

Books A warm welcome to *Collect British Postal Stationery*

IT HAS BEEN a long time coming but this new title by Dr Alan Huggins and Colin Baker is worth the wait. In 1970 Dr Huggins published his much acclaimed book *British Postal Stationery*, and a new edition was eagerly awaited. However this new book 'is not designed simply as a replacement for the earlier work which contains a very considerable amount of additional background and specialised data that may not necessarily be of primary importance to all collectors.' Thus *Collect British Postal Stationery* is subtitled 'A Simplified Listing of British Postal Stationery 1840 to 2007', but don't let the word 'Simplified' make you believe it is not a major piece of work, skillfully distilling detailed study and research into a concise, well-illustrated and relatively easy-to-use book, sure to encourage interest in the subject as well as satisfy existing postal stationery collectors.

It opens with a short but worthwhile account of the Nature and Origins of Postal Stationery, followed by three pages explaining the Structure of Listing with a select bibliography, a list of relevant societies and organisations, and a note on the pricing system used. The listings are in broad categories such as Envelopes, Letter Sheets, Telegraph Forms, Postcards, Newspaper Wrappers, Certificates of Posting, Registered, Recorded & Special Delivery Envelopes, Letter Cards and Air Mail Letter Sheets (aerogrammes). Each includes sub-divisions, such as Post Office and Stamped to Order issues, and Envelopes covers Swiftair, Airsure, Airpacks, Cassette Envelopes, and Mailpacks, as well as conventional stamped envelopes. Oddly, Letter Sheets – Official Issues are in the Newspaper Wrappers section, rather than in the Envelopes section with Post Office letter sheets.

Each section is well illustrated, showing entire items of stationery or imprinted stamps, or other important detail to aid identification, and the listings are clearly demarcated by reign. Each item is given a reference number, which will be useful for both collectors and dealers. Items are priced mint and used although much modern material is unpriced used, as commercially used items (as opposed to philatelic usage, often with a special

handstamp) rarely come on the market. Where modern material is priced used this often exceeds mint prices; for example the 8p envelope (EP128) of 1979 is priced £15 used compared to £2 mint. The four short-lived 1992 Mail Packs are priced £15 each mint, but unpriced used. Illustrations for the stamps on Stamped to Order Envelopes & Paper make four attractive pages, and the valuations indicate how scarce some of these now are. The listings of compound stampings will be closely scrutinised by specialised collectors to see what they are missing, or indeed if any in their collections are omitted from the listings.

Official postal stationery for use by government departments are popular and examples are listed for the Inland Revenue, Board of Agriculture & Fisheries, Crown Agents and others, as well as those of the Lords and Commons. Stamped telegraph forms continued into the early 1950s and are priced mint only, prices ranging from £15 to £200. The Postcard section includes a number of commemorative issues, such as the Wembley Exhibition 1924-25, 1993 London and Stratford scenes, 1994 Giant's Causeway and the latest 2007 Scout Centenary set. None of these recent issues is priced used. Official postcards include rare issues of Victoria, Edward VII, and George V for the Irish Land Commission, Patent Office, the Inland Revenue, Army and Admiralty. Forces (Field Service) postcards were issued in 1914. Post Office issues of newspaper wrappers ceased after 1938, although stamped to order issues continued until the 1970s, with compound stampings of up to six stamps known. Similarly, PO issues of stamped certificates of posting date only from Victoria's reign, but 1970s STO issues are recorded with pre-decimal and decimal Machin impressions.

The Registered envelopes section is especially interesting and includes modern 'plastic' Special Delivery issues which now carry a 'Paid' or PPI type indicia rather than a Machin head stamp. These Special Delivery envelopes, it is noted, also exist without pre-payment indicia and required adhesive stamps (or meter impressions) to be affixed. These 'fall outside the currently accepted



definition of postal stationery', so are not listed. Also noted are items 'used by the Post Office for their own mail'. A popular category of registered envelopes are those issued for Forces mail until 1984. Registered envelopes overprinted for the Admiralty in the reign of Edward VII are listed and valued at £300 mint and £500 used. Letter cards, once popular for short private messages, were discontinued in 1981. They were revived in 1997-98 as 'Aircards' in pictorial designs.

The final section deals with probably the best-known and most popular postal stationery area – Air Mail Letter Sheets, or aerogrammes, first issued in 1943. Of the standard PO issues, only those of George VI and pre-decimal QEII issues are priced used; decimal issues, although until recently used in large quantities, are rarely found in dealers stocks except for philatelic usage with special postmarks or flight cachets. Genuine used examples, for both business and social mail, are worth looking for. There are many special issues of aerogrammes, from the 1948 Olympic Games to Christmas 2006 (reissued in 2007). The stamps and pictorial front panels are all illustrated – a

most useful reference and a colourful seven pages of 171 illustrations. These include the Scottish and Welsh issues, Christmas designs, and occasional true commemoratives, such as the 1964 Shakespeare Festival, 1977 Silver Jubilee, 1981 Royal Wedding, and 1996 Olympic Games. A considerable number of STO aerogrammes are listed including PO issues with additional stamps added; although produced for philatelic purposes, they have a following. The book concludes with a comprehensive index. I spotted a few minor errors – the mis-spelling of Llangollen in the postnotes listing (pages 16-17), and a Elizabeth II envelope (for the 10th anniversary of the NPM, 1979) shown alongside a Mulready and 1890 Uniform Penny Post envelope in the Queen Victoria section (page 1). But the authors are warmly congratulated on a job well done; their surnames will be used as shorthand when referring to their work by postal stationery collectors for many years to come. JH ●

168 pages, hardbound with dustjacket. £30 (postage £4 UK, £7 Europe and elsewhere surface mail, £10 Rest of World air-mail) from Ian Harvey, 27 Landford Rd, Putney, London SW15 1AQ. Remittances payable to Great Britain Philatelic Society.