

# Thematic Letter Boxes 2



This article follows-on from the first contained within the November 2001 *Philatelic Bulletin*. It expands on sources and offers suggestions to help you collect the subject of letterboxes on stamps, although many aspects of this article are relevant to all themes. Its appearance coincides with the excellent new issue from Royal Mail depicting five letterboxes spanning over a century and commemorating 150 years of the roadside letterbox.

## Sources

As with any theme, there are the usual sources for material, including dealers, auctioneers and, for new issues, postal authorities. For me, though, despite using each of the above methods of acquisition, the Internet stands out. It has certainly revolutionised the way that I collect.

eBay [www.eBay.com](http://www.eBay.com) regularly contains items that I have never come across anywhere else. I recently obtained a rare German card that had been processed by an automatic registered mail machine that incorporated a posting box. No, not the common facility from the late 1960s, but a trial from a decade before that is virtually unknown outside of Germany – and the receipt is overprinted MUSTER (specimen). The collector who sold me it also offered several other items classified under what I refer to as 'box automation' from several countries. All items were unknown to me, but are so relevant to my collecting interest.

In the Netherlands there is a dealer called Postbeeld [www.postbeeld.com](http://www.postbeeld.com) from where I have obtained dozens of sets containing stamps depicting or relating to the story of letterboxes. Almost every stamp is illustrated, so you invariably get to see before you buy. They have just launched a sister site that will soon include every stamp issued from 1920 to date, in glorious colour and priced if in stock. Known as Free Stamp Catalogue, the web address is [www.freestampcatalogue.com](http://www.freestampcatalogue.com), Postbeeld justifiably call themselves 'the largest Internet stamp shop'.

Fellow collectors are also guaranteed to be a good source for knowledge and material. Let us face it, who is better suited to help you with your chosen theme than a philatelist with similar interests?

## Opportunities

Ensure that you become known for your interests, for it presents unique opportunities. Write articles in magazines, ask for help in specialist journals, etc. By doing this, you will be assisting fellow collectors and adding to your pool of collector resources and philatelic knowledge. Incidentally, you do not have to be an expert at writing to get published – that's what Editor's are for!

I was recently able to assist a postal authority with a letter box stamp issue and a leading cover producer sought clarification on historical facts for the new British issue. This is immensely satisfying and fits perfectly within such a friendly hobby, where helping each other is reward in itself.

At exhibitions, I have often been welcomed by dealers, who know me as 'the letterbox man'. That is fine, for it has resulted in items being set-aside in anticipation of my attending the show. Incidentally, I would always recommend purchasing the item, if reasonably priced, even if you have it, for you can always sell it on later and who knows what gem might await you at the next show?

## Internet Research

One source, still in its infancy, are the search engines to be found on the Internet. Many agree that Google [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) stands head and shoulders above the rest. It automatically undertakes indexing 24-hours a day, with perfect results every time and without sickness or tea breaks! They are the envy of every librarian, recording, as they do, most words on thousands of web-site pages daily.

Information on the Internet tends to be temporary in nature or the content moves from site-to-site as the compiler finds a cheaper 'hosting' deal. Google can help here by caching (backing-up) obsolete pages and allowing you to retrieve the information long after the original page has ceased to exist in cyberspace. This is really useful when researching obscure philatelic facts.

By simply entering key words to identify what you seek (I use "letter box", letterbox, mailbox, briewebus, briefkasten, brevenbus and dozens more variations of spelling and language), you can then sit back and wait for the results to appear on screen.

## Societies

There is a society that is featured regularly within these pages, namely the Letter Box Study Group (LBSG). It is well worth the small annual subscription, as benefits include a quarterly newsletter with free letter box postcard, plus the chance to buy surveys, books, catalogues and other collectibles on the theme.

There are no further societies on this subject, philatelic or otherwise, to my knowledge. It is a fine source for background information on British boxes, but caters little for foreign ones. It has a web-site at [www.lbsg.org](http://www.lbsg.org) that is well worth a visit.

## Exhibiting

If you have the inclination, I can truly recommend exhibiting. Start at local society level and slowly develop the width and depth of your theme. As with most endeavours, give a lot of time to the planning stage for this will pay off and enable you to avoid the early mistakes that I made (too much writing-up, too little material)!

Pretend that you are writing a book and lay out your story in the most logical order. (For example, if you have proofs and the issued stamp, then be sure to show the proof first, for this is the order that it was created in.) Exhibiting can result in much useful help and material being offered to you. Why not give it a go?

Hopefully this short article will have offered a few suggestions to get you started on that new thematic collection that you have always talked about undertaking.

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