

THE WORLD OF ONLINE PHILATELY

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The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA)

www.postalheritage.org.uk

The screenshot shows the BPMA website homepage. At the top left is the logo 'THE BRITISH POSTAL MUSEUM & ARCHIVE' with the tagline 'Our history through the post'. A search bar is in the top right. A navigation menu includes 'About Us', 'Visiting', 'History', 'Exhibitions', 'Collections', 'Catalogue', 'Learning', 'Shop', 'Support Us', 'Podcast', and 'Wiki'. The main banner features the text 'DESIGNS ON DELIVERY' in large letters, with 'WELL GALLERY LONDON COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION' and '7 OCTOBER - 4 NOVEMBER' below it. Underneath the banner is a paragraph about British postal communications and a 'Listen to this page read aloud' button. Below that are sections for 'News' (BPMA Search Room closed 29 October 2009 morning) and 'What's on' (Talk: 40th Anniversary of the Post Office Act 1969). A 'Site highlights' section includes 'London 2010: Festival of Stamps' and a 'Press centre' link.

The BPMA will be well known to readers of the *Bulletin* because it features regularly within these pages. The curatorial staff cares for the visual, written and physical records of over 400 years of British postal development, including the rapid changes occurring in the postal system at the present time.

This website is constantly updated with all the work that staff are undertaking in preserving and, just as importantly, making readily accessible, this history, whether it be for those visiting online or in person.

The site uses all the modern methods at the disposal of webmasters, including the ability to have the current page read out extremely clearly to you, while summaries of key information is available in French, German, Spanish and Welsh languages. Ease of use is at the heart of this site and the simple menu system ensures that navigation is free of difficulties.

The Home page contains all the latest news, events and site highlights. It also enables access to a search engine, help screen, email updates, external links, contact details and a site map. There are also links entitled About Us, Visiting, History, Exhibitions, Collections, Catalogue, Learning, Shop, Support Us, Podcast and Wiki. These are far more powerful sections than the short, snappy titles might imply and a visit to any of them will open up a whole new world of information.

“Exhibitions”, for example, will enable you to read not only about current and upcoming exhibitions and events by BPMA at its own premises in London and Debden, but across the country, too, invariably in partnership with other museums. There are currently details of two exhibitions that are available for other venues to display (*Brunel: Speeding the Mail* and *Moving the Mail: Horses to Horsepower*), plus 13 online virtual exhibitions, comprising current and closed events going back to 2006.

For researchers, it is the “Catalogue” link that will hold the most interest, for it is possible to decide exactly what files you wish to examine from the comfort of your home in advance, saving valuable time when visiting the Search Room. There are increasing numbers of images to view on screen as well, including philatelic material

such as items from the Reginald M Phillips collection and many of the fascinating posters deployed down the years. Incidentally, you can now buy high quality digital prints of a selection of these posters via a separate website to be found at www.postalheritageprints.co.uk.

The BPMA website is your gateway to the treasures of the museum and archive and is a “must visit” for anyone with an interest in philately, family history and social history. Even those without these interests, or whose interests lie elsewhere, will soon find something that will hold their attention, for the postal service continues to touch all of our lives, even in these increasingly electronic times.

(498 words)