

Halcyon

The Newsletter of Redditch Philatelic Society

No. 18 - Winter 2012

From the Chairman

Merry Christmas and a Happy & Prosperous New Year to all our members!

I can't believe that Christmas is almost upon us again. This year has certainly been notable not only for the excellent displays that we have seen by visiting speakers, but also those exhibits on view at Stampex and at Perth 2012.



Unfortunately, 2012 also saw the demise of Philatex, for many of us this has been a key date on the philatelic calendar. Has the internet reduced the popularity of stamp shows? Certainly the internet has opened a number of new channels to help us acquire stamps etc. In particular, Ebay has allowed us to locate items of interest from around the world; and electronic searching is faster and more convenient than sorting through the boxes on a dealer's stand. However, what we lose are the social aspects of our hobby: the opportunity to make friends with the dealers and other collectors at fairs and exhibitions, to view exhibits to which we can only aspire, to share knowledge, to discuss finds and the "one that got away".

One of the meetings in November was given over to "Writing up for Collections and Competitions". One reason for this evening was in response to requests at the last AGM. The timing of the session was to encourage members to enter our club competitions: the nine-sheet annual competitions being held on 3rd January. We have invited external judges to mark our exhibits and therefore it would be a magnificent effort if every member came up with one entry on the night. Don't be shy about entering – the judges understand that not everyone is experienced in putting together entries and their comments will only be constructive. The winning entry in each class will go forward to the Inter-Society competitions at the MPF Spring Convention. So, go on, give it a try!

Finally, If you haven't written your letter to Santa yet, here are some ideas of books for Christmas. *First Class: A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps* by Christopher West; *Birds, Blocks and Stamps: Post & Go Birds of Britain* by Robert

Gilmour; *Stamp Collecting Unhinged: Thirty Years to Save the Hobby* by Tim Clegg.

I look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.

Alan Godfrey

SOCIETY PROGRAMME:

January to June 2012

Meetings are held at St Luke's Memorial Hall, Headless Cross, Redditch from 7:30pm. The main business of the evening starts at 8:00pm prompt.

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|---------------------------|---|
| 3 rd January | Annual 9-sheet Competitions |
| 17 th January | Aspects of the Netherlands East Indies (John Jackson) |
| 7 th February | Visit from Evesham PS |
| 13 th February | Annual Dinner at Archer's Restaurant |
| 21 st February | Annual General Meeting & 1-sheet Display |
| 7 th March | Cyprus (Mike Fulford) |
| 21 st March | Auction Preview |
| 23 rd March | Annual Auction |
| 4 th April | Two Members Talks |
| 18 th April | Railways (Keith Downing) |
| 2 nd May | Three Sheet Competition – Letter "D" |
| 16 th May | Captain Bligh (Alwyn Peel) |
| 6 th June | Visit from Gloucestershire Philatelic Society |
| 20 th June | President's Evening - "Something for Everyone" |

Please make every effort to come along to meetings and support your Society.

GB New Issues for 2013

The special stamps from Royal Mail for 2013 will comprise the following:

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| 3 January | Definitives - 1st & 1st Large red; low values with security overprint, new colours for 50p & £1; England/Wales Cartor litho printing. |
|-----------|---|

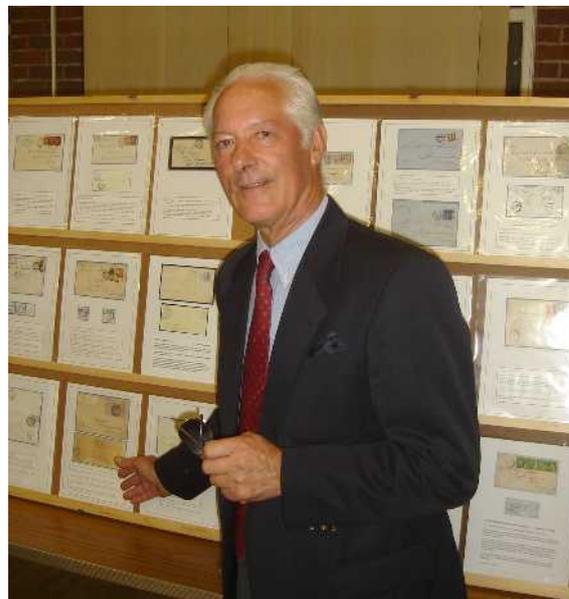
| | |
|--------------|--|
| 9 January | London Underground set, MS, retail booklet |
| 7 February | Year of the Snake generic smiler |
| 21 February | Jane Austen (Stampex issue) |
| 22 February | Post and Go stamps: Freshwater Life - Ponds |
| 26 March | Classic TV |
| -- March | Machin and Country definitives, tariff change. |
| 16 April | Great Britons 10 x 1st |
| 9 May | 150 th anniv of the Football League |
| 10 May | Generic Smilers – details awaited |
| 30 May | Her Majesty the Queen (60 th anniv of the Coronation) |
| 18 June | Classic Locomotives of Northern Ireland MS |
| 25 June | Post and Go stamps: Freshwater Life - Lakes |
| 11 July | Butterflies |
| 13 August | British Auto Legends |
| 19 September | Merchant Navy (Stampex issue) |
| 20 September | Post and Go stamps: Freshwater Life - Rivers |
| 10 October | Dinosaurs |
| 5 November | Christmas |

MEETING REPORTS

Thursday 20th September 2012
Visiting Speaker: Philip Mackey
GB Maritime & Overseas Mail – Echoes of Empires to 1885

Philip advised that his display was to cover not only the British but also the French Empire- and that his definition of maritime mail could be considered a rather loose one. If the mail had crossed any stretch of water then it was considered 'maritime'.

He opened with French maritime mail from the 'classic' period 1849- 1876 (pre-revolution). His exhibits were almost all on cover, as his preference is to retain the entire postmark. He has also generally acquired only 4-margin stamps, wherever possible. During this period true maritime mail services were dominated by the English shipping lines.



Philip Mackey showing his items of maritime mail

Philip showed a rare 1st July 1815 cover of the '100 days' period after Napoleon's escape from Elba, and pre- Waterloo. There followed exhibits representing many destinations and points of origin- including Papua, Dominica, India and others, including a 2F rate France to Bombay, sent by the son of the Prime Minister. Next was a 1F80 cover- a rare rate- from France to Sicily. A cover from Paris to St. Petersburg had arrived four days before it had been sent- thanks to the then-prevailing use of both the Julian and Gregorian calendars. The 5F60 rate to Buenos Aires was an enormous amount- equivalent at that time to 8/6d- when average earnings were 10d per day.

The difficult 5F stamp of 1862 appeared on a 5F40 rate cover to Peru- this stamp was only issued for two years. The rate from any French overseas P.O. back to France was the same as for French internal mail- Philip displayed Shanghai to France cover to illustrate this. Also shown was a French Navy cover (any example is rare) from the Black Sea squadron. Services personnel didn't get postal concessions, but again the rate was the same as French internal. Six 'ceres' stamps from 3 issues were shown on cover. Letters from the Isle of Man, Mull and Ireland, in fact any offshore island in the British Isles, were charged an extra 1d over standard rate, but this was paid in the receiving country, covers were shown to this effect with both French and British stamps. During the Crimean War British mail was carried by French Paquebots, as the British didn't have enough ships! - Philip displayed examples. Final 'first half' exhibits were examples of Balloon Mail out of Paris, during the siege of Paris of the Franco- Prussian war.

After the tea/coffee and viewing break the second half of the display was British Empire Maritime Mail. Included were a toll returns letter which had crossed the Solway Firth by Dumfries, a

Hawkshead to London cover bearing an extra 1d for the Windermere ferry (this letter being from the solicitor who subsequently married Beatrix Potter), a cover to Mauritius including 4½d payable to Union Castle for the sea voyage to Cape Town, and a 1/- blue on cover, which Gibbons state to be a changeling from the 1/- green.

The Q.V. jubilee issue included a 5d value, which was the rate to India, but is quite rare on cover- Philip included an example. A London 1855 letter from Edward Hawkesley concerning water supplies was of interest- costs of a typhoid outbreak were being discussed, and the resultant lives lost. Male lives were valued at 10/-, female at 2/6d!

Philip concluded with a fine display of Cape Triangulars- both on and off cover- including both mint and used multiples.

Ralph Richardson mounted a brief but poignant vote of thanks noting that the exhibitor certificate had been beautifully written and that Philip as an excellent presenter was a very deserving recipient. the audience applauded.

David Gillespie

Thursday 4th October 2012 Members' Show & Tell

A select band of members proved once again what a wide variety of materials and subjects are collected by our colleagues in the Society. There was quite an Olympic theme amongst the displays (is this what was meant by the legacy of the Games?) with Bob Harper kicking things off with a full set of the GB Gold Medal winners, which even at a discount had still cost him £93. Bravely he has now opted to receive the Paralympic winners set for only £20. Ralph Richardson had also been on the Olympic trail tracking down local winners and their gold pillar boxes. This was all right until he came across one in Stratford upon Avon which was for the mixed rower James Rowe. No post office seemed to have one until Ralph tracked a set down at Westlands Post Office in Droitwich. Even Alan Godfrey was on the Olympic theme with an autographed first day cover of Nick Skelton, the gold medal winning show jumper, together with a signed photograph.

Having recovered from this Olympic bonanza, Pete Elms showed us some lovely French silk postcards sent home by troops during the First World War. A strange postcard written in semaphore was displayed by Paul Veal. This dated from 1904 and although the message was not very exciting, nevertheless it must have given the postman delivering it a bit of a shock. After showing most of my collections over the past two years I decided that I would delight the audience with the sources of my various interests (catalogues and associated material – always essential if you collect something or somewhere unusual).

At least I am not now alone in being thought eccentric by members as, after seeing David Gillespie's display of Belgian Congo postmarks, I feel that I have a fellow sufferer. He also showed USA from the Seventies. Next we had a shock with Chris Jackson bringing out some *stamps* for us to see; Rhodesian at that. However, he soon recovered to conclude with needlemakers material together with Worcestershire letters of the Crimean and Boer Wars. Malcolm Allinson showed us a copy of the Act which set off the postal reforms as well as his now completed M rows for Plates 5 and 6 of the Penny Black; others are in the process of being finished.

Alan Godfrey had a second go to finish the evening with a really mixed bag, including a postcard from Rhodes (from where he had returned early that very morning), a local railway stamp and more material from the Sir Hubert Wilkins expedition by submarine. He finished with underpaid airmail which bore distinctive large stickers on the reverse.

Many thanks to all who contributed to the evening. It was generally light hearted with plenty of audience participation.

Robin Jarman

Thursday 18th October 2012 Bring 3 Sheets or pay 50p

With most of the committee at the ABPS National Philatelic Exhibition in Perth, Bob Harper took the role of chairman this evening and eight members rose to the challenge in the title of the meeting. Bob started off with a display of stamps for the use of tourists in England and Scotland produced by "UK Mail", an independent company. The stamps, for postcards or letters, showing popular tourist venues, are for sale in strips at post offices and must be sent abroad. Another display featured Christmas stamps by TNT and a third showed Downstream (or DSA – Downstream Access) operators' postal impressions.

Peter Elms presented two displays – errors of the GB 1973 Christmas (Good King Wenceslas) issue and four covers from the 18th century showing Birmingham postal marks.

Mike Such displayed six album pages of attractive stamps of Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika from KGV to EIIR. David Gillespie talked about the 1908 Washington/Franklin series of USA definitives, which replaced the 1902 presidential series and through many variations of perforations, watermarks, paper, printing processes and sizes did the job until 1922 when the next series of presidents was issued. The displays ranged from 1915 to 1922.

Judy Brierley presented early cancellations - the Maltese cross, croix patée, Tudor roses and town numbers. The display included a Mulready

envelope and numerous penny blacks, 2d blues and other early issues.

Paul Veal presented some postcards featuring the seldom-remembered British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow (not Perth!) in 1938. A second display comprised three postcards of Dickens characters by "Kyd" included in the GB June 2012 stamp issue marking the birth bicentenary of Charles Dickens.

Diana Seward presented a thematic display of stamps featuring roses including the GB 1976 (Royal National Rose Society Centenary) issue and stamps from various foreign countries.

Roger Wood presented an impressive display of many shades of the KGV 2½ d blue definitive of 1912-24, there being nineteen identified shades of this stamp. The display included a letter of certification from the Royal Philatelic Society. The meeting ended after coffee at nine o'clock.

Paul Veal

Thursday 15th November 2012

Visit from Dudley PS

Visits from other Philatelic Societies are always different; we never know what subject or subjects may be shown nor how many visitors to expect. This evening was no different. Ray Green, one of Dudley P.S. stalwart members who had been due to come on the visit had recently passed away and, due to holidays, John Southall was their only available speaker.

John brought his collection of German States, mainly fine used stamps but including some envelopes. He explained why he had arrived at the situation which led him to collect German States, a common one, in that he was only left with very expensive items to find for his G.B. collection. Consequently, he looked for new areas and finding an old German States album decided to go for that. His comprehensive display covered all the main states that preceded a unified Germany, this gave a 19 year period from 1849 to 1868 to collect. He covered the two currencies used, the silver groschen by the northern states and the kreuzer by the southern ones. Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria comprised the first half of the evening and this included an early cover, containing a sample of cloth, which had been missorted and travelled all over Germany before reaching its destination, He also showed a number of railway stamps and official stamps.

Many of the stamps have a higher catalogue value in used condition rather than in mint and forgeries are common, he showed one of these that had a cancellation which was three years prior to the issue of the stamp!



John Southall with his display of German States

The second half started with the rump states of the Hanseatic League: Brunswick, Hanover, Heligoland and the two Mecklenburgs. John then displayed his latest project – to collect a stamp from each of the numbered post offices of the Thurn & Taxis postal authority which had started in Italy and Germany, and eventually covered most of Europe for some 400 years. A major work in progress!

John explained the history of the Thurn & Taxis posts, which really took off when Emperor Maximilian made them postmasters for his Empire in the 15th century. John ended his display with the Franco-Prussian war which finally brought Bavaria and Württemberg into the unified Germany with one postal authority in 1871. This was an excellent evening on a subject not shown before at our society.

Chris Jackson

Interesting websites

Here is a further selection that I have found useful:

www.gutenberg.org/files/34011/34011-h/34011-h.htm

This site specialises in copies of out of print books. This one is "The Development of Rates of Postage" by A D Smith BSc(Econ) pub. 1917.

www.philatelicdatabase.com

An archive of stamp collecting articles.

www.gbstamps.com/gbcc/gbcc_rates1.html

Listing Internal Postage Rates 1635 to present day and Parcel Rates 1883-2009

Please send in your favourite sites with a brief description of what you get, excluding of course any commercially orientated ones

ABPS NATIONAL EXHIBITION PERTH 2012

The middle of October saw four members complete with wives and/or partners making the long journey to Perth (the one in Scotland, not Oz!) for the APBS National Philatelic Exhibition. Three members had submitted entries into the National Competitions which were to be held there. Robin had entered a four board (64 sheet) exhibit on Chilean Airmails, Alan and Chris had both entered one board (16 sheet) exhibits with the 1998 Christmas Angel issue and Early Worcester Mail, respectively.



This item was on display at Perth 2012; addressed to Alcester, needless to say, the local connection caused some excitement! It is the only known example of the VR Dundee Ship Letter mark.

Friday was a typical wet grey Scottish day so the men of the party were pleased to be indoors at the Dewars Centre in Perth just a ten minute walk from the hotel. The venue was superb, loads of space in a high ceiling sports hall with good lighting. The competitions took up about a third of the hall with dealers and the exhibits from the Queens collection in the rest. Refreshments were upstairs with further competition entries and conference rooms. The eating area overlooked a huge ice rink which was in constant use by people playing curling, a sport that we all learned a little more about before we left.

The fair was a little disappointing, some of the listed dealers failed to show and those that were there did not have the wide range of material that we have become used to finding at Stampex or the now deceased Philatex. However, for anyone collecting Scottish postcards the number of cards on sale was astronomical.

The competition results were posted on the entries late on Friday afternoon. Robin received a very well

deserved Gold, Chris a Vermeil (silver/gilt) and Alan a Large Silver. All in all a very creditable result keeping Redditch on the National Philatelic map.

Spare time on Saturday led to our intrepid three entrants taking a walk around Perth, where we happened to go to the same café as the ladies. The ladies left and while we finished our snack our chairman was provided with a snow shovel to carry back to the hotel! Well what else would you buy when in Scotland?

When it came to Saturday afternoon and collecting our entries back, the organisers were sadly very short of manpower and so the four of us ended up being badged up as 'officials'. We then got stuck in to helping with the removal of the exhibits and delivering them to secure storage. One advantage of being willing to help was that we were at the front of the queue when it finally came to handing back entries. Once again it was Redditch to the rescue!

Sunday dawned a glorious day as we all went our different ways. It had been a good few days, accommodation in a converted 15th century water mill was very good as was the company and the philately. In addition, the ladies seemed to enjoy the break almost as much as we did so what more could one ask for.

Chris Jackson

OTHER PHILATELIC EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY

Many members follow where and when major events, particularly Stamp Fairs, are being held so here are listed some that may be of interest:

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| 18-19 January | York Stamp & Coin Fair |
| 20-23 February | Spring STAMPEX |
| 11 May | WORPEX (Worcester) |
| 6 July | MIDPEX |
| 19-20 July | York Stamp & Coin Fair |

The Road To Perth: A Personal Journey

It was on a train on the way back from one of our philatelic trips to London that the idea was raised that there might be a mass entry of exhibits from Redditch at the ABPS National in Perth in October. Having done a one board entry (16 sheets) for the previous year's event at Sheffield with moderate success, I bravely or foolishly decided on 4 boards this time, which meant preparing 64 sheets for the exhibition. I started considering what I was going to do before Christmas last year to give myself plenty of time; never having done anything on this scale before. I knew that I had the quantity of material to do 64 sheets, but was uncertain whether there was sufficient quality in the covers to achieve a reasonable exhibit. Indeed at one stage I even considered dropping down to 3 boards but the proposed subject of my favourite Chilean Airmails just would not fit sensibly into 3 boards. So 4 it was

and immediately it became apparent that the structure of the exhibit and what it looked like was as important as the actual material. Aerophilately is all about routes and rates and I knew that with Ross Towle's excellent book I would be alright with the rates, even if the stamps on the envelopes sometimes bore little relation to the amount to be charged. Routes are sometimes not so easy to decide, as letters could have taken one of two or more routes dependant on the airline involved. Occasionally it is a case of best guess.

On another of our London trips we saw one exhibit on shipping, which included small pictures of the vessels concerned printed on the sheet almost as headings. I decided to try this approach with my exhibit but of course using aeroplanes; not on every sheet as I felt that that would be too much but scattered throughout as appropriate. After all it is one thing to say the type of plane used on a particular route is a Morane Saulnier MS 35, which would mean something to only the most dedicated aircraft enthusiast, and another to show any judge that you knew what you were talking about. For anyone who does not know the plane is a small single seater monoplane of almost First World War vintage which was used on the first official air service in Chile.

Gradually, the exhibit came together and before we opened up our caravan in Wales for the year at the end of March the layout and most of the writing up was done. I had decided a border around each sheet would look good and arranged all the pages in that way, only to discover that some of the covers would not fit between these borders, so they all had to be deleted again. There were one or two blind alleys like this before I could begin to print off the individual sheets. From start to finish was a long time, and naturally I saw other items for sale in the meantime which fitted in to my exhibit very well. Every time I purchased one of these it meant a redesign of the layout. Indeed a late purchase of an early airmail cover resulted in to me a less than pleasing second sheet, but I felt that the cover added more than it took away from the exhibit, so it stayed as it was. I had added a map and other non-philatelic items such as stickers and other related material and was unsure how this would be received by the judges but apparently it is quite acceptable, even up to 20% of the exhibit. That seems rather excessive to me.

About four weeks before the event, I decided that I had finished. I was not going to do any more tinkering and it would have to do. Then, I suddenly realised that the title bore the dates 1927 – 1945 and I did not have any covers from the latter date. Panic ensued but the last page of e-bay on Chilean Airmails revealed one letter of that date addressed to Bolivia. I hastily acquired it and hope that it would arrive from South America in time. Fortunately it did and it was with relief that I gave my entry to Chris Jackson to take to London to hand in. It was then a nervous wait until the judging

at Perth. The result exceeded my best expectations and so it had all been worth it. Would I do it again? Well at the moment I am uncertain but perhaps later on I may be tempted.

Robin Jarman

Great Britain: The Travelling Post Office (1894)

In this article, taken from The Ludgate Magazine (London, 1899), we have a veritable feast for collectors of TPOs. It is certainly unusual to see the operations of travelling post offices in the nineteenth century.



The postal system of the country may be taken as part and parcel of the railway, for the G.P.O. would indeed be a shortlived institution should it ever strive for independence. In the year ending March 1894, we were informed that the number of letters, postcards, book-packets, circulars, samples, newspapers and parcels sent through the Post Office was 2,796,500,000 and that the bulk of this was transmitted by rail. It is true that in the Parcel Post system the railway has to face a formidable competitor, for the Royal Mail coaches, a revival of the good old times, ply on no less than eight highways out of London, because it is found to be both a cheaper and more swift means of transit for this "expansion of trade" – the Parcel Post.

A writer on railway lore goes a step further and ventures to warn shareholders that the time may come when passengers will be accepted as parcels, having been subjected to an official stamp before embarking on the coach – they would, in fact, be conveyed at "owner's risk." It is not generally known that the pneumatic tube plays a very important part of the G.P.O. system, more particularly as a night-messenger, in the newspaper office. It is claimed that atmospheric air never loiters by the way to play marbles or "cod'em," neither does the tube puncture or in any way lay itself open to the temptations and various hindrances which meet the experienced Press messenger or thirsting reporter. The railways

advertise, and are more than anxious for your custom. Parcels are collected free of charge, and possibly – not often – delivered in a state of chaos, free of contents. Speaking of advertising reminds me of an accusation brought against a famous biscuit firm, to the effect that although the managers stoutly denied the charge of thus pushing their wares, it was proven, and that without a doubt, that not only did they imprint their name upon every biscuit, but in addition, made the public swallow it. The whole world, it may be safely asserted, feeds from its postbag: if these rations are stopped, business, enterprise and progress are at a standstill, or worse.

How many of us picture the weather-beaten driver in charge of either mail coach with its steaming "three in hand," or the frizzling engine-man in charge of the Travelling Post Office Down Night Mail, upon whose care our morning post depends; and yet it is to these faithful servants of the Government (not public, as they'll tell you, if you proffer a bent halfpenny across the Post Office counter) that we owe so much. But our object is briefly to explain the ingenious mechanism which the G.P.O. adopted, upon all the principal trunk lines of the United Kingdom, for the transmission of letters and the like. The first illustration depicts the stationary post office at Bletchley Junction, the only one of its kind to be found actually on the platform of a station, but being so important a centre for the exchange of mails, the L. & N.W. Ry. Company found it expedient to control an institution of the kind. This particular company, be it observed, is the Royal Mail route *par excellence*, providing as it does the special weekly American mail trains, and also the Irish.

The genial post-master stands to the right of our view, and within arm's stretch we may notice various interesting impedimenta, such as mail canvas bags awaiting their consignment from the sorters' tables in the centre, tall baskets for the reception of umbrellas, wicker bird-cages, or a pot or saucepan which, like the widow's cruse, never fails to supply molten sealing wax for the purpose of official stampings upon the canvas letter-bags.

This is the T.P.O., or Travelling Post Office, which dashes headlong in the hours of dark from



apparatus to apparatus, for the purpose of both



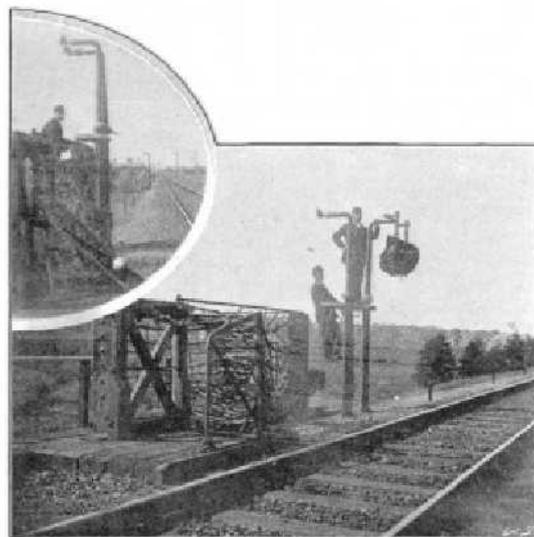
delivering and picking up mail bags without a stop; in fact, at Bletchley, where most of our illustrations were secured, the speed is proved to be over a mile a minute: but for all that, the double exchange goes off nightly, and in the case of the weekly "specials," to which reference has already been made, by day too, without a hitch. The apparatus at Bletchley has recently undergone a change, and we find that while it has been moved about half-a-mile from its former position, the other side of the junction, we also notice that the apparatus is of the latest and most approved pattern. Now about the Travelling counterpart of the post office: there may be two or any number of bogie letter cars on the mail, and these are united one to the other by means of covered gangways giving the appearance of one long saloon. We notice a net on the exterior of the carriage, and also some iron brackets fastened flush with the side of the vehicle, as is the case when the apparatus is thrown out of action. More about this contrivance later.

We pass inside the vans, and observe that the whole is lighted by a double row of gas-lamps from the roof. There is an open passage along the centre of each van, while on one side are empty canvas letter bags hanging in thick clusters, and on the opposite side runs a sorting table parallel with the entire length of each car, having at intervals numerous canvas wells for the reception of all halfpenny stamped matter. Above this table are pigeon-holes innumerable from end to end, piled one above the other. Beneath the sorting table are folding seats, resembling little music-stools, but a letter sorter never had time to test one yet. Long before this night mail quits its terminus the postal cars become choked with myriads of letters, and the sorters set to work directly they embark to gorge and disgorge both bag and pigeonhole. If then we are to travel on the L. & N.W., our departure is made from Euston, and it is but a few minutes before Watford is passed, where we find the first apparatus for catching and exchanging mail bags in readiness. It is at Bletchley, one of fifty-three stations on the system, where the heaviest bags are both dropped from the postal vans and received; therefore we will accompany the scarlet-coated mailmen who are just starting from the post office, with their canvas letter bags

shouldered in readiness for the mile which they have to foot to the apparatus.

It is on the "Down" side where we find all the tackle, the "Up" side merely having a small receiving net to catch the drop from the mail, without giving any thing back in exchange. We notice as we draw near that the apparatus is out of action, the lofty brackets or "standards" being reversed inwards from the line, and the receiving net closed, the iron barrier which is close to and runs parallel with the rails leaning against another of wooden construction. The two mail-men have no time to lose, so they set to work at once to enclose the sealed canvas letter bags "in stout leather casings or "pouches." The weight of these pouches, when made up, must not exceed 50 lbs.; but then as many as nine such packages can be hung up for the mail nets to sweep off, seeing that each standard provides three spring catches whereon separate pouches can be hung. One net is sufficient both on the ground and on the mail, as however many pouches are hung out from the stationary standards or even mail van, they are all of them bound to come in contact with the one receiving net. The standards are next turned round with their precious burdens swinging aloft in mid-air, and the receiving net thrown open and propped up by means of a stout metal cross-bar which bears the full brunt of successive blows from the mail-van standards, thus releasing the pouches. The net itself, of a size known as ten feet (and this is one of the largest to be seen), is of very formidable proportions; and so it need be, when we picture the shock received as the mail, travelling at seventy miles an hour, hurls nightly into the net something weighing quite three quarters of a hundredweight.

The train itself at the moment of the double exchange fairly staggers under the blow, and for the moment seems to halt, for proof of the concussion is readily understood when it is mentioned that the rails, which are laid parallel with the apparatus, require special attention, inasmuch as the line is periodically pulled round out of truth, entirely due to the impact which the long mail car causes (and the net is always at the end furthest from the engine) as courtesies are exchanged. As soon as the mail comes in sight, within 200 yards of the apparatus the net is sprung by a lever in the car, and this operation is automatically announced by an electric bell, which continues to ring in the postal van until the catch is taken, and the net closed again as a warning to the sorters to give a wide berth to that end of the car where the net is situated, for the huge pouches that come shooting in and rolling down from the net would fairly damage anybody. Simultaneously with the dropping of the net, the hinged standards are let down by a cord from the side of the car with the leather-wrapped bags dangling and scudding a few feet above the fast-vanishing track. The supreme moment then arrives, and mails are exchanged, but



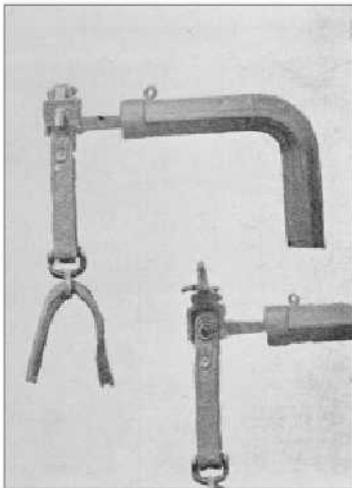
with such rapidity that the eye fails to follow the double movement which takes place. Inside the car, you are conscious of a tremor from stem to stern of the saloon, and a bang and a crash. If you are standing near the ground apparatus, you are conscious of hearing a series of sharp, cracks, above the roar and grinding of the express, almost like the report from a volley of rifles, as one after another the nets pick off their complements, and nothing but the vanishing tail-lights of the mail are left to view. Properly speaking, the mail vans should always be coupled next the engine, both as a guide to the mail-men in charge of the ground apparatus, and also for safety to passengers. Horrible catastrophes have occurred before now, when the mail-van, with its net, and appurtenances, has been run in some other portion of the train – that is, anywhere but next the engine. In more than one instance a passenger has leant too far out of the window, when his head has come in violent contact with the huge pouches swaying on the standards of the ground apparatus, whilst if the mail-van had been run in its proper place these pouches would have been picked up before a passenger carriage could reach them.

The sorters, and there may be as many as twenty or more in the night mail, are some of them specialists at their work, while others take it in turns to have a ride as a change from the routine at the G. P. O. An apparatus inspector who has been completely through the "mill" was telling me of the "sea-sickness" from which at first all sorters invariably suffer. They are for a time completely prostrated, while it takes about three weeks to acquire one's "mail-legs."

The overseer in each sorting-car is responsible for the carrying out satisfactorily of all the many operations which require assiduous and unremitting attention. For example, the night mails would seem to afford increased difficulties by way of knowing where and when to, precisely set the van nets and drop the pouches, for, as it has been pointed out, should either of these operations be effected before

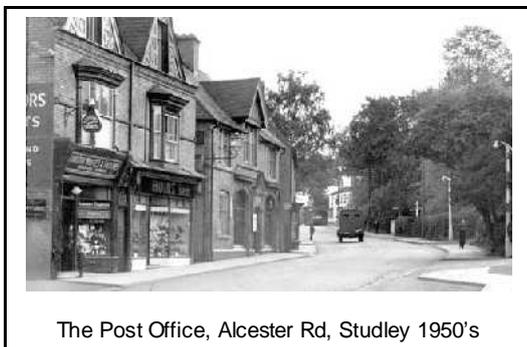
or after the right moment, a long list of casualties may be the issue.

However, an experienced sorter can tell by ear to within a few yards as to whereabouts he is, and whether the moment has arrived for exchanging mails, his hearing being guided entirely by such sounds as the peculiar reverberation noticeable



Above, thimbles strap and spring attachment on standard, closed and opened.

when rushing through a cutting, the roar when the mail burrows into a tunnel, or shoots under or over a bridge. It is true that there are other "cues" to act see that the line adjoining receives some extra ballast owing to its displacement; or again, to see that the mail-men pay some sort of attention to the various regulations drawn up for the safety of both themselves and the mails. A rather common



The Post Office, Alcester Rd, Studley 1950's

mistake at one time was to hang up a pouch with its proportionate length sideways, instead of lengthways and parallel with the line. As a consequence, the mail net has struck the pouch, and, ripping up the tough bull hide, fairly scattered the contents and all to the four winds-odd scraps of paper were found for over half-a-mile up the line in too small a portion to make it worth the while of a professional scavenger to collect.



This Christmas card was sent by John S Hatfield to his family in England in 1915, while he was held as a prisoner in the Ruhleben internment camp in Berlin during World War I. This camp was based at a former race course at Spandau, where the stables had been converted to barracks to hold a large number of mostly British nationals, many of them civilians or merchant seamen, held at the outbreak of the war in 1914.

Thanks to all our contributors in this edition, more meeting reports and articles are always needed. Please don't wait to be asked to put pen to paper.



Our three entrants to the ABPS National Competitions in Perth. (above right) Robin with his Gold medal winning exhibit, (left) Chris with his Vermeil winning exhibit and (right) Alan with his Large Silver winning exhibit.



(above) The infamous snow shovel
(right) Relaxing after a strenuous day at the exhibition



You are welcome to visit our website www.redditch-philatelic.org.uk for our programme, news and other Society activities. Article and statements made in this newsletter are by individuals and are not necessarily the views or policies of the Society.

Halcyon is produced for the members of Redditch Philatelic Society and anyone else with an interest in stamp collecting. If you are not a member and are interested in joining, please come along to one of our meetings, on the first or third Thursday of the month (September to June) at St. Luke's Memorial Hall in Headless Cross, Redditch B97 4JX. Visitors are also welcome to any to any of our meetings.