

THE WORLD OF ONLINE PHILATELY

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Following the recent death of Ron Negus, I was invited to continue this popular series. I start with a look at The British Postmark Society website located at www.britishpostmarksociety.org.uk



The screenshot shows the homepage of the British Postmark Society website. At the top, a blue banner reads "British Postmark Society". Below this, a large heading says "Welcome to the British Postmark Society's Website". On the left side, there is a vertical navigation menu with buttons for "Welcome", "publications", "membership", "Journal", "Postage Label..", "PO Closures", "SCMs", "PPIs", "C9 PPIs", "CL Indicia", and "Downloads". The main content area features a red rectangular postmark stamp that reads "POSTMARK - B - SOCIETY I JAN 1958". To the right of the stamp, a paragraph explains the society's purpose: "The BPS exists to promote and to co-ordinate the study and collection of British postal markings, particularly of the 20th century and subsequently, and the means and mechanisms by which they are applied, and to publish and disseminate the results of our studies. Our members' interests include hand and machine datestamps, slogan and special event postmarks, explanatory and instructional labels and markings, Post Office postage labels, Royal Mail SmartStamps and Online Postage indicia, and printed postage impressions of Royal Mail and other licensed postal operators." Below this, another paragraph mentions the society's founding on 1st January 1958 and its Golden Jubilee in 2008, along with a reference to an article in *Gibbons Stamp Monthly*. Further down, it notes a programme of displays at Philatex in 2008 and an AGM in 2009. The page is dated "Page updated 7th March 2009." and includes a note that the website is maintained by the Treasurer, John Enfield. A final instruction reads: "Please click on any picture within the site to enlarge it."

For over 50 years the British Postmark Society has collected and recorded British mail. Founded in 1958, it is a registered charity that exists to promote and co-ordinate the study and collection of British postal markings, particularly of the 20th century and subsequently, and the means and mechanisms by which they are applied, and to publish and disseminate the results of their studies.

Members' interests include hand and machine datestamps, slogan and special event postmarks, explanatory and instructional labels and markings, Post Office postage labels, Royal Mail SmartStamps and Online Postage indicia, and printed postage impressions of Royal Mail and other licensed postal operators. Its website acts as a fine introduction to these interests.

It is extremely easy to navigate thanks to eleven subject buttons that always appear down the left edge of each page being viewed, but I found the use of a strong yellow background colour to every page to be extremely tiring on the eyes but, that said, the webmaster could easily change this and it fails to detract from the useful content.

A welcome page details the aims of the BPS, while a membership section records benefits, subscription details (just £12pa for UK residents) and a downloadable application form. The *BPS Journal* appears four times a year and its web page records the varied main contents of the most recent four issues. A downloads page enables anyone to obtain a valuable free cumulative index to the journal from its inception in 1958 through to 2007 as an Excel spreadsheet. An extensive BPS library list shows around 350 publications available for members to borrow if resident in the UK and additionally serves as a useful bibliography of British postmarks and allied subjects.

The BPS has always been extremely good at publishing the results of its researches and there are currently 11 reasonably priced books listed for sale. Anyone with an interest in Slogan, Special Event, Skeleton or First Day cancellations is well catered for by these publications.

There are currently 18 links to other websites recorded that the BPS webmaster believes may be of interest to students and collectors of British postal markings. These are listed under the headings of Members' Sites, Philatelic Organisations, Postal History and Postal Services and there is bound to be something new to readers of the *Bulletin*.

A section on Post Office closures details the changes currently underway to the network of branches. It mentions the Post Office Essentials trial at offices offering a limited range of services, such as that located at Old Town Hastings, and also the relationship with high street retailer WHSmith where Post Office branches are increasingly being located inside these stores. Elsewhere, Post Office branded "Travel Kiosks" are appearing that offer foreign currency services only in WHSmith. All of these developments have their own range of self-inking datestamps (SIDs) and examples are illustrated on the website.

Postage labels have their own concise page and the recent changes to Horizon counter labels for Inland and Forces mail, together with the trials and subsequent live Post and Go labels are all recorded. A link to <http://postagelabelsuk.com> enables visitors to keep up to date with new developments in this growing field of interest.

The final pages of the website relate to Postage Paid Impressions, the so-called "Condition 9 Access Mail" licence holders and a listing of the licenced postal operators in the UK.

(600 words)