

Philatelic Research at the British Library

By David R Beech, FRPSL

Head of the Philatelic Collections at the British Library

Introduction

The three key elements of the Curator's job are: to collect, to preserve and to make available. In many ways that of making available is the most difficult to achieve and so I welcome this opportunity to describe the considerable resources available to researchers in philately and postal history at the British Library.

The British Library is the National Library of the United Kingdom and while it was established only (by the British Library Act, 1972) in 1973, its collections originate from a number of institutions, significantly for the philatelist from the British Museum library departments and from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in the form of the India Office Library and Records.

The size, range and coverage of these national collections of international importance is difficult to get across, indeed one would have to spend a lifetime in understanding their inestimable significance to world culture and scholarship. One is forced to quote numbers, give examples of classes of material and describe a few individual items of special significance. In its last Annual Report to 31st March, 2004 the British Library's holdings were given at 92,522,446 items, but even this does not give the true number as serials (periodicals, newspapers, auction catalogues etc) are counted by the number of catalogue entries. This means, for example, that *The London Philatelist* the journal of The Royal Philatelic Society London has one catalogue entry but is currently in its 113th volume or about 1,300 individual numbers.

A brief survey of classes of material may be useful.

Monographs	11,223, 249
Serial titles	836,328
Newspaper titles	55,718
Manuscripts	312,263
India Office Records	391,374
Philatelic items	8,220,994
Cartographic items	4,301,034

Music scores	1,590,029
Sound disks	1,285,914
Sound tape items	221,967
Videograms	25,193
Prints and Drawings	32,597
Photographs	251,049
Patent specifications	53,483,537
Reports on microfilm	10,115,000
Theses	176,200
 Total	 92,522,446

Philatelic material

This is mainly held in the Philatelic Collections which are the largest such collections in the world. The scope of this material is of the widest with almost all countries and periods covered in postage stamps, postal stationery and meter stamps, with important coverage for revenue stamps and postal history materials. About fifty important Collections or Archives are held, all of which have been acquired by donation, bequest or transfer from Government departments, with one received via the in lieu of tax scheme. The Philatelic Collections were established in 1891 with the bequest of the outstanding Tapling Collection.

Since 1891 philatelic collections have been received on a regular basis making them now the most extensive in existence and the most significant for research. About half of the material held is of Great Britain, with large groups of British Colonial or Commonwealth and a balance of Foreign countries material.

The Principal Collections are: -

General Collections

The Tapling Collection was formed by T K Tapling and bequeathed in 1891. It is of postage stamps and postal stationery (with some telegraph stamps) to the 1890 to 1900 period. It is virtually complete in all basic issues and most of the principal rarities, with its strength in unused examples, it has with excellent ranges of shades, essays, proofs and some covers etc

The Supplementary Collection [to the Tapling Collection] is of material given between 1900 and 1922 and is chiefly British Colonial from the Crown Agents. Mainly unused with some proofs.

The Campbell-Johnston Collection is of poster stamps mainly advertising exhibitions from about 1850 to the 1920s. Given in 1932 by Mrs Florence Campbell-Johnston and formed by Louis Campbell-Johnston.

The Crown Agents Collection comprises issued stamps given by the Crown Agents from 1922.

The Crown Agents Philatelic and Security Printing Archive includes essays, artwork, proofs, colour trials and associated records for postage stamps and revenue stamps, postal stationery, postal orders and paper money produced by the Crown Agents. The Archive covers the period from about 1900 but some types of material or records are of a lesser span. Extensive.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection is of British Commonwealth postage stamps, revenue stamps and postal stationery, with some postal orders from about 1890 to 1992.

The General Collection is a world Collection of small acquisition from 1923.

The Harrison Collection is of die proofs engraved by J A C Harrison between 1911 and 1937. Given by H W P Harrison in 1963.

The Heys Collection is of the stamps and cards issued by amateur radio operators in Europe and was presented by John Heys in 2001.

The Imperial War Museum's Stamp Collection is of 1914-18 World War issues and former issues of occupied territories. Transferred from the Imperial War Museum in 2001.

The Kay Collection of British Colonial revenue stamps to about 1940. It was formed by A B Kay.

The McInroy Collection comprises meter stamps of Great Britain and the world. Donated in 2004 by Dr R McInroy. Extensive.

The Mosely Collection is of African British Colonial postage stamps to 1935 was formed by Dr Edward Mosely and presented in 1945 by Mrs K Cunningham.

The Turner Collection is of world postage stamp forgeries, was formed by S R Turner RPD and bequeathed in 1973.

The Universal Postal Union Collection covers stamps and some postal stationery issued by UPU member countries being specimen or unused examples. Extensive.

The Wilson-Todd Collection is of 1914-18 World War occupation or War Tax issues in mainly unused singles. Formed by James Wilson-Todd.

Great Britain Collections

The Board of Inland Revenue Stamping Department Archive comprises postage and revenue proof material 1710 to date and postal stationery. It includes large numbers of proof sheets in black, India postage and revenue stamps as well as issues of Great Britain overprinted for use in other territories, in proof and issued form. Very extensive.

The Chinchen Collection is of Lundy Island, formed by Barry Chinchen and donated in 1977.

The H M Customs and Excise Collection of revenue stamps in proof or registration form includes Table Water Duty, Medicine Tax, Playing Card Tax stamps and Pension Order Forms. Transferred in 2002.

The Ewen Collection is of railway letter stamps 1891 to 1912 with proofs, sheets and covers. It was formed by H L'Estrange Ewen and donated in 1949.

The Fletcher Collection covers nearly 300 years of public and private postal services. About half of the Collection is of pre-adhesive postal and other markings which illustrate the development and operation of a large number of different services. The remainder comprises issued stamps, some postal stationery including many plate reconstructions and is mainly used. The Collection was formed by H G Fletcher and transferred from the London Borough of Haringey in 1989. Extensive in 341 volumes.

The Harrison and Sons Collection is mainly of Egypt 1921-22 issue and Palestine 1927-45 issue. Donated by De La Rue in 2002.

The HMSO Collection includes Excise Revenue, National Savings and National Insurance stamps.

The Landmark Trust Lundy Island Philatelic Archive includes artwork, essays, proofs and issued stamps from 1969 and an extensive range of postmarking devices from 1929. Given by the Trust in 1991.

The Langmead Collection comprise Great Britain and Ireland Telegraph stamps and stationery formed by Peter Langmead and received via the in lieu of tax scheme in 1991.

The McInroy Collection see under General Collections

The Scott Collection see under Air Mail Collections.

The Sherborn Collection is of postal stationery envelopes of 1841. It was formed by C Davis Sherborn and donated in 1913.

The Treasury Excise Correspondence Collection comprises entire letters between the Treasury and the Excise from 1826 to the 1840s showing a wide variety of postal marks and rates. Transferred from HM Customs and Excise in 1992.

The Turner Collection is of railway letter stamps 1891 to the mid-1940s and is strong in covers. Formed by S R Turner RDP and bequeathed in 1973.

The Turner Collection is of Newspaper tax stamps and of the 1694 6d revenue tax stamps. Formed by S R Turner RDP and bequeathed in 1973.

The Walker Collection is of Channel Islands second world War German occupation issues (mainly Guernsey). Given in 1948 by G L Walker.

Air Mail Collections

The Fitz Gerald Collection is of world air mails to the 1930s strong in France, Germany, Italy, Newfoundland and the United States. Formed by Mrs Augustine Fitz Gerald and given in 1947.

The Monks Collection is of air mails to and from South Africa formed by David Monks and bequeathed in 1981.

The Seymour Collection is of mail associated with the Comet aircraft, was formed by Kenneth Seymour and donated by his son and daughter in 2003.

The Scott Collection is of Great Britain inland air mails to the late 1970s. Formed by H Eric Scott and given in 1977.

Country Collections

The Bailey Collection is of Spain 1936-39 Civil War postal history material mainly covers. Formed by Eric Bailey and now on loan from the Spanish Study Circle.

The Bojanowicz Collection is of Polish postal history 1939-1946 including Wartime posts in Poland and Polish Free Forces. Formed by M A Bojanowicz RDP and donated in 1966.

The Burnett Collection is of Hyderabad postage stamps, postal stationery and postal history. Formed by A H Burnett and given by his sons A D and R G Burnett in 1991.

The Chand Collection of classic Mauritius postage stamps on cover and postal history is on loan from Vikram Chand of Singapore.

The Davies Collection is of Libya revenue stamps 1955 to 1969, was formed from the Bradbury Wilkinson Archive and presented by J N Davies in 1992.

The Foreign Office Collection is of Germany 1945-48 Allied Military Administration issues and consists of proofs, colour trails and issued stamps. Transferred from the Foreign Office in 1956.

The Ginger Collection is of the postage stamps of Victoria (Australia) and covers the period 1850 to 1883. It was formed by George Ginger RDP and is on loan from The Manchester Museum, The University of Manchester.

The Kaluski Collection is of Poland postage stamps to 2002 including Russian issues, German occupation issues, the Polish Government in Exile, etc. Formed by Janusz Kaluski and donated in 2003.

The Model Collection is of Germany 1945-46 provisional issues unused and on covers. Formed by Dr Walther Model von Thunen and presented in 1956.

The Murray Collection is of China from 1865 to the mid 1950s, mainly unused and used with some blocks and covers. Formed by Engineer Captain J A Murray and Dr S E Murray and presented by Maurice Murray in 1980.

The Row Collection of Siam from 1883 to 1918 is chiefly unused with many blocks and is strong in the various surcharges including some postal stationery and issues used in Kedah and Kelantan. Formed by R W H Row and presented in 1919.

The Ryan Collection is of Hungarian municipal revenue stamps in proof and issued form. Formed by Gary Ryan and donated in 2001.

The Shelley Collection is of Spain 1936-39 Civil War International Brigades mainly covers. Formed by Ronald Shelley and bequeathed in 2003.

The Smith Collection is of League of Nations material and United Nations postage stamps and covers. It was formed by M Martin Smith and was bequeathed in 2002.

Special Collections

The Muraleetharan Papers were formed by George Muraleetharan and relate to research into various British Commonwealth postage stamps including the 1935 Silver Jubilee issue, the 1937 Coronation issue, the 1947 Victory or Peace issue, 1953 Coronation issue, the Royal portraits for the issues of George V, George VI and Elizabeth II, correspondence relating to security printers, the Royal Mint Archives, De La Rue Archives, and Australian issues in the Australian Archives. Eleven volumes.

The Postal Authority Pre-Issue Publicity Collection comprises leaflets, press releases, etc for world new issues 1960s to 2000.

The Photograph Collection is of photographs of material of the world not in the British Library collections.

The Royal Philatelic Society London meeting notes. Grey literature being notes and papers presented at meetings of the Society from 1950.

The Williams Papers formed by L N and M Williams and Norman Williams and relate to research for books and articles 1940 to 1999.

The classes of material held include: -

Air Mails:

The Fitz Gerald Collection, The Monks Collection, The Scott Collection, The Seymour Collection

Essays, artwork, colour trials, proofs, etc for Crown Agents countries:

The Crown Agents Philatelic and Security Printing Archive

Meter stamps of the world:

The McInroy Collection

Photographs:

The Photograph Collection

Postal stationery of the world.

The Tapling Collection, The Crown Agents Philatelic and Security Printing Archive, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, The Sherborn Collection.

Poster stamps: circa 1850 to mid 1920s:

The Campbell-Johnston Collection

Revenue stamps:

The Crown Agents Philatelic and Security Printing Archive, The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Collection, The Kay Collection, The Turner Collection, The Board of Inland Revenue Stamping Department Archive, The HMSO Collection, The Davies Collection, The HM Customs and Excise Collection, The Ryan Collection.

Philatelic literature

The British Library holds one of the world's most extensive collections of philatelic literature estimated to be some 30,000 to 35,000 volumes. These are mainly in Western languages and include monographs, serials, auction catalogues, philatelic exhibition literature, stamp catalogues, bibliographies, indexes, etc. and have been acquired by legal deposit (with some Colonial legal deposit), donation, bequest and purchase. The philatelic literature is organised into three groups:

1) In the Philatelic Collections, departmental reference library used for reference and enquiry work. This group reflects the makeup of

the Philatelic Collections and the demands of research and information needs.

2) The Crawford Library of some 4,500 volumes dating from 1861 to 1913 and regarded as the most complete holding for this period. It is catalogued in *Catalogue of the Crawford Library of Philatelic Literature at the British Library*, Fishkill, The Printer's Stone Limited in association with the British Library, 1991.

The Crawford Library was formed by the 26th Earl of Crawford between 1898 and 1913 when it was bequeathed to the Nation. It includes the Tiffany and Frankel philatelic Libraries from the United States and Germany and has extensive holdings of rare monographs, serials and early auction catalogues. Included in the unique or rare items are a set of Chinese Imperial Post Circulars from numbers 1 to 32, 1897 to 1900 which set out the ways that the post should operate.

3) The General Library, acquired in the ways described above and available in the Reading Rooms, catalogued in and available via the Integrated Catalogue available at www.bl.uk

Background materials

The Background materials are a unique Collection supporting philatelic research and the classes of sources involved include:

Printed Books Collections with Timetables mainly railway with some air; Directories of place, trade profession etc; Books and some sound recordings with copyright royalty stamps; Shipping information and records; [British] Mercantile Committee on Postage, papers 1837 to 1840; British Proclamations relating to the post (from 1583); two 1680 original Dockwra post advertisements or notices and such items as *A true account of the life, trial, and execution, with the dying confession of Huffey White and Robert Kendall, who were executed at Northampton, on Friday the 27th of August, 1813 for robbing the Leeds mail coach.* 1813.

Sound Archive which includes recordings with copyright royalty stamps and the *Singing Postman* recordings!

The Map Library, one of the most extensive in existence, includes postal maps for Argentina 1863, Bombay 1878 to 1925, Cape Colony seven maps 1903 to 1933, China eight maps 1903 to 1936, England 1812

to 1905, French West Africa 1922, Hawaii and Guam 1905, Hungary four maps 1837 to 1847, London twenty-three maps 1837 to 1973, New York State 1868, New Brunswick 1784, Nova Scotia 1876, Pembroke, Milford to Carmarthen 1827, Peru 1794, Russia in Europe 1812, Scotland map of Scottish Post Towns showing routes for letters through Carlisle, Transvaal 1890, Yugoslavia, 1949, 1955 and 1970.

As an example of what might be held for an individual country, China in general, has 880 maps from 1556 to date and clearly many of these may be of research value to postal historians.

The Western Manuscripts Collections include: papers relating to British Postal Reform with some referring to Rowland Hill, James Chalmers, Sir Henry Cole, Francis Freeling, Colonel Maberly, George Moffatt.

The Music Library had some interesting postal titles with *The Post Band*, a march of 1899, *Here and There. Post Office Rag* 1917, *The Old General Post Office or Royal Mail Polka* 1854

The Newspaper Library holds a world collection which will include shipping information, details of changes in postal officials, postal rates, postal routes, information about post offices, etc. This source will include contemporary reports and commentary of events of postal or revenue interest, such as the opening of a railway or a crash on a railway, etc.

Official Publications are publications of official international, national or local organisations. This is a vast area, again a world collection, with much to offer. The kinds of material that may be found would include Parliamentary or legislative Bills, Acts, debate reports (Hansard, etc), papers, regulations, treaties, conventions, postal guides, reports, Government Gazettes, etc and some of these will relate to postal and revenue stamp taxes.

Material from the Universal Postal Union will cover Postal Congresses and the resulting conventions and agreements with the detailed regulations and specimen forms for the operation or administration of a postal service or type of postal service. As an indication of the importance of UPU material to the postal historian I list below a range of the headings taken from *Universal Postal Union. Convention of Rome (26th May 1906) Together with the detailed regulations for its execution*: - Rates of Postage and General Conditions, Registered Articles Advices of Delivery Requests for Information, Express Delivery, Mails exchanged with warships, Counterfeit postage stamps, Fixing the Rates of Postage, Reply-Coupons, Insufficient Prepayment, etc.

Asia, Pacific & Africa Collections cover material in mainly 350 oriental languages, with 65,000 manuscripts, 900,000 printed books, 120,000 volumes of periodicals and newspapers, and the India Office Records (the Public Records relating to the British administration of India). This last group are the largest holding of Public Records outside of the National Archives [formally the Public Record Office] and include files relating to postal services, stamps, tax and revenue stamps adhesive and unadhesive, military records, Ecclestial records (including those of baptisms, marriages and burials for which certified copies of entries are issued). Oriental maps, official publications are also to be found here.

The Science Collections include 53 million world Patent specifications which will include details of inks, printing, embossing, perforating, etc together with inventions for postal mechanisation. These collections include the Patent for the Perkins D Cylinder printing press of 1819, the “Penny Black” printing press on public exhibition at the Library; British Patent 1819 number 4400 *Specification of Jacob Perkins. Engine Lathe for Engraving surfaces, Printing and Coining Presses, etc.*

Access

All of this extensive material may be consulted by researchers who hold a British Library Reader Pass. Those seeking a Reader Pass should attend at the Reader Admission Office bringing with them identification in the form of a Passport and a utility bill to prove an address of residence.

To see material in the Philatelic Collections an appointment is necessary and researchers should in the first instance contact a member of the curatorial staff. So that full assistance can be given and material made available a description of the work being undertaken giving countries, dates, classes of material, etc should be made and an indication of the level of research should be given, for example for a monograph or handbook, article or paper, etc.

The philatelic literature and background materials listed above are available in the appropriate British Library Reading Room.

The Philatelic Collections curatorial staff is always pleased to give general advice on philatelic research at the British Library.

The British Library,
Philatelic Collections,

96, Euston Road,
London,
NW1 2DB

Telephone: 020 7412 7635

Fax: 020 7412 7780

E-mail: philatelic@bl.uk

Web site for the Philatelic Collections: www.bl.uk/collections/philatelic

Web site other enquires: www.bl.uk

The British Library Integrated Catalogue: www.bl.uk

September 2004

Published in *Cross Post* [Journal of The Friends of Postal Heritage]
Volume 10 Number 3, Autumn, 2004, pages 119 to 128. ISSN 0268-
4349.