe nach amtlichen Quellen* (1928), p. 48.
4. The Griepenkerl (also Gryphiander) family were councillors and judges in Oldenburg; they are also known for their artistic works.
5. Personal union of the Electorate of Brunswick-Lüneburg with Great Britain.
6. Wrede is the name of an old Westphalian noble family; its ancestral seat is in Aemecke, today part of Sundern in the Sauerland region.
7. Constitutionally the Duchy of Westphalia was subject to the Cologne Cathedral Chapter (until 1803), but there was a *Landtag* in which councillors of the towns and nobles of the state were members; von Wrede was a deputy.
8. The von Söhlenthal (also von Söhlendal) family is well-known. The one named here was a chamberlain and privy councillor in Prussian service.
9. 'pp' = 'praemissis praemittendis' = 'with advance notice of what has been sent in advance'.
10. Johann August Levin von Schlepegrell (1723–1801).
11. Article 6 of the postal treaty of 14 December 1801.

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*All items illustrated are from the author's collection of Schaumburg.*