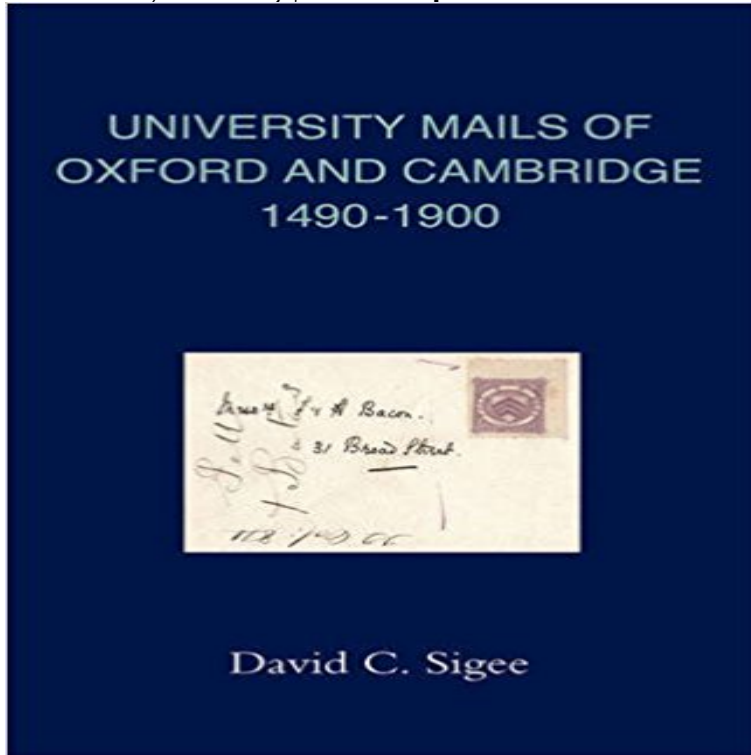


The University Mails of Oxford and Cambridge 1490 - 1900: Early Letters, College Stamps and Victorian Security Marks



The Universities of Oxford and Cambridge enjoyed a degree of independence which is reflected in their private posts, open only to members and other privileged persons. Starting in 1490, the book plots the development of University carrier mails to London and other major cities - with letters transported on horseback, in wagons and by mail coach. Original contracts and letters, hidden away for centuries in University and College archives are illustrated for the first time, including Royal letters signed by a range of monarchs. In addition to this long-distance transport, the activities of individual Colleges in organising their own local messenger services are described in detail, emphasising the period between 1871 - 1886 when some Colleges issued their own postage stamps. The magnificence of these items is matched by their rarity, and a wide range of stamps, covers and proofs is shown in full colour. The second half of the Victorian period is characterised by a distinctive use of the General Post by members of the Universities, with the development of printed postal stationery - fully illustrated for both College and University societies. The use of Post Office stamps brought with it concerns about misuse, and the development of special security marks. These included overprints, perforated initials (PERFINS) and embossing of cards bringing the story of the University mails to a fascinating conclusion.

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