**IN SEARCH OF INFORMATION FLOWS – POSTAL HISTORICAL METHODS
IN HISTORICAL RESEARCH**

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One of the earliest attempts to discover the speed of mail transmission was made by Francis de Tassis, the well known General Post Master of the Habsburgian Tour and Tassis (Thurn und Taxis) mail organization, in 1506. Wanting to control the efficiency of the messenger system, the Post Master sent a letter from Brussels to Innsbruck and Vienna with instructions to write the exact arrival times on the letter. The result in the end was that the letter was carried from Brussels to Innsbruck in five days and 11 hours and further to Wiener Neustadt on the other side of the Alps in three days and seven hours. The performance was very good at that period, as the promised duration between Brussels and Innsbruck was five days in the summer and 6.5 days in the winter, and the experiment took place in late March – early April. During the 1,207 km voyage, 33 messengers were used for carrying the letter.[1]

A historian often finds it more difficult to get an answer to the question about speed of information transmission. Problems vary depending on the mail route (sea, overland, or mixed), the time period (war times, seasonal variations, general level of technological development) and the source material in question (correspondence, newspapers, administrative documents).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the use of different sources and methods in the research of information flows, especially the duration of information transmission. The observations and conclusions are based on the writer's study of the development of overseas business information transmission in the 19th century, especially between Britain and its colonies or other important trade partners. As the British seafaring of that period is rather well documented, e.g. the maritime intelligence of *Lloyd's List* was published regularly for the needs of underwriters, a historian can easily follow the information flows enabled by the British mail services. Most of the conclusions regarding measurement of the duration of

information transmission can be considered universal, however.

What can be achieved by using sources available?

The nature of sources available, as well as their quality and quantity, gives firm limits to what can be attained by examining the information flows. If the interest is in personal contacts, e.g. the speed of a particular merchant's business information transmission, the main sources are the received letters in the merchant house correspondence. Yet they can be completed with maritime intelligence published in contemporary newspapers or included in postal historical studies. Sailing data from newspapers, customs bills etc. are the main sources if the interest is in the general conditions of information transmission. Letters with postal markings and handstamps give more and better information of the transmission than privately sent or very early letters with only the writer's and recipient's handwritten markings.

There are generally speaking three main aspects to consider when choosing the method for measuring the speed of information transmission:
- measurement of the duration of information transmission from the sender to the recipient of the message
- measurement of the duration of transport between two places
- measurement of the frequency of transport between two places

These aspects have often been used for measurement of the speed of information transmission without clearly distinguishing the difference between what has been measured and what is talked about.

The information transmission from sender to recipient obviously includes the second aspect, the duration of transport between two places, and is very much dependent on the third one, the frequency of the transport available.

The first aspect deals mainly with correspondence between two individuals and leads to

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[1] Berthe Delepinne, Histoire de la Poste Internationale en Belgique sous les Grand Maîtres de Postes de la Famille de Tassis (Bruxelles 1952), p. 24-25.

research of personal communications, while the two other aspects generally deal with public sources – like newspapers, customer bills, post office records and collected sailing data in postal historical studies – and focus on public communications. The two latter aspects *explain* the duration of personal communications, while the personal correspondence with its postal markings and handstamps can *verify* the data and statistics given by public sources. Therefore, the use of different aspects together can portrait an issue better than the use of one only.

The most common method in measuring the speed of information transmission in history studies has been the simple calculation of days between writing and receiving letters. This method can only give limited results, however.

Firstly, only received letters are useful in the research, as the copies of letters sent do not include information about the arrival date in the other end. Copy books of sent letters can sometimes complete the picture shedding light on the information circulation or the frequency of communications. By using only the writing and arrival dates of the letters for measuring the speed of information transmission, several important aspects remain unknown.

The transmission of an overseas letter can be described as a process, which is sliced in several independent parts: how long time it took for the writer to send the letter after writing it, how long it took for the local system (coffee house, forwarding agent, post office) to forward it to an ocean going vessel (if overseas mail), how long it took before the ship was ready to leave from the port, how long the sea journey was, and how efficiently the letter was forwarded and finally delivered in the other end. Naturally, the duration of the whole process also depended on the frequency of the mail transport available.

To understand how the process worked and thus be able to distinguish the fixed elements of information transmission from occasional delays, it is useful to learn to understand the postal historical elements of the material examined.

Postal handstamps and other markings on the letters made by post offices are of great help when examining the factual speed of information transmission. They give accurate dates of

departures and arrivals of the letters, as well as the transit places. The handstamps were needed to inform the receiving post office, as well as the final recipient who had to pay for the transport, by which route the letter had been carried. The inland postage rates depended on the length of the route by which the letter was carried, while the ship letters had their own instructions. For fiscal purposes, it was important that the system worked promptly, and much effort was put to correct mistakes instantly.

Handwritten instructions on the covers are also very useful for a historian, regarding the means of communications ('per Packet', 'per English Steamer', 'per Neptune', 'p. Capt. Read') or the route ('via Panama', 'via Marseilles'). Also these markings are usually reliable, as there were strict regulations about the rates depending on different mail routes, mail contracts, etc. The changes *en route* were most often corrected on the cover, or they can be noticed from differing postal handstamps.

By reading carefully the postal markings of the covers and examining the postal history, it is usually possible to discover further information regarding the letter's trip from the writer to the recipient instead of just calculating the days between writing and receiving it.

Complementary methods add value to the results

One of the rare academic studies crossing the boarder of philatelic postal history has been conducted by John J. McCusker, who examined the origins of one single letter in his essay *New York City and the Bristol Packet.*[2]

The letter, found by McCusker himself as a boy, appeared to be an important document in the history of the first packet service between Bristol and New York in 1710-13. As the author puts it, "administrative, philatelic, archival and genealogical evidence united to support the validity of the conclusion" that the letter was really sent from New York early in May 1711 by one of the packets. "The letter traveled on precisely the business and precisely the route that the organizers of the packet service had intended. It linked English and colonial merchants and secured their communications during a time of war. London merchants, like Joseph Levy [the recipient of the letter], had been the ones who had pressed

for the packet. For Levy and Simson, and many more like them, the mails meant the continuation of their business but government, too, realized the need, and reaped the advantages of secure lines of communications with the Continental Colonies."[3]

Complementary methods obviously add value to the research. In addition to the data collected from personal correspondence, and especially if the main interest of the study is in public communications, general news flows or the efficiency of mail systems, maritime intelligence from contemporary newspapers or relevant postal historical studies are of great help. Most British and French mail steamship routes as of 1838 are well covered by postal historians at least to 1875, the year when the Universal Postal Union, or UPU, was established and the international postal rates were uniformed. Also earlier mail sailings are often well documented in postal historical studies, or the data can be found from contemporary newspapers.

A few examples from the writer's collection may clarify the usefulness of combining the classic method of calculating the difference between the dates of writing a letter and receiving it, the postal markings on the letter and the sailing data published in the contemporary newspapers or postal historical studies:

A private ship letter from Charleston, South Carolina, was dated on 6 March, 1793, and sent by "*Minerva*, Capt. Pame", to Chester, England. Additionally, there was a note inside that the letter was a duplicate, while the original had been sent by the *Carolina*, Capt. Planter. It was typical to send duplicates to ensure that at least one of the letters would be received, and as soon as possible. The letter bears a DOVER SHIP LRE handstamp from the first port of call in England, as well as an arrival handstamp of 30 April on the reverse.[4]

There is no recipient's marking on the letter, but it would be easy to calculate by using the arrival handstamp on the reverse that the duration of information transmission from Charleston to Chester took 55 days. But this would not be correct. The arrival handstamp

[2] John J. McCusker, "New York City and the Bristol Packet. A chapter in eighteenth-century postal history", in John J. McCusker, Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic World (London 1997), p. 177-189.
[3] McCusker (1997), p. 189.
[4] A ship letter to Charles & Thomas Goodwin, Esqrs., Chester, dated 6.3.1793 in Charleston, by the *Minerva*, Capt. Pame, in Seija-Riitta Laakso, Development of Transatlantic Mail Services from Sail to Steam. A postal historical collection (2005). (SRLC).

on the reverse was neither from Dover nor from Chester, but it was the typical 'Bishop mark' of the London General Post Office. The maritime intelligence of *Lloyd's List* on 30 April confirms that the ship *Minerva* had arrived at Dover on 27 or 28 April.[5] The paper did not usually publish arrival dates at that time, but taking into account the mail-coach trip to London and the possible delay in printing, the timing matched perfectly. From London it would take two to three days by another mail-coach for Chester. Therefore the duration of the transmission of this specific letter was about 58 days, not 55.

However, thinking of information transmission, that was not the final answer. There was a note in the letter that it was a duplicate, and the original was sent by the ship *Carolina*. Without having the original letter, we do not know whether it was sent on the very same day as the duplicate. But according to *Lloyd's List*, the *Carolina* arrived at Dover already on 16 or 17 April. The original letter was thus received in Chester about 11 days earlier than the duplicate. Although our letter had arrived in Chester some eight weeks after being written, the addressees had in fact received the same information in 6.5 weeks from the writing of our letter by another vessel.

In the late 18th century, there was also a monthly British Post Office sailing packet service between England and New York. A letter from Richmond, Virginia, with the note "p. Packet", bears the Richmond Post Office handstamp of 2 September, 1796 and the arrival handstamp of London 18 weeks later, 5 January, 1797.[6] As the letter was obviously written in Richmond (it is not dated) and it was addressed to London, there should not have been any delays in the ends of the journey. But how could it take 125 days to bring the letter from South Carolina to England?

According to *Lloyd's List*, two mail packets had arrived at Falmouth from New York on the same day, 2 January, 1797. This matched perfectly with the arrival handstamp of London on 5 January. One of the packets was the *Countess of Lei[ce]ster*, which had sailed "in 7 weeks", and the other was the *Princess of Wales*, "in 5 weeks".[7] As the mails should have arrived once a month, at least one of the ships was at least two weeks late. There had been problems in the westbound packet service already, as the writer starts his letter by

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[5] *Lloyd's List* 30.4.1793.
[6] A ship letter from Richmond, Virginia, 2.9.1796 to Duncan Davidson Esq., London. (SRLC).
[7] *Lloyd's List* 6.1.1797.

complaining that "your last of 2d May only reachd me last week owing to the delay of the Packet". Due to the war time (French war 1793-1802), dozens of mail packets were captured, including one in June which probably should have carried the letter if available.[8]

The unlucky combination of a late incoming packet and the need for waiting at port, primitive inland connections between Richmond and New York – only one post rider was in service, as the mail coaches would start on the Virginia route just a few years later[9] – and the five to seven weeks sailing from New York to England caused an accumulated delay to the information transmission. However, the facts known verify that the sea transport had taken only 30-40 per cent of the whole transmission time. Studying only the writer's and recipient's markings on the letter would have given an incorrect picture of the overseas communications, and studying only the sailing data would have given a mistaken picture of the whole process of information transmission.

Sometimes the historian's interest is not only in the duration of the information transmission but in learning more about the process of how the mail was carried. The letter itself may give little to start with but even those markings may open a path to an exciting story about how information was transmitted during that period.

For example, a letter in the writer's collection to "Messrs Magowe & Son, Boston", with no further specifications, has been written in Calcutta on 6 December, 1851, and handstamped on the reverse by the Calcutta General Post Office on the 8th. Additionally, there are the British handstamps of London and Boston on 15 January, 1852, "INDIA" by red letters, a few rate markings and a handwritten remark "America". The recipient has finally marked the arrival date on the reverse, February 9th. All the needed information exist to find out the duration of information transmission: 65 days from the writer to the recipient. We even learn that the letter was handled by the Calcutta Post Office only two days after the writing, so there was not much delay. The British markings show that the letter has been carried via England.[10]

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[8] The *Countess of Leicester* was also captured by a French privateer in December 1797 and the *Princess of Wales* in May 1798. See Howard Robinson, Carrying British Mails Overseas (London 1964), p. 312.
[9] Allan R. Pred, Urban Growth and the Circulation of Information: The United States System of Cities, 1790-1840 (Harvard 1973), p. 91.
[10] A letter to Messrs Magowe & Son, Boston, from Calcutta 6.12.1851. (SRLC)

But how did the letter arrive in Britain and further to the United States? By examining the postal historical studies available we learn much more about the information transmission process: After being written in Calcutta on December 6th and handstamped by the Post Office on the 8th, the letter was taken by the Peninsular & Oriental Steam Navigation Company's, or P&O's, branch steamer to Galle, Ceylon, and from there on the 16th by a larger P&O vessel, the *Oriental*, via Aden to Suez, arriving there on 1 January, 1852. From Suez the letter was taken overland across the desert by donkey, dromedary and riverboat services to Alexandria, Egypt, from where the letter continued on 5 January by a third P&O vessel, the *Ripon*, to Malta. It arrived on the 9th and proceeded immediately on the same day by the British Admiralty steam packet *Banshee*, Lieutenant Hosken as the Captain, to Marseilles, arriving on the 11th.[11]

The mails were taken by railway to Calais, across the Channel by a branch steamer, and again by train to London, from where the letter was forwarded to Boston on 15 January. However, the letter was meant to Boston in the United States and not in Britain. The word "America" was added to the address, and the letter was sent across the Atlantic by the Cunard Line mail steamer *Niagara*, which departed from Liverpool on 17 January and arrived in New York on 7 February, or by the same company's *Europa,* which departed on 24 January and arrived in Boston on 8 February.[12] In both cases the letter would have been dispatched in Boston on the 9th, as it happened. The trip by the *Niagara* took 21 days but that of the *Europa* only 15 days. The rough winter winds in the Atlantic were sometimes unpredictable, and the *Niagara's* trip had been lengthened so much that the ship had to put into Halifax for coal on 4 February.[13]

By slicing into pieces the letter's trip from Calcutta to Boston according to the means of transmission during the voyage, we discovered a great deal of information not available in the original letter. Instead of just finding out the duration of the information transmission, we learnt that the letter was carried by six different mail steamers and several trains, as well

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[11] Reg Kirk, The P&O Lines to the Far East. British Maritime Postal History, Vol. 2 (printing data missing), p. 30; Colin Tabeart, Admiralty Mediterranean Steam Packets 1830 to 1857 (Limassol, Cyprus 2002), p. 212. For the Overland trip, see Boyd Cable, A Hundred Year History of the P&O, Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company, 1837-1937 (London 1937), p. 85-93.
[12] Walter Hubbard & Richard F. Winter, North Atlantic Mail Sailings 1840-1875, U.S. Philatelic Classics Society, Inc., (Ohio 1988), p. 30.
[13] J.C. Arnell, Atlantic Mails. A History of the Mail Service between Great Britain and Canada to 1889, National Postal Museum (Ottawa, Canada 1980), p. 311.

as donkey, dromedary and river boat. We could notice that the international mail system worked smoothly already in the mid-19th century, especially when the letters were carried by British services all the way. The waiting times were short, but there could be variation in the duration of longer sea journeys as in the Atlantic crossing.

News flows in focus – about sources and methods

In addition to the use of personal correspondence, the speed of arriving news has generally been measured from the time lag of foreign news published in the newspapers. Päiviö Tommila calculated in his pioneering article in 1960, how long it took for the news of *Finlands Allmänna Tidning,* an official newspaper, to arrive in Finland from different countries in 1830.[14] Ian K. Steele used the same method to calculate the age of London based news in some American newspapers in 1705-1740, and Allan R. Pred for calculating the spread of news between the major American cities in 1790-1840.[15]

The method of comparing known facts of historical events with the dates on which the news was published in the newspapers in other countries leave several questions open. By which means were the news carried, how long was the waiting time before the transport, what was the duration of the transport, how long did it take before the next issue of the newspaper was published, and finally, how long did it take before the newspaper was delivered to the readers, probably again far from the place where the paper was printed.

To measure the duration of maritime news transmission, Yrjö Kaukiainen calculated the difference between the dates on which the sailing lists from distant ports were sent and on which they were published by *Lloyd's List* in London. This method gives comparable knowledge from different routes and different time periods, and is very useful for measuring the speed of one-way information transmission.[16] However, it does not tell the whole truth about the duration of information transmission from the recipient's point of view. As the news in the earlier times were carried by occasional merchantmen, the readers

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[14] Päiviö Tommila, "Havaintoja uutisten leviämisnopeudesta ulkomailta Suomeen 1800-luvun alkupuolella", Historiallinen Aikakauskirja, vol. 81 (1960), no. 1, p. 83-84.

[15] Ian K. Steele, The English Atlantic 1675-1740. An Exploration of Communication and Community (Oxford 1986) p. 158-159, 302; Pred (1973), p. 35-57.

[16] Yrjö Kaukiainen, "Shrinking the world: Improvements in the speed of information transmission, c. 1820-1870". European Review of Economic History, 5 (Cambridge 2001), p. 1-28.

in Britain often had to wait one or two extra months to learn e.g. of a particular ship's arrival, simply because there were no vessels arriving from that port to bring the news.

For example, a sailing list from Hong Kong published in *Lloyd's List* on 25 October, 1845, included arrivals and departures from that port between 20 June and 26 August. Thus, the age of the earliest news was 127 days while the latest ones were only 60 days old when published in the same day's newspaper.[17] The frequency of mail transmission definitely played an important role in the information flows. When interpreting the figures, it is important to keep in mind the difference between the measurement of duration of the mail transportation itself (which was chiefly examined by Kaukiainen) and the measurement of the duration of spreading the news contents.

Similarly, when using Allan Pred's figures of the "relative level of interregional shipping interaction" between the coast ports of the United States, it should be remembered that the "weighted arrivals" are not at all the same as the factual sailings.[18]

Ian K. Steele calculated the duration of early North Atlantic sailings using British port records of customs entrances and clearances, finding important information of the frequency and duration of sailings during the period 1675-1740. Yet, as Steele noted, by this method the duration of sea journeys is calculated only from customs to customs.[19]

In the real life, the final departure dates could vary several days from the customs records. It often took days after the clearance before the ship really departed, due to bad weather or other delays. The ship could even put back having already sailed due to damage caused by storm or other unexpected events.[20] Thus, the figures do not reflect the duration of the sea voyage only, but may include other elements.

A comparison between the customs records and the final sailing data from the port of Liverpool in 1825 give a good example of the difference. The American sailing packets, although scheduled for regular line service, did not always depart on the given date, even if

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[17] *Lloyd's List* 25.10.1845.
[18] Pred (1973), p. 115-126.
[19] Steele (1986), p. 283.
[20] An extreme example from the 1840s: "Liverpool, put back: 14 Aug, *Thomas Bennett*, late Halsey, for Charleston, the Master having been killed by the Cook, 8th inst." *Lloyd's List 15.8.1844*.

they had cleared in good time to be able to do that. The clearance took usually place on the scheduled departure date or the day before, but in half of the cases in 1825 the ship was delayed, the average delay being four days and the variation from one to 12 days.[21] When measuring the duration of sailings, there can thus be a major difference in the results depending on which method has been chosen.

Naturally, the newspaper dates may have included more errors, while the customs bills were administrative records with most obviously correct data. Yet the maritime intelligence of *Lloyd's List* was at least "half-official", being collected by Lloyd's agents and correspondents for the use of underwriters. A general rule in using newspaper data is that the longer the distance between the event (e.g. ship arrival) and the place of publishing it, the more potential there is for errors. In those cases where postal historical studies have been based on e.g. Caribbean newspapers, some additional caution is needed when considering the precision of the dates given.

Carl C. Cutler used a combination of custom house records, log books and maritime intelligence of the contemporary newspapers to collect sailing lists of the American tea clipper voyages in the 1850s.[22] Colin Tabeart based his study of the Admiralty Packets in the Mediterranean on data collected from the ships' logs and maritime intelligence from the newspapers, combining these with factual postal information from the letters carried on the route.[23] Especially the latter one is an excellent combination, but seldom available.

A deeper look into the news flows, an example

Instead of just calculating the duration of news flows from an event to the publishing of the news, a deeper look can be taken into the process. One option to follow more accurately the news flows is to combine the known details of the event with the dates of publishing the news and the maritime intelligence regarding the ships which carried the information.

To illustrate how the news from East India reached London in the early 1830s, when no

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[21] *Liverpool Customs Bills of Entry*, 1825; *Lloyd's List* 1825. Calculated from 41 departures of which all needed information was available.
[22] Carl C. Cutler, Greyhounds of the Sea. The story of the American clipper ship (Maryland 1930), 475.
[23] Tabeart (2002), p. x-xi.

imperial mail system existed between the mother country and the Asian colonies, an example has been picked up from the maritime intelligence published by *Lloyd's List*.

The 666 tons merchant ship *James Sibbald*, commanded by Captain Darby, sailed from London for Calcutta on 14 June 1832 and departed five days later from Portsmouth. She arrived at Bengal on 2 November. The news of the ship's arrival was brought to England by another merchant ship, the *Duke of Lancaster*, which sailed from Sand Heads (off Calcutta) on 1 December. The ship arrived in Liverpool on 25 March and those who waited for news about the *James Sibbald* found the needed information in *Lloyd's List* on 29 March together with several other ships which had arrived in Calcutta before 1 December. It took the *Duke of Lancaster* 114 days to sail to England and the news about the arrival of the *James Sibbald* was 147 days old when published.[24]

At the time when the owners in Britain learnt the good news about the ship's safe arrival in Calcutta, things had changed drastically in India. The following information about the *James Sibbald* arrived rather soon, brought by an unknown vessel which had arrived at Bordeaux. The news, dated in Paris on 14 April, read shortly: "The *James Sibbald*, Darby, from Bengal to London, is lost on Point Gordewain, entrance of the Coringa Bay. Crew and Passengers saved."[25]

What had happened? Was the ship really a total loss? Where were the crew and passengers? There were news arriving by different ships from India, but it took almost two more months to learn the whole story.

The next news about the ship came by the *Lady Flora*, which had sailed from Madras on 10 January. She landed the mails off Margate on 27 April and arrived at Gravesend three days later after a 110 days sailing. The short news report, dated on 9 January, read: "The *James Sibbald*, Darby, from Bengal to London, grounded on a Sand Bank off Coringa Point 29th ult. and there is but little hope of saving her either the ship or cargo. The Passengers had arrived at Masulipatam."[26] This information was 112 days old when published. After this,

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[24] For maritime intelligence, see *Lloyd's List* respectively. – The news of ship arrivals were usually sent in long lists and it often happened that the earliest arrivals on the list could be weeks older than the latest, depending on how long ago there had last been communication from the port in question to London.
[25] *Lloyd's List* 19.4.1833.
[26] *Lloyd's List* 30.4.1833.

nothing more was told about the passengers. However, the fate of the ship and cargo was important, and the reporting continued.

The following news came by the *Duke of Buccleugh*, which had sailed from Calcutta 14 January. Dated two days earlier at that port, the story read: "By last advices from the *James Sibbald*, which got on shore about 15 miles below Coringa 28th ult. she was being lightened, in the hope of getting her off."[27] The *Duke of Buccleugh* sailed from Bengal via Cape of the Good Hope and St. Helena in 113 days and the news were 115 days old when published. However, it showed that the agent in Calcutta did not know well enough what happened at Coringa Bay. Even if the news was fresher than the earlier ones, the expectations were far too optimistic compared to what would arrive by some other ships from Madras.

The following piece of news gave a different view: "Madras, 3d Jan. The *James Sibbald*, from Bengal to London, on shore on the Coast, is full of water. About 1000 chest of indigo, with some other portions of cargo have been saved."[28] The *London*, which carried the news, had sailed from Madras nine days later than the agent had dated his report. She was a large East Indiaman of 1,332 tons, probably heavy loaded. She was reported off the Wight on 5 May, but the news was published as late as on the 10th, 128 days old. For the owners, this was good news, however. One thousand chests of indigo were worth some £45,000 while the value of the ship must have been considerably less.[29]

The fate of the vessel was clarified in *Lloyd's List* 11 days later: "The hull of the *James Sibbald* wrecked off Coringa, was to be sold 15th inst."[30] This news, dated on 21 January in Madras, arrived by the *Coromandel*, which was reported arriving off the Wight on 18 May. The ship had sailed from Madras on 24 January and arrived at Gravesend on 24 May.[31] Despite the fact that *Lloyd's List* was published only twice a week at that time, news were often published before the ship carrying it had *de facto* arrived at the homeport. In this case,

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[27] *Lloyd's List* 7.5.1833.
[28] *Lloyd's List* 10.5.1833.
[29] The value of indigo is calculated from BPP, Colonies, East India 8. Appendix to the Report from Select Committee on the Affairs of the East India Company, II Finance and Accounts. (Published in the Irish University Series, Shannon, 1970) Part II Commercial, 1831-32. Appendix No. 4. Imports – Calcutta, Madras and Bombay, 1830, p. 575.
[30] *Lloyd's List* 21.5.1832.
[31] For maritime intelligence, see *Lloyd's List* respectively.

the news seems to have been landed "off the Wight".

And the final news about the wrecked vessel was reported in *Lloyd's List* on 14 June, two months after the first news about her incident, and 5.5 months since it had happened: "The cargo saved from the *James Sibbald*, wrecked off Coringa, has been reshipped per *Charles Eaton*, Fowle, arrived at Madras."[32] This news had been sent by the *Wellington,* which sailed from Madras on 24 February, and it was 110 days old when published.

The story gives us an idea about how the news arrived, not only slowly but sometimes also in a confusing order. The mails with news of the *James Sibbald* were carried by six different ships which sailed from India within 1.5 months. The age of the news when published varied between 110 and 147 days. Most certainly duplicates of the same news were carried by other ships sailing from India, and *Lloyd's List* published the freshest available. The example thus portrays also the circumstances in which the newspapers of the period had to collect the information for their news stories.

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How to estimate the mass of information transmitted?

What methods should be used to estimate the mass of information transmitted? For example, the statistics of income from postage rates to the post offices have sometimes been used to figure out the growth of the number of letters sent during a time period.[33] Yet the rates of single letters may have changed markedly during the period, the relation between cheaper short-distance and much more expensive long-distance mail may have changed – and these figures could not be compared with other cities of different geographic location even on the same year. Finally, the newspapers were normally not included in the postage rate figures.[34] Therefore, these figures probably describe best the fiscal importance of the postal services. Numbers of letters sent during a specific period can naturally be compared with numbers of letters sent during another period of the same length.

As has been noticed, there is no single method which would answer to all questions regarding the information transmission. Even though all methods can be used to measure

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[32] *Lloyd's List* 14.6.1832.
[33] Steele (1986), p. 124; and Pred (1973), p. 80, 96-101.
[34] Pred (1973), p. 94.

something, it should be kept in mind that there is a great difference in what can be achieved by using the alternative methods. Table 1 may be of help in the consideration.

Table 1. Methods for measuring speed of information transmission

What is calculated	Focus	Source material	Comments
Duration between dates of writing & arrival of letters		Correspondence (only received letters useful)	Includes unclear delays between the two dates. Real duration of transport will remain unknown. Sent letters are not useful for speed calculations, but they shed light on the information circulation as a whole.
Duration between dates of arrival & answer of letters		Correspondence	Not very useful, as there might have been several reasons for delays in answering. However, the method sheds some light on the frequency of business relations.
Duration between a historical event & the news spread by newspapers		Newspapers, their contents (maritime intelligence give added value)	Includes uncertainties in both ends, e.g. how long it took for the newspaper to receive the specific piece of news, and how long it took for the recipient to receive the newspaper after printing.
Duration of transport	From departure of mail to arrival (from post office to post office)	Correspondence (postal markings, only received letters useful)	Gives a true picture of duration of mail transmission from the post office of departure to the post office of arrival, and all transits. Can be used only when the letters have been carried by official mail. Not useful when examining the frequency of mail transport.
Duration of transport	From the latest news to the date of publishing	Newspapers, the technically latest news	Gives a proper picture about the speed of news transmission (e.g. maritime intelligence for newspapers). Includes a gap between the arrival of news to the publisher and the printing. Should not be mixed with the speed of news spread.
Duration of transport	From departure of ship to its arrival	Sailing lists, published in newspapers & postal historical studies	Gives a solid picture of the duration of transport on general level, and if the date of sending is known, also about the duration of transport of a specific letter. However, there may be gaps and even faults in the newspaper based data.
Duration of transport	From departure of ship to its arrival	Log books of ships	Gives quite exact data about duration of transport (with some reservations). However, log books of specific sailings are not easily available, and many have been destroyed.
Duration of transport	From customs to customs	Customs records of clearances and entrances	Includes unclear delays between the dates of customs clearances and the ship departure. The real duration of transport remains unknown.
Frequency of transport	From departure of ship to its arrival	Sailing lists, published in newspapers & postal historical studies	Gives useful data about the frequency of transport. However, there may be gaps in the information as all details have never been published.
Frequency of transport	From customs to customs	Customs records of clearances and entrances	Very useful, if all records are available, but early mail ships (e.g. Falmouth packets and Admiralty vessels) did not sail via customs.
Frequency of transport	Postage rate incomes	General Post Office records	Includes uncertainties in form of changing postage rates and different types of mails.

Information circles as tools in the measurement of the speed of business information transmission

The need for fast information transmission often varied between the players of mercantile societies. Newspapers wanted to get the freshest news as quickly as possible, and for them the rapid one-way information flow was the most important. But for traders – depending on the nature of their business – it was often at least equally important that the system enabled them to answer rapidly to the business letters, and again to receive fast answers to their letters.

A practical tool which has not to date been used for measurement of the speed of business information transmission in published studies is to calculate the number of consecutive information circles enabled by a particular service within a calendar year. This tool enables us to examine in a commensurable way the efficiency and development of the information circulation during different time periods and on different routes.

One information circle is equal to the time between sending a letter and getting an answer to it. While a round trip of a mail carrying ship means the period from the ship departure from the home port to the arrival back home, an information circle could be shorter, if there were other mail carrying vessels departing earlier from the other end, and they were able to carry the answer. Thus, the length of an information circle did not only depend on the duration of two one-way trips but also the frequency of the sailings.

The duration of the sailings can be calculated from the sailing data published in different postal historical studies, or if such study is not obtainable for a specific route or time period, from the maritime intelligence published by *Lloyd's List* or other contemporary newspapers. By combining information of the arrivals and departures of mail carrying ships, it is easy to find out how the system worked in both ends of the trip. A combination of these facts gives us the length of one information circle and enables the calculation of numbers of consecutive information circles per year.

How this system worked in reality, and were the trade partners really using it in an optimal way, can be examined from the correspondence of the various merchant houses. The handstamps and other postal markings of the letters also give us a clear idea of which postal

service has been used in case there were several possibilities, e.g. the alternating British and French government mail services for South America in the 1860s.

It should be noticed that this tool measures the best possible information circulation (the maximum number of consecutive information circles) between two places within a time period, e.g. one year. There may have been many other possibilities to send mail in one direction, but this method gives us an idea about how the two-way communications worked in practice. It was surprisingly often a very different story.

Historical methods of researchContentIntroductionDefinition of researchWhat is a historical method of researchStages of historical methods of research conducti…Â Here research andscientific methods may be considered a course of critical enquiry leading to discovery offacts or information.What Is A Historical Method of Research?Historical methods of research are the process of systematically examining anaccount of what has happened in the past. It is not facts and dates or even a description ofpast events. The dynamic account of past events that involves an interpretation attempt torecapture the nuances, personalities, and ideas that events. One of the goals of historicalresearch is to communicating of past events. Historical Methods. The History of the British Isles. European and World History.Â Historians commonly approach the study of historical writing in two quite distinct ways: either by study of the techniques which we hold to be immediately relevant today, or by looking at the â€œhistory of historyâ€, as for example by focussing on classic texts in Western historical writing. This paper takes the second road. Its principal agenda are as follows: The close reading of texts which really will bear close reading â€" reading being still the most fundamental of all historical â€œmethodsâ€.