

Federation Stamp Day at Tempsford

After welcoming cup tea or coffee, the day got off to a prompt start with our speaker for the day, Michael Pitt-Payne, being introduced and launching straight into the first of three excellent and different displays.

UK mail to France - 1727 - 1900

With two covers from the early 18th century it was soon clear how complex the postal rates were with payments due in both the United Kingdom and France, where charges were made to London, from London to Calais and then to wherever in France. At this time mail was rarely prepaid and so postage due was collected on delivery. This, of course, meant complex accounting was required on both sides of the Channel.

The French Revolution added complications and indeed for a number of years around the turn of the 19th century no mails travelled officially between the two countries. There was a further suspension of mail during the months leading up to Waterloo and for some time thereafter.

Many superb covers were shown showing the routes and rates charged and the changes brought about by various treaties and conventions, particularly those agreed in 1836 and 1843. In the former new arrangements included such aspects as stage payments e.g. prepaid mail, or mail part paid to Calais or monies collected in France by the postman delivering the letter, while the latter provided for a more uniform single rate to France with 5d being charged for each half of the journey. This led, in 1848, to the production of the 10d embossed stamp for fully prepaid mail. The introduction of the Uniform Penny Post in January 1840 led to the dropping of any charge for letters to France for their carriage to London.

In 1855 the postal charge was reduced to 4d for each part of the journey for ¼ oz letter, a registration fee for registered mail was introduced at a further 4d and arrangements were put in force to cover underpaid mail. New times were brought in for the closing of post offices; late mail could be accepted by the post master for an extra 1d 'late fee'. However, many such fees ended up in the post master's pocket and so compulsory marking of late charges was enforced. Again many fine examples of covers and entires were shown to illustrate these changes.

Postage costs were further reduced in 1870, when the 4d rate was cut to 3d, while at the same time the weight of a letter could be increased to 1/3 oz. At a meeting in Berne in 1874, many countries reached new, simpler charges for international mail were agreed, particularly for transit mail. Tax marks were introduced along with regulations for foreign post card rates, printed paper rates and letter cards.

Postage Due Mail

The 1812 Post Office Act brought in new postal rates, starting with a charge of 4d for a single sheet for a trip of up to 30 miles, rising to 1/- for up to 300 miles and a 1d extra for each 100 miles thereafter. These rates remained in force until December 1839 with the introduction of the short-lived Uniform 4d Post.

During this period most letters were paid for by the recipient, so charges were handwritten on the covers in black. If prepaid, red ink was used. Where a letter had to be re-directed then a further charge became payable.

From 10th January 1840 when the Uniform Penny Post came in, the charge was to be prepaid, thus saving time for the post man on his round. If the postage was not prepaid, then the post man had to collect the fee which was 2d – i.e. the notion of a double rate was established .

Several 'instructional' marks were introduced such as 'more to pay', 'over ½ oz' and 'postage unpaid'. An additional charge of 1d was introduced as a flat rate re-direction fee, unless this was to be possible within the same postal district, when there was no charge and a 'R' in a circle with a crown mark was used.

From 1870 printed papers could be sent at a special rate as long as no letters were included. To ensure this such papers had to be handed in at Post Offices unbound to allow checking for infringements of the regulations. Printed post cards were also permitted from this time as long as certain restrictions were followed, otherwise the cheaper rate was doubled. 1887 re-direction charges were abolished and a ½d charge was introduced for 'return to sender'. Private post cards were permitted from 1894, subject to regulations, after pressure from printing companies wanting to benefit from tourism. A hand stamp of '1d' plus the use of the town's station number was used for a number of years to indicate wrongful use of post cards.

The 20th April 1914 saw the first use of postage due stamps, charged at double the deficiency rate, however, the post man was required to pay for the monies he was due to collect from his own purse, to ensure that these fees were duly collected.

Where there was disallowed writing on the front of a post card, or its illustration was textured, it was charged as a letter and a 'T' mark was applied and postage due stamps affixed. If a letter was marked with blue lines or contained inclusions – such as coins – then it was treated as registered post and charged 3d. During the first World War there was often a shortage of postage stamps in the conflict area and so incoming mail from the armed forces was only charged 1d.

Travelling Post Offices permitted the collecting of 'late mail' for which an extra charge was made. When this was unpaid then postage due stamps were used. Incomplete meter marks were also subject to postage dues.

The 15th February 1971 saw the decimalisation of our currency and with it new designs of postage due stamp with the new values; these had been released in stages from June 1970. Old currency stamps remained valid until 13th March 1972 and thereafter they were a cause of underpayment. Sadly, by the time the third design of decimal postage dues was launched, plans were already afoot to phase out their use all together. In 1973 the fee charging regime changed. From then on the

unpaid postage became due together with a 'handling fee'. Initially this worked out as 13p (postage) plus 10p and, for a while at least, this was cheaper than the previous double rate approach. Handling charges increased so that in 2001 it was 50p, 80p in 2002 and in 2004 it was further increased to £1.

And now you have to go to your local sorting office to collect the item as well!

Social Philately

In the afternoon there followed a wonderful collection of postal history superbly researched and written up with many illustrations. The first part of the display related to Reginald Bray, known as the man who posted himself. He was obsessed with the Post Offices rules and regulations and went out of his way for many years to test and tease the Post Office. For example he used pictograms to create the addresses on letters, used post marks for the same purpose, tried posting a rabbit's skull with postage stamps attached and many, many more ruses. He sent requests for autographs to thousands of famous people, collecting about 10 000. In all, he sent some 30 000 items between around 1900 and 1935. Examples of these were shown.

A letter was displayed that had been sent 'Free' from Lord Clifford who was the first Catholic member in Parliament (Upper House) and research had provided his life story, that of the recipient a Mr Ambrose, and details of the Manor he was living in at the time.

Another intriguing item was a 1783 letter from a John Campbell who worked for the Royal Bank of Scotland from 1727. It turned out that in 1745 he was a cashier at the Bank when 'notes' were produced to the value of £3 000 requiring that they be honoured in gold, to pay for Bonny Prince Charlie's uprising. Furthermore Mr Campbell married twice; his first wife produced no children but he had 14 children with his second and 13 of his offspring outlived him.

There was also an example of a Queen Anne's Bounty letter. This was a fund which could pay money to priests in poor parishes, which in turn, was paid for by the donation of a priest's first year's stipend and 10% of all further stipends if he were in a wealthy parish or was a retained vicar.

This section showed just what can be derived from a letter and its cover and served as an example of producing superb philately at a modest financial cost.

Those who were unable to attend missed an absolute treat. Now how will the Federation follow that?