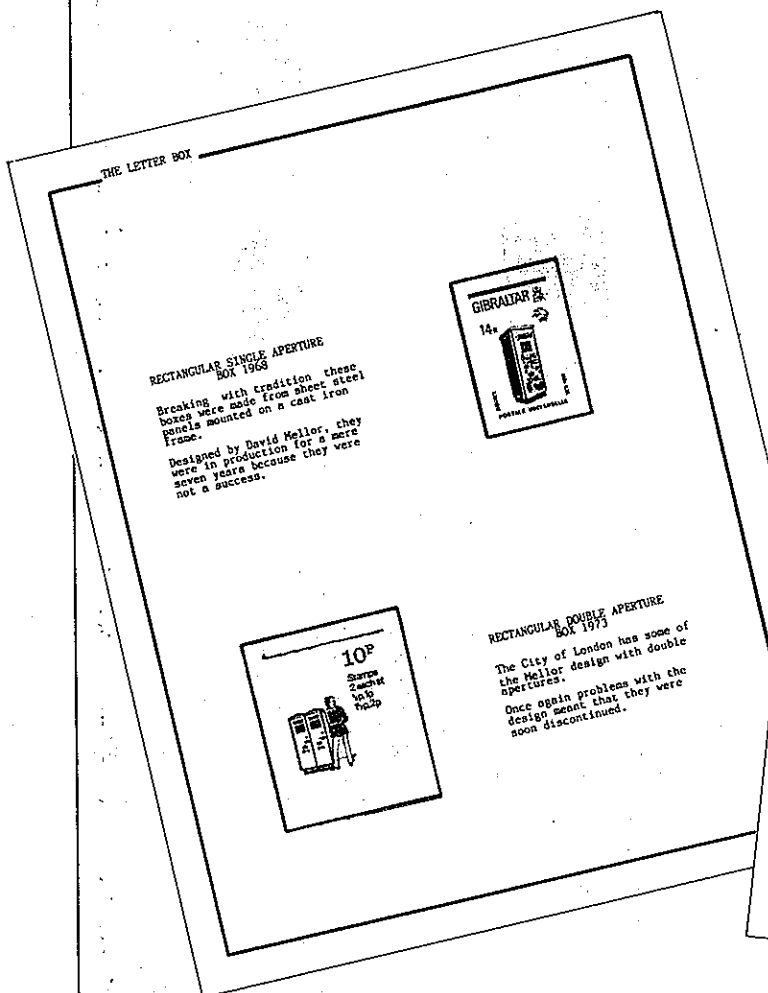
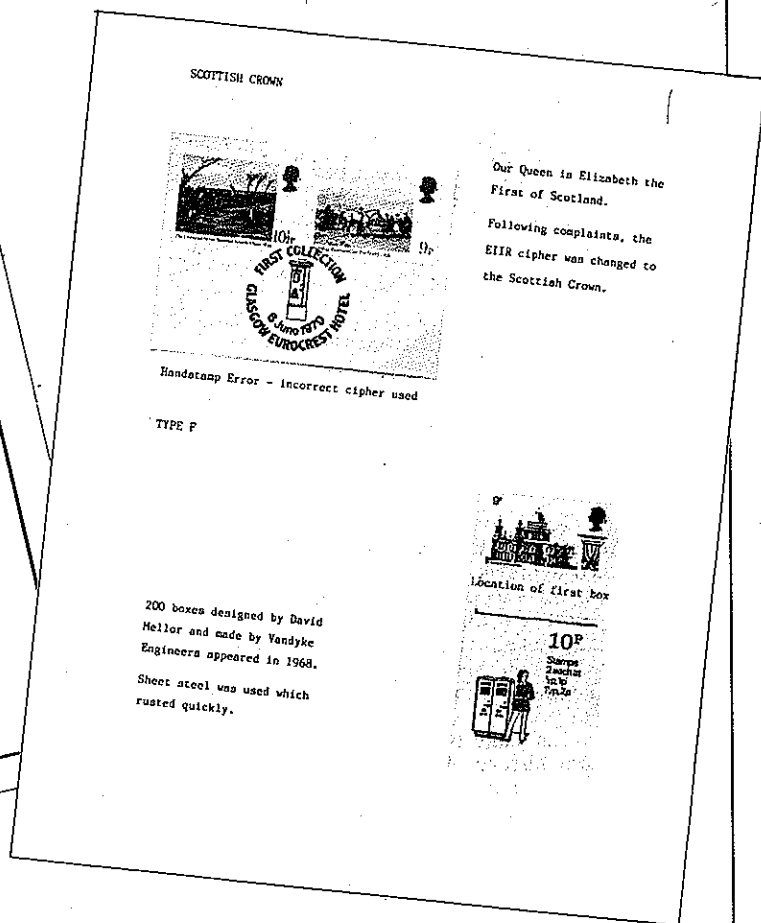


It is possible to succeed at national competitions, if you are prepared to listen to advice. This was certainly the experience of Glenn Morgan.

Exhibiting Letter Boxes



First attempt: for the National Philatelic Society competition (an eight sheet entry) — too much write up and too few stamps.



Second attempt: for Stampex 1984 — a little less write up and postal markings included for the first time (resulting in a silver medal).

Thematic collecting is boring and childish'. This was my original view about an up-and-coming branch of our hobby until I visited the British Philatelic Exhibition in 1983 and studied the exhibits.

My main collection of Channel Islands postal history had stagnated and I needed a complete change from specialised one-country collecting. I was so impressed by what I saw that I started to direct my mind to finding a theme. This was probably the biggest task that I had to overcome. What was I inter-

ested in that could be collected thematically? Sport? Wildlife? Both had been over collected and seemed too obvious a choice and so I opted for the humble letter box that is used by millions but hardly ever noticed.

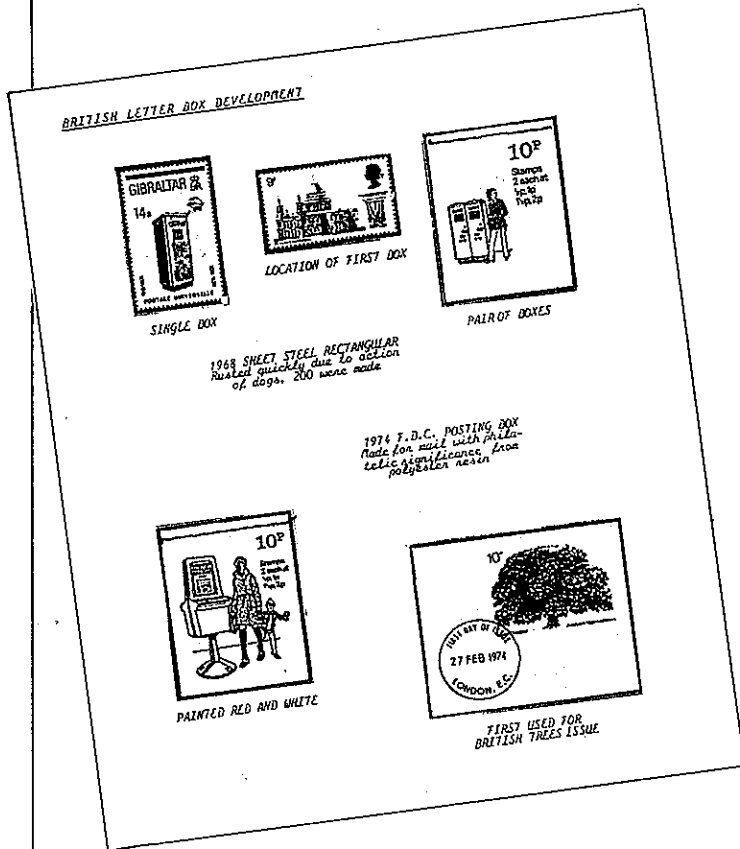
I checked my stamp collections and found examples on the stamps of Guernsey, Jersey and Gibraltar together with British stamp booklet covers. Had I chosen too large a theme, I pondered? A copy of Gibbons' *Stamps of the World* catalogue was purchased and I began wading through the 2,000-odd

pages to find out. Stamps even remotely connected with the theme were noted and I found that letter boxes were not the favourite choice of postal administrations for depiction on their stamp emissions.

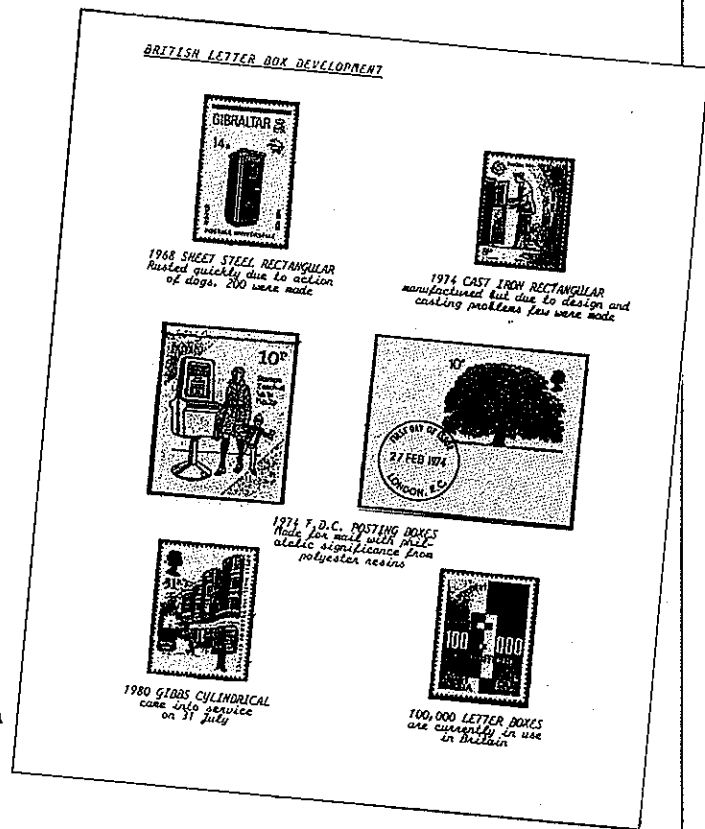
Despite this set-back I visited my favourite dealer armed with a wants list fully expecting every item to be in my possession by that evening. I was in for disappointments. I had opted to collect mint stamps only as mixing mint and used on the same page was apparently frowned upon, especially if I ever decided to exhibit my

collection. The dealer disliked splitting a mint set just so that I could have the stamp with the hexagonal Penfold box on it. This forced me to purchase unwanted values which proved to be an expensive way of obtaining the lowest value. Additionally, I soon found that 'sorry sold out' or 'I don't stock foreign' seemed to be the order of the day. Indeed, I am still missing some sets from my collection.

Undaunted, I gradually purchased what I needed and set about writing-up the collection. It was at this point that I



Third attempt: for British Philatelic Exhibition (awarded a bronze-silver medal).



Fourth attempt: for Stampex again (and again a silver medal).

'discovered' the Letter Box Study Group. I joined and have since received a much greater understanding of the subject. Details are recorded of all types of boxes that exist, regular meetings are held and newsletters keep members informed and in contact.

Perhaps at this stage of the article a potted history of the British letter box would not go amiss. The boxes that will be most familiar to collectors fall into three basic categories, namely the *pillar box* with either one or two apertures; the *wall box* either embedded into a wall as its name implies or, where no suitable wall exists, in a brick pillar; or the *lamp box* fixed to lamp standards or telephone poles.

The first type dates back to the 1850s when Anthony Trollope, the novelist and Post Office Surveyors Clerk, was sent to the Channel Islands in order to improve postal services. Whilst there he learnt of receptacles in the streets of Paris for the posting of letters and he suggested to his superiors that they be introduced in Great Britain. Boxes were installed experimentally on Jersey in 1852, followed by Guernsey the following year. They were so successful that the first boxes appeared on the UK mainland

shortly afterwards at Botcher-gate in Carlisle. London had to wait until 1855 before she got her first box which was at once ridiculed by *Punch* magazine for resembling a stove.

For many years local Post Office regions were allowed to design their own letter boxes and commission the manufacture of them. Consequently a large range of styles exist. It was eventually decided that it would be more cost effective to 'bulk buy' and offer a limited range of models that would suit the largest city and smallest hamlet alike.

Historical value

The most recent type was introduced in 1980 and was designed by Tony Gibbs. Cylindrical in shape, it is slowly becoming more numerous as new road schemes, building work or road traffic accidents necessitate the removal of older boxes that could have occupied the same site for over one hundred years. Fortunately, the Post Office are becoming increasingly aware of the historical (as well as financial!) value of old letter boxes and always try to find a good home for unwanted ones in museums, private collections or the Post Office's own collection.

Returning now to my letter box collection and, having amassed a fair amount of material, I realised that the idea of becoming a thematic exhibitor appealed. I had already entered Stampex and BPE with Channel Islands German Occupation material and so was familiar with preparing entries but this had not prepared me for the task ahead.

Fired by my new-found enthusiasm, I entered the National Philatelic Society's Trophy Competition with eight sheets on the British Letter Box and was amazed to take first placing. The Chairman, Richard West (yes, *that* Richard West) suggested that I enter a national exhibition and so I submitted a 32-sheet exhibit at Stampex 1984 where a silver medal was awarded.

The transition from society to national standard took a great deal of hard work and at one stage I almost gave up. I simply could not find enough material to fill the required number of sheets and a large white mass of blank paper stared me in the face. I was slowly realising that with thematic collecting it is necessary to devour everything written about your chosen subject, both philatelic and otherwise. In time ideas came to me and the

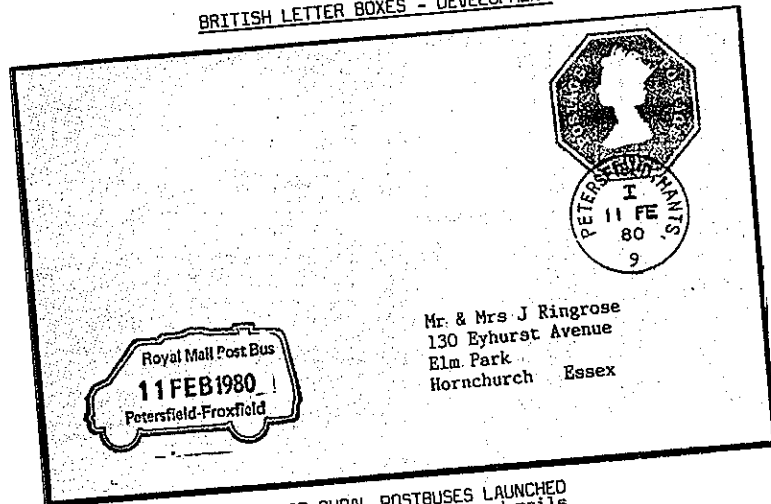
display finally took shape. The closing date for the submission of entries drew nearer and on the final hour of the final day I handed in my collection having completed it in Stanley Gibbons' shop whilst walking up the Strand.

As previously stated I won a silver and so I then set about aiming for a silver-gilt and, although it only takes up to five more points than silver, it was to be a few years before I achieved the required standard.

Once the exhibit was returned by the organisers I set about deciding how I could improve things. It is essential that would-be exhibitors adhere to the rules — they are there for your information and assistance. Once read, read them again until they have sunk in for, as with any worthwhile endeavour, you will be downgraded for not complying with them. They taught me that philatelic exhibitions are about philately and that stamp items should be the predominant feature. I had fallen into the trap of producing a literary work. Yes, that's right — too much writing-up.

I completely pulled apart the exhibit and started again from scratch using a Script type face. I found more material, replaced others, rewrote the descriptions

BRITISH LETTER BOXES - DEVELOPMENT



1967 RURAL POSTBUSES LAUNCHED carrying passengers and mails



1968 STEEL RECTANGULARS made, but soon rusted



1968 STEEL RECTANGULARS put in pairs where needed



1970's P.O. TELEPHONES objected to lamp boxes

Current exhibit: entered for Autumn Stampex/BPE 1987 — awarded a small silver-gilt medal and the Link House Thematic Trophy.

and mounted each item on a black paper mount which was then affixed to the album page. Much better! I submitted the entry (early this time) to the BPE but only got a bronze-silver. I had substantially altered and improved the exhibit but got one medal grade less. I now realised that until a completely unbiased way of judging is found, such as a computer (heaven forbid), we shall always be faced with discrepancies such as this. Some judges prefer certain themes or countries and human nature naturally enough will take over at times. Still, it was only I that thought it was better and it did give me something more to

strive for.

I tried again at Stampex the following year having dismantled the exhibit once more. I still used the Script type-face which, with hindsight, was probably too fancy for the judges and visitors alike to read clearly, I suspect. Stamp collectors are notorious for having poor vision. It incorporated more postal history material and won another silver medal. All that extra hard work and I was only back to the standard that I had reached at the exhibition before last! I now realised that if I was ever to get past the barrier between silver and silver-gilt it was going to take a major rethink.

Work on a revamped exhibit began again in earnest. A new typewriter typeface was chosen called Quadro which is without serifs and can be clearly read at some distance from the frames. The text was kept to an absolute minimum and was 'justified', like the columns in this magazine, which set-off the material above it nicely. I endeavoured to make each sheet balance-up with the others in the exhibit bearing in mind that I knew in advance that I would be allocated two frames of 16 sheets (four rows of four sheets). The main improvements were much more postal history material than hitherto and instead of having up to four stamps telling

the same part of the story, I restricted myself to only one stamp. This enabled more of the subject to be covered on the same number of sheets.

I submitted the entry to the recent Autumn Stampex/BPE and won a small silver-gilt and the Link House Thematic Trophy for the best exhibit in the class. At last I had reached my ambition of winning a major national award. Please do not think that I am one of the 'pot hunter' brigade who attempts to amass as many medals and trophies as possible as this is simply not the case. I do however, like to respond to a challenge to improve myself and my collection and I find that philatelic exhibiting gives me this opportunity. For this I offer no excuses.

If there is a moral to this story it is that in philatelic exhibiting it is necessary to take the disappointments with the joys. However, stick with it and study the exhibits at local and national shows and 'judge' each entry yourself to see whether you agree with the final awards given and incorporate the best points into your own entries. In time all the hard work and disappointments will pay off. Take advantage of having the judge go over your entry with you. They have invariably gone through the stages that you will face and, being dedicated collectors themselves, will be only too willing to impart their specialised knowledge to you.

I am now faced with the pleasant task of expanding my entry from two frames solely on the British letter box to one of six frames (96 sheets) which will additionally cover a section from my overseas letter boxes collection. This will provide me with an excuse for travelling abroad in order to follow my collection around the international philatelic exhibitions in the coming years and to make new friends.

Was it I that said that thematic collecting is boring and childish? No, it must have been someone else for I am hooked and am about to form another collection of material on the history of the Tramcar and Trolleybus. Now where did I put my copy of *Stamps of the World*?...

Details of the Letter Box Study Group are available in exchange for an SAE. Contact the Secretary, LBSG, Sally Jones, 43 Miall Road, Hall Green, Birmingham, B28 9BS. £3 per annum.