

I hope these recollections of a long-retired clerk will be helpful and will be interesting to those who come across old conveyances and other documents bearing impressed stamps.

*Stuart Browning, via e-mail*

### Editor

Well, it seems that there are in fact two possible definitions for the job title 'Sub Distributor of Stamps', as the Archives Officer at the British Postal Museum and Archive had confirmed for us that Sub Distributors were employed by Royal Mail to distribute postal stamps. However, given that Elaine Oldham discovered this job description on the 1841 census and that the first postal stamps were introduced in England just the year before, your definition does seem more likely in this instance. Perhaps Elaine will be able to find out one way or the other by searching records of the Inland Revenue.

## HEIR HUNTERS' FEES DEBATE

CONCERNING THE FIRST article in the series by Title Research that appeared in issue 12 (March 2011), I note that it contains a sidebar giving details of their campaign against contingency fees. I would like to address that specific point.

Our 'Contingency Fee' clients sign an agreement allowing us to recover our fees as a percentage of whatever they receive from the estate. If for any reason they receive nothing then neither do we. All expenses involved in finding heirs and proving their claims are borne by us.

Most reputable firms in the business of finding missing heirs work on a contingency fee because most of our cases come from public advertisements made by the Treasury Solicitor. These cases are worked on speculatively as there is no one who can instruct us.

Fees in our industry are around 15 per cent, sometimes higher if we have to bring in specialist researchers if the work is unusually difficult or requires foreign research. Contingency fees are fair to our clients because if their claim

is not accepted then they have lost nothing.

By taking a percentage fee, our company bears all the risk, taking a chance that the estate will be large enough to cover our costs. There cannot be a fairer system for cases where there is no one to instruct us or agree to pay our fees prior to the start of research.

Outlawing contingency fees is not in the public interest, given hourly/flat-rate fees are not appropriate for cases advertised by the Treasury Solicitor. The time and resources expended by genealogy firms, particularly those with several staff, would result in substantial costs to the estate in hourly rates. In most cases, the amount of work might dilute the

estate to the extent that the heirs would receive nothing at all!

For those interested in further information concerning the points raised in the aforesaid article, I refer the reader to our website [www.celticresearch.co.uk](http://www.celticresearch.co.uk).

*Peter Birchwood,  
Celtic Research, Powys*

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## Star Letter

### HUGUENOTS IN VIRGINIA

I HAVE JUST finished reading that Johnny Depp's familial roots can be traced to 1700s Virginia. I have suspected for quite a while that Mr Depp's immigrant ancestry can be traced to the French Huguenot settlement founded at Manakin in 1699/1700 on a 10,000-acre land grant from William III. I have seen evidence of a Pierre Deppe included with my ancestor Dr Pierre Chastain's documents.

Pierre Deppe, immigrant, is included in the Registered Lineage list of the Huguenot Society Founders of Manakin in the Colony of Virginia (HSFMCV), which can be examined at <http://huguenot-manakin.org>. Quite a few Virginia Huguenots migrated to Kentucky, including the family of Frontiersman 'Davey' Crockett and also the 'under-appreciated' Jack (Jacque) Jouett, who is considered to be the Revolutionary War's 'Paul Revere of the South'. I suspect Mr Depp's ancestors were a part of the same migration west.

I currently serve as historian for the Virginia Branch of the HSFMCV and love being able to share the rich heritage of our ancestors with others. I have found that many people in Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee are unaware of their Huguenot ancestry and believe this to be due to the assimilation, culturally speaking, via marriage into the English/Scottish families that made up the larger portion of the population at that time.

The other Huguenot settlements in North America were located in urban areas, Charleston, SC and New Paltz, NY, so it would have been easier to maintain purely French family ties. Our poor little group was 'dumped' at an abandoned American Indian campsite, west of the James River fall-line (wilderness), and there were laws passed by the Colonial Council that forbade any citizens of Williamsburg (VA) to offer lodging, employment or sustenance to any of the French immigrants. My own ancestor lost his wife and four of his five children in the first year in Virginia, but I am forever grateful for his sacrifice in the name of religious freedom.

Our Huguenot ancestors were made of good stuff and I hope to have shared some clues as to Mr Depp's ancestry. It is fitting that he has made his home in France. Perhaps it is the siren song of his ancestors' blood that makes him feel so 'at home'.

*Linda K Scoville, Lynchburg, USA*

Linda has won 100 credits for [www.192.com](http://www.192.com) (worth over £40) for her star letter of the month. Send YFH your comments, feedback and suggestions for a chance to win the same prize next issue.

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