

The Philately of the Edwardian Era as shown in its Literature

A Paper presented on the occasion of the 88th Philatelic Congress of Great Britain, Renfrew, on 7th July, 2006. The Congress marked the Centenary of The Caledonian Philatelic Society.

By David R Beech, FRPSL

As this Paper is being given in 2006 no one can be alive who has any meaningful experience of philately in the reign of His Majesty King Edward VII. To discover virtually anything at all the researcher must examine the literature and the archives of the period. As far as the literature is concerned we have in the United Kingdom, that held in the library of The Royal Philatelic Society London and at the British Library, mainly in the Crawford Library.

The pastime of stamp collecting had developed from the very earliest days of those who launched it in the 1860s. That first generation were indeed pioneers and many would engage in the debate as to how to collect – in the English or French school? Fortunately the French style prevailed which opened the way for a new generation of collectors and dealers to develop the subject into philately in the 1870s to the 1890s and it was this group that was still much in evidence in the Edwardian Era. Clearly the development of institutions such as in 1869 with the formation of The Philatelic Society, London, the oldest existing Philatelic Society, had an important impact on the eventual sustainability of philately and stamp collecting through to the present day in Britain and around the world.

The Edwardian period was in many ways a golden age before the great social, economic and political upheaval of the Great War of 1914-18. Indeed the title “The Great War” tells us a lot about the age. It was a world that would seem strange to us now, where as John Betjeman put it “Safe were those evenings of the pre-war world, When firelight shone on green linoleum”. But as far as philately is concerned it was period of development that one would understand today. Society was to go through great change, but somehow philately kept marching on beyond the war, with the only philatelic casualties being the popularity of fiscals or

revenues and postal stationery which have only in recent years recaptured a deserved position.

So what can we find out about philately between 1901 and 1910 from its literature? I have attempted to paint a picture mainly using the unrivalled material in the Crawford Library and have divided my findings into several subjects: auctions, exhibitions, periodicals, the National collection, the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain, collecting fashions, dealers, people, and philatelic societies.

Auctions

A number of auctioneers were operating in the vibrant London market, amongst these was William Hadlow from 1891; Venton, Bull and Copper who had been established in 1892 and Plumridge and Company established in 1898. Most prominent was Puttick and Simpson who had started in 1894. It was in 1904 that they sold for a world record price for a postage stamp an unused copy of the Mauritius 1847 2d "Post Office" for £1,450. This is the splendid copy now in the Royal Philatelic Collection. Two new auction firms joined the list in 1901. One was Glendening and Company and the second was Martin, Ray and Company. This latter firm was to be taken over by Harmer, Rooke who were subsequently acquired by Stanley Gibbons.

Exhibitions

The exhibition scene was no less interesting with two major events. In 1906 the International Philatelic Exhibition was held at the Royal Horticultural Society's Hall, Vincent Square, this attracted some 257 varied exhibits including a number from H R H The Prince of Wales who included the Mauritius 2d mentioned above and several from the Earl of Crawford. It is interesting to note that just 4,123 visitors attended! In 1908 the Junior Philatelic Society under its most active President Fred J Melville had organised the Imperial Stamp Exhibition at Caxton Hall. In 1909 an exhibition was held at Manchester but I cover this under Congress below. International Exhibitions abroad were held in The Hague in 1901, Berlin in 1904 and Milan in 1906.

Periodicals

Philatelists were well supplied with magazines and those that had commenced publication in Victoria's Reign included *The Philatelic Record* (1879), *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal* (1890), *The London*

Philatelist (1892), and *Ewen's Weekly Stamp News* (1899). The periodical *Bric-a-Brac* had been started by the dealer J W Palmer in the late 1870s. He was rather obsessed with forgeries and his shop in the Strand had a room wall papered with stamps that he so declared! It was later demolished to widen the street and all were lost! Those that started publication after 1901 included *Gibbons Stamp Weekly* (1905), *West End Philatelist* (1904), *Stamp Lover* (1908) and *The British Philatelist* (1908). Three of these titles are still being published today.

National Collection

Of great importance in October 1903 was the opening of the permanent exhibition of the Tapling Collection at the British Museum. An index to the collection was published by the Trustees at the time, to be followed by *The Tapling Collection of Stamps and Postal Stationery at the British Museum* by Fred J Melville in 1905. Parts of the Tapling Collection may still be seen on exhibition at the British Library.

The Philatelic Congress of Great Britain

The first Philatelic Congress of Great Britain was held in conjunction with an philatelic Exhibition at Hulme Town Hall, Manchester between 18th and 20th February, 1909. The business included the formation of a National Society or Federation, the desirability of a Collectors' Catalogue, unnecessary issues, deceased collector's stamps and an encyclopaedia of philatelic literature. From which we gather that nothing much has changed! The Junior Philatelic Society of Scotland, the original name for The Caledonian Philatelic Society (the "Caley" as it is affectionately known) sent three delegates Robert Borland, J R Donaldson and J L Thomas. The literature now available includes a verbatim report, a volume of papers and a history of the event which includes the second Congress of 1910. The 1910 gathering was held in April at the Caxton Hall in London at the invitation of the Herts. Philatelic Society. The Caley's delegates were J L Thomas and H A Wise. The business included philatelic terms, unsolicited approval sheets, guarantees of authenticity – should they be for a definite period? and the manufacture and sale of forged stamps. Still issues of today!

Collecting Fashions

As ever it depended on your pocket but it was a period when you could collect quite a lot. The issues from the South African War, that is the Boer War of 1899-1901, were popular with the 1900 Mafeking siege

issues being the most expensive with the 1d showing Cadet Sergeant-Major Goodyear on his bicycle priced in one list at 22/6 that is £1.12.5 pence. The areas still in vogue included postal stationery, fiscals or revenues and telegraphs and dealers listings and catalogues were produced for this market. It was after the First World War that these groups lost popularity as did the associated literature, and joined the cinderellas of philately until the revival of recent years. This explains why postal stationery of Great Britain is less easily found after 1918 than before! Strangely the postage stamps of Great Britain were not as popular as one is accustomed to today, but the Australian States were an area much in demand.

Dealers

In addition to the auctioneers dealers had long established a vibrant market and amongst the leaders were Stanley Gibbons, Whitfield King, Ewen's Colonial Stamp Market, Charles Nissen, W H Peckitt, W T Wilson, Bridger and Kay, Fred R Ginn, Bright and Son, and Walter Morley.

People

The pages of the philatelic press and exhibition literature reveal to us the leaders, organisers and workers for our subject. The names for anyone who has made even the briefest study of the history of British philately are a who's who. These include H R H The Prince of Wales, The Earl of Crawford, M P Castle, Fred J Melville, J A Tilleard, E D Bacon, T W Hall, R B Yardley, W Dorning Beckton, Major E B Evans, C J Phillips, L L R Hausburg, L W Fulcher, W R Lane Joynt, H F Johnson and Baron A de Worms and Baron P de Worms and so many more, but to me these in particular sound down the years.

Philatelic Societies

By the Edwardian Era a good number of local societies had come into existence with those in Glasgow, Herts., Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Oxford, Sheffield, Bath, Bradford, Huddersfield, Hull, Leicester and Northampton having been established (this is not a complete list). The Philatelic Society, London was granted permission by H M The King to use the prefix "Royal" and became The Royal Philatelic Society, London in November, 1906. Other societies include the Junior PS, and Irish PS with just one specialist society the Fiscal Philatelic Society. Not be

missed out of the list is the Junior Philatelic Society of Scotland the original name of the Caledonian Philatelic Society founded in 1906.

It is impossible to give anything other than just an indication of the philately and philatelic world of the Edwardian Era in the space available to me in the Congress Handbook. I have attempted for those who may be interested to give some ideas of where they might find out more. What is clear is that philately and stamp collecting was enjoying a healthy time with much activity and publication that has since been built on to give us what we have today.