

PHILATELY and the LETTER BOX...

Glenn H Morgan Member 232

Collecting stamps by a particular theme is very much in the ascendancy. Even so-called “traditional” stamp collectors are now just as likely to form a collection based on, say, architecture or goats as they are on stamps from the Cape of Good Hope or France. For the purposes of this article, the suggested collecting theme is understandably that of the history of the letter box, a topic for which I have been buying items for more than 35 years.

I record below appropriate sources for acquiring knowledge, together with details of the kind of material that is available to those thinking about starting out in stamp collecting or, if you are an older reader and maybe therefore a lapsed collector, getting you to think about returning to philately (the posh word for stamp collecting!).

There are several sheets from my gold-medal winning exhibit on the pages that follow that will let you to see how I have chosen to display my philatelic material, but every collector will approach the subject differently, for there are no right or wrong ways, just your way.

INFORMATION SOURCES

One of the greatest requirements of thematic collecting is an abundant source of non-philatelic reading material to enable you to learn about your subject in-depth to assist with knowing what can be purchased. Read everything that you can put your hands on for it has been my experience that the more obscure and lesser known facts about letter boxes have often come from unexpected sources. As an LBSG Member, you have a head-start in the form of the many excellent publications from the Group, albeit that they are primarily GB-centric.

If you have access to a decent library, such as those found in larger towns and cities, do be sure to check out the stamp catalogues, as very often they will contain pictures or data that you may not find elsewhere.

I have a website that includes many aspects of letter boxes, including the 35 issues of *Philately and the Letter Box* that I used to produce for LBSG. Go to www.stampprinters.info/boxes.htm where you will find more than 60 articles, bibliographies and monographs that I have written down the years on the subject. These can all be viewed on-screen or printed off free of charge.

ACQUIRING MATERIAL

Much philatelic material is fairly readily available, but knowing what is out there had traditionally required extensive research in stamp catalogues to find the most suitable material.

Nowadays, the internet means that it is much easier and by entering key phrases on the likes of eBay or Delcampe, such as “letter box stamps”, “pillar box stamps”, etc., you will reveal a lot of results. I am also a big fan of a Dutch stamp dealer found at www.postbeeld.com/en from where more than 75 sets of letter box stamps are currently illustrated and advertised for sale.

It must never be forgotten that while we in Britain talk of the letter box, searches online for material or information should always include the equivalent words in other languages, such as **briefkasten** (Germany), **brievenbus** (Netherlands), **boîtes aux lettres** (France), **buzon** (Spain) and many more besides these four major European languages. To restrict yourself to just the English language is to miss out on many fascinating items.

Stamps are the obvious starting point when beginning to collect by theme and in many respects are still the most important ingredient. I have identified many hundreds of relevant stamps and others that fit into the story in a more obscure way, such as a stamp showing iron being poured at the foundry to help tell the story of manufacturing boxes, so you can choose to be selective or wide-ranging in what you decide to purchase.

There is still a tendency for many existing collectors to think that *only* postage stamps should be included in a collection or display and if this is how you wish to collect, then that's perfectly fine. However, to ignore items such as those that are detailed or depicted below, is to miss out on a wealth of material that will enhance the interest and maybe even the value of your collection.

It was rather surprising to find so many postmarks relating to the letter box theme. Quite a lot of special hand-stamps for events and anniversaries have been used down the years and these can be most attractive. Operational hand and machine postmarks have not been neglected either and include slogans such as “Post Early for Christmas” and “Everyone’s Shopping by Post These Days”.

There are also operational handstamps applied to envelopes and cards from the Victorian-era through to modern times from across the globe that make valuable additions, such as “Posted in Late Box”, or “Aus dem Briefkasten” (found in letter box). The many privately produced cachets (including those from LBSG in years gone by) can also make a colourful chapter in a collection.

10.2 Technological Impact - Electronics are making the above scenario appear all the more likely.

10.1 As Museum Exhibits - May eventually be the only location where letter boxes can be viewed.

What of the Future? - The demise of traditional letter boxes appears feasible.

9.2 Health & Safety or Exclusion - Boxes can harm staff or users, or be unusable by young folk.

9.1 Offences Against Boxes - Damage by nature accidents, causes, thieves, vandals or public misuse.

Problems in Use - Boxes can be damaged, misused, or cause harm to their users.

8.1 Out of Hours Service - Enables payment, franking and mail return in an integral box 24/7.

Box Automation - No stamps? Need staff help? Automated boxes can assist.

7.4 Unexpected Sightings - Colonialism, twining or poor service can see boxes in wrong country.

7.3 Marketing and Publicity - Boxes in postal campaigns, publicity and in commercial advertising.

7.2 Durting Conflict - Mail can replace special posting method, while boxes can become casualties.

7.1 Out of Context - Boxes arise in childhood as toys or cartoons, in romance, literature and in art.

Unusual Emotions - Part of life, boxes can appear in some surprising locations.

6.6 Sunday Delivery Services - Staff or religious opposition to Sunday box delivery was overcome.

6.5 Rural Community Facilities - Groupings of delivery boxes at a central point expedites delivery.

6.4 Multi-Oceanic Delivery - Saves postal staff miles of walking up and down driveways every day.

6.3 Garden Gate Access - Allows the need for postal workers to knock at each address on their route.

6.2 Front Door Access - Boxes arise in the need for postal workers to knock at each address on their route.

6.1 Private Amenities - County houses, firms and hotels made arrangements for mail collection.

Private and Household Boxes - These are essential for speed and efficient delivery.

5.5 Airports - Facilities for passengers in airport arrival and departure lounges, but not on planes.

5.4 Railways - Many Post Offices saw advantages for all by having boxes on the side of a train.

5.3 Railways - Since the early days of horse-drawn road transport, boxes have been stited on board.

5.2 Railways - For centuries, normal boxes on board ships had existed thanks to the captains.

For the Travelling Public - Boxes have long existed for anyone who is on the move.

4.4 Clearance and Delivery - Unique vehicles and different emptying mechanisms are utilised.

4.3 Visual Identification - Colour, words or symbols help identify boxes in a crowded environment.

4.2 Boxes for Special Purposes - Boxes can have different uses, e.g., local, EU or express mail.

4.1 Construction - Style, manufacturing materials and the component parts used can vary greatly.

Structure of a Box - Several elements are considered when creating letter boxes.

3.4 Standardisation of Boxes - Design and production was centralised, with advances to this day.

3.3 Early Malinland Boxes - Idea spread to England from 1853 using local designs and producers.

3.2 Trolley in Channel Islands - Aware of French boxes, he suggested similar for Jersey in 1851.

3.1 Ahead of Britain - Other countries had street boxes first, but they were not effectively utilised.

Street Boxes - Mail pre-payment enabled boxes to be stited away from Post Offices.

2.6 Souvenir Mailboxes - Temporary letter boxes can be set-up for events, or to post collector mail.

2.5 Mobile Post Offices - Sometimes the Post Office and letter box leaves the high street behind.

2.4 Post Receipts - Enables mail collection from a specific P.O. when residential box unavailable.

2.3 Private Boxes - Many countries offer Receiving House was invariably necessary.

2.2 Pre-Stamp Era - A trip to a distant Post Office or Receiving House was necessary.

2.1 Facilities at Post Offices - From himited beginnig, box services expanded.

1.4 Journal of a Letter - White, post, clear, sort, deliver and read-mail.

1.3 Objects and Memorabilia - Boots, bottles and barrels were among early letter box subsitutes.

1.2 Evolution of the Posts - From ancient China through to stamps, mass literacy and affordability.

1.1 Writing Materials - Had to transform paper into letters, books, postcards and wax tablets into paper.

Creating the Requirement - It was to be centuries before letter boxes were needed.

Introduction and Plan of Exhibit

I hope that this article has proved to you that there is a lot more to thematic stamp collecting than perhaps you

immediately thought. Whatever the depth of your pockets or available time might be, it should be possible to acquire

stamps that will be of interest to many viewers, including special interest groups such as the WI and U3A, both of

whom are always an enthusiastic and appreciative audience. Go on, give it a go!

The final major range of collectible items is within depicting the theme.

Interleaving only, while many have many items in total, giving you lots of choice.

1.1.1 Stamps on its airtelte forms, envelopes and postcards down the years, but that has not stopped the

same from 1971 the British Post Office produced a long series of 10p stamp booklet cover designs depicting the vari-

ous types of letter box used in this country. The basic booklets still cost well under a pound each. In all, more

than 200 stamp booklets have emanated from the world's postal authorities, some depicting boxes on the cover or

like of Sweden, Australia, Hungary and many other countries from the WI and U3A, both of

which have traced more than 300 stationery items in total, giving you lots of choice.

Corsini and the Merchant Strangers' Post. Who says that thematic collecting is all about pretty pictures?

Over the counter long prior to the establishment of the roadside letter box. The earliest posted letter in the

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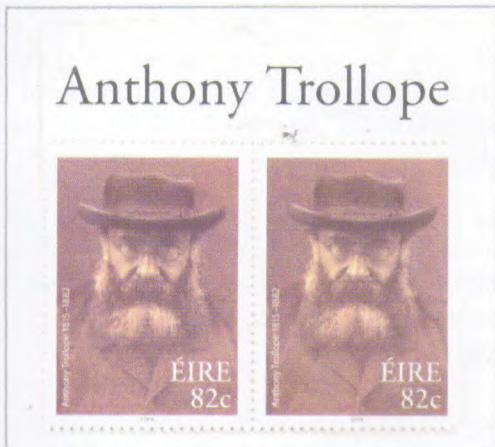
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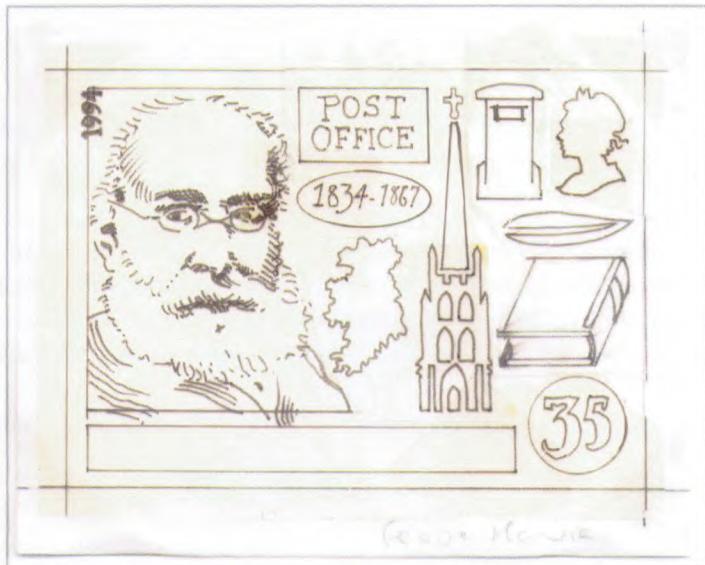
3.2 Trollope in Channel Islands

Seeing French boxes, he suggested similar for Jersey

From an inauspicious start in the Post Office, Trollope found his 'Eureka' moment while on Jersey.

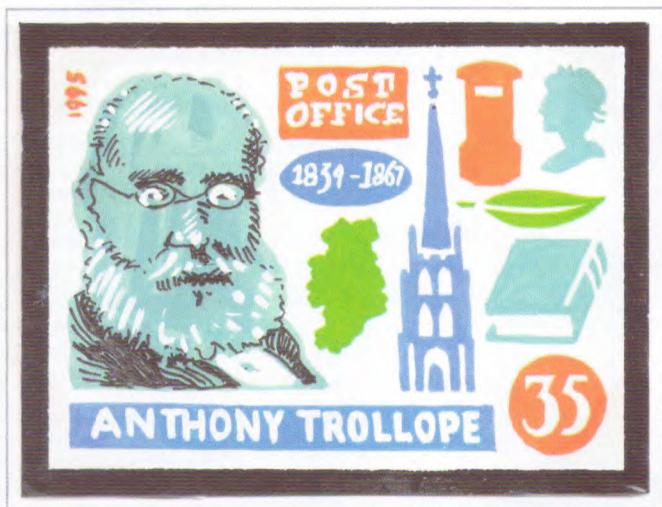


During 1851, Anthony Trollope was sent to the Channel Islands to review the postal system. While there, he advanced the idea of British roadside letter boxes.



Perf. 14 (l) and 14.5 (r) versions exist due to perforator problems at Questa stamp printers.

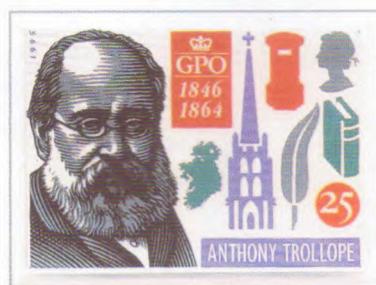
In 1852, the GPO in London permitted the trial installation of four letter boxes on Jersey.



Original signed sketch and watercolour by George Hardie for Royal Mail of Trollope and his contribution to postal development in Britain.

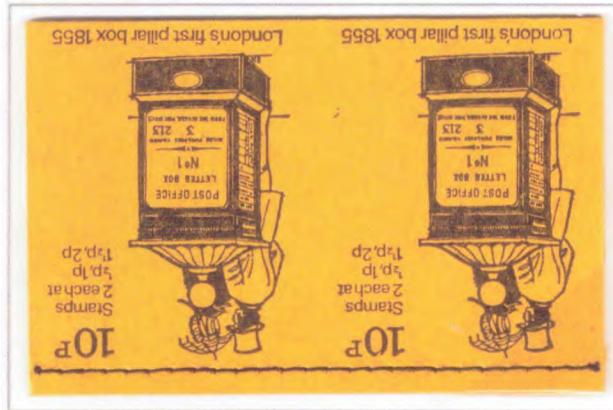


Pictorial interpaneau (gutter) pair of Vaudin's octagonal box. The boxes were made at the iron foundry of John Vaudin.



Reduced copy of above final artwork held at British Postal Museum & Archive.

1853 saw the first London letter box erected in Fleet Street. It was quickly ridiculed by *Punch* magazine for resembling a stove. A perforate repositioned in box body.



A French letter box was imported and trialled by Rowland Hill in London during 1854. Basic Antiguan stamp with three BARBUDA overprint types in navy, light blue and black.



A similar, but hexagonal, design to the Channel Island boxes was installed at Barnes Cross, Dorset in 1854. Still in-situ.

The first mainland box was in 1853 at Botchergate. Design remains unknown, but a 1989 repro Penfold now marks the site.



The British box story is typical of that worldwide. The balance of this section studies their development.

Idea spread to England with local designs and production 1853-5

3.3 Early Mainland Boxes

4.4 Clearance and Delivery

Emptying mechanisms and showing mail source

Varying methods of emptying boxes are employed worldwide. Items may be cancelled to show origin.



An internal chute ensures that mail slides into collection sack.



A front or side mounted door enables access to the mail.



Hinged floors may drop to let mail fall into a sack.



Colour trials and issued stamp.

Despite other attempts, 'by the handful' is how most letter boxes are still cleared by postal workers.



A 1926 'Buzones' (letter box) handstamp from Mexico used to identify all mail items posted in a street letter box. Mail can be identified as having come from a street box by use of postal markings at the sorting office.



In 1981 Blackpool had the world's first Post Office tram with letter box and stamp sales.



In 1893 Huddersfield Corporation introduced letter boxes on its fleet of tramcars.



<Germann Endeopde posteri
in the Hamm Post office service.
Bears Cache! Aus dem
Staatsenbandnreksaisten,
(Found in the Fram Letter
Box) in use until 1930

As tram services expanded, onboard letter boxes began to appear, but mail rarely showed its origin.

Boxes on the side of street trams

5.4 | ramways

7.4 Unexpected Sightings

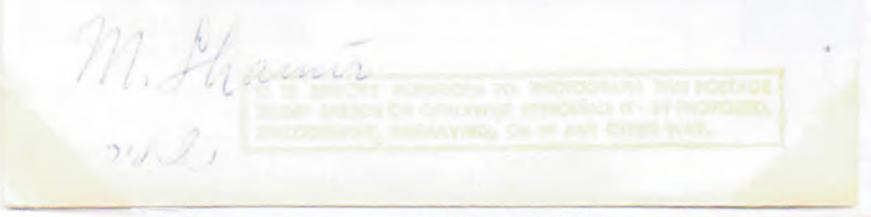
When abroad, another postal administration could be operating in that country using its own style of letter box.

This could be due to slow postal services, as in Portugal, where travel reps sold tourists prepaid stamps. The mail was posted in Swedish boxes and then flown to Sweden and reposted there for onward transmission.

Post Offices operating abroad



Posted 1995 in the Algarve, Portugal in a Swedish letter box using a Swedish Postage Paid stamp to pay postage.



Submitted but unadopted original artwork for an Israeli 1954 philatelic exhibition stamp. British Mandate letter box depicting Israeli postal logo not used until after statehood.



Austrian Ottoman Period type of letter box.

Letter boxes can also reflect the country that has overall political control. For example, until 1914 the Austrian Post Office used to operate in Eretz Israel during the Ottoman Period. Then came the British Mandate Period, followed finally by the State of Israel.



Modern letter box of the State of Israel.



In 1906, two Hungarian machines were installed in Budapest that accepted, cancelled and retailed the mail item.



Blank cancel =
Press Specimen.

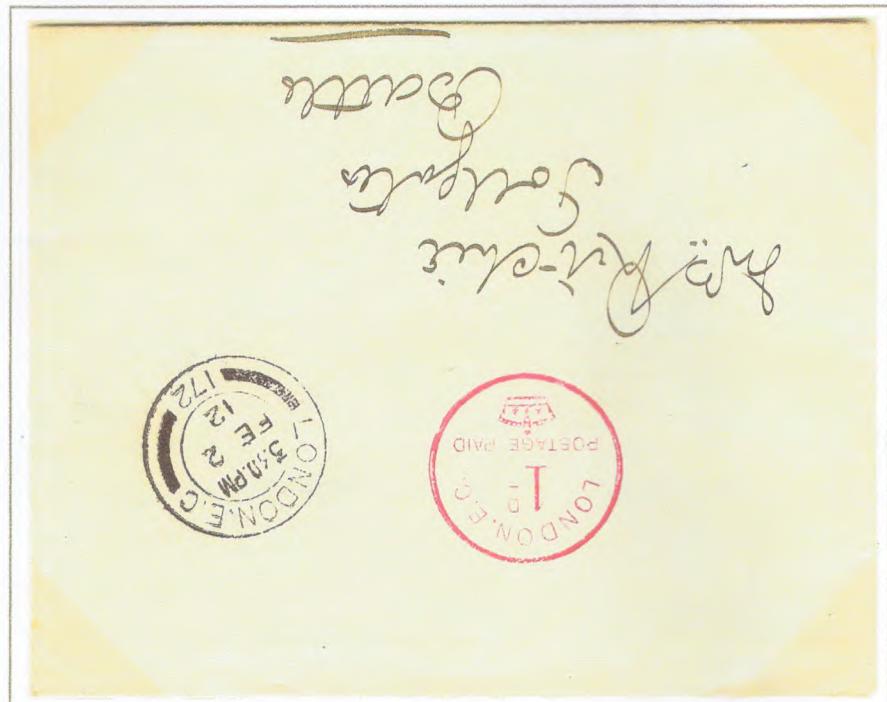


Pre-paid mail can be dropped straight into a letter box, while other items may need a helping hand.

8.1 Out of Hours Service

No stamps, need staff help? Automated boxes can assist

Cover from Wilkinson trial dated 2 February 1912, one of just 97 items of mail posted that day.
Mr. Wilkinson's Penny-in-the-Slot machine was given a 1912 London trial between January and August. The equipment accepted, postmarked and received from an early German trial registration machine sold in Leipzig and dated 31 July 1923.



Unrecorded Wilkinson
violet proof strike.

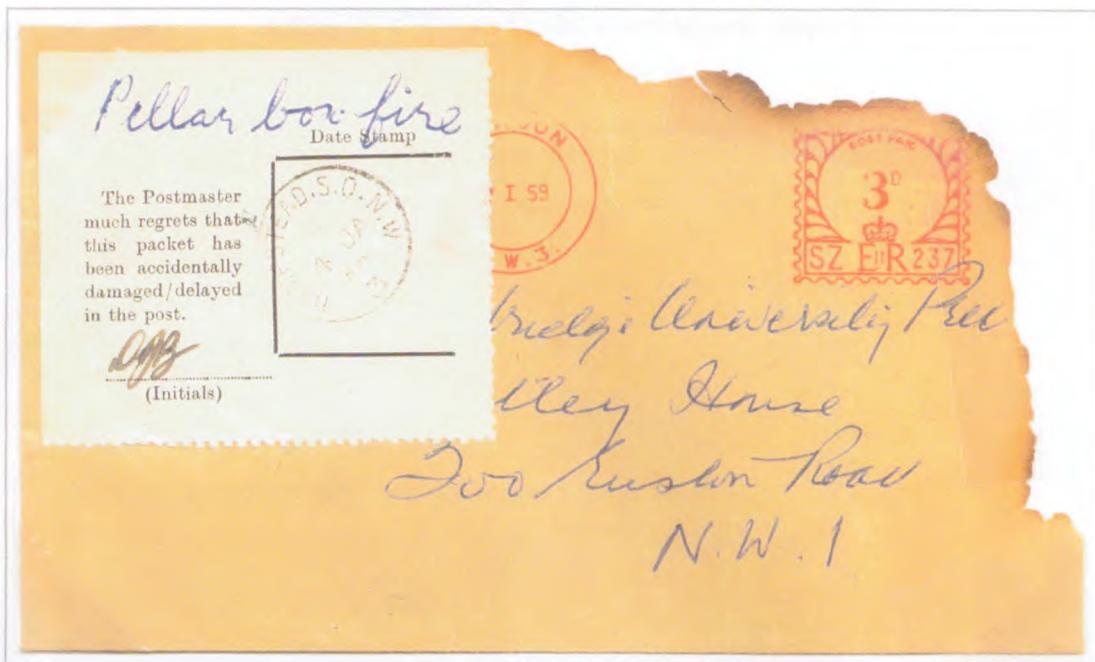


For customers without stamps or requiring staff help, mechanical or computerised equipment enables weighing, payment, franking and retention of the mail in an integral letter box. This is especially useful when counters are busy or offices are closed.

8. Box Automation

9.1 Offences Against Boxes

Damage to boxes and mail by vandals



Commercial mail item posted in London during January 1959 with apology label and manuscript explanation 'Pillar box fire'. Unusually, not due to bonfire night. Mail is damaged by the posting of lighted matches, cigarettes or fireworks. Damaged mail, or often just what is left of it, is sent on its way whenever possible by the postal administration.



Muster = Specimen.
Vandals destroy mail for 'fun'.



1824 saw first mail damage by fireworks in a letter box in UK.



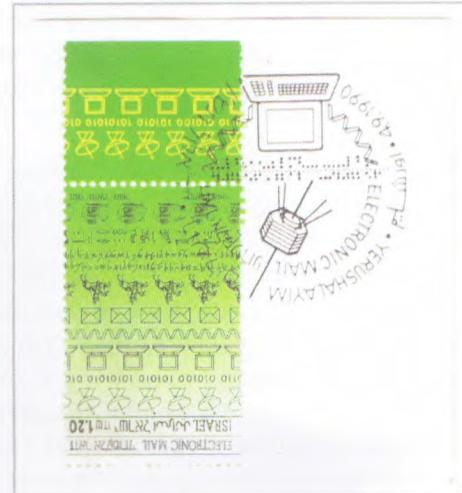
Ex coil.
Spraying graffiti on to boxes
is a major worldwide issue.



2002 Australian cover marked as damaged by 'Foreign Matter'.
These days, anything that might cause damage to property is deemed an acceptable target by anyone who is guilty of practising so-called anti-social behaviour.

letter boxes now in case it becomes too late.
Time alone will tell, so learn to love your

boxes harnessing computers and satellites.
Or maybe the future will solely comprise



Perhaps email boxes and street boxes will both survive?
Is email-related from the 1998 film of the same name.
2003 Portuguese New Lisisom sample stamp, ironically, its text

by increasing the number of boxes over the same period.
Encouragingly, some countries are bucking the trend.
France: 124k boxes in 2004, now 150k; India: 584k / 636k.



Box numbers are declining in many countries with examples of PU statistics between 2004-2008 shown above.
Australia: 21k boxes in 2004, now just 17k; Hungary: 19k / 9k; Poland: 57k / 48k; USA: 345k / 205k.



Post Offices are seeing a progressive decline in mail volumes, resulting in conflicting demand for boxes.

Is technology making letter box demise an eventual likelihood?

10.2 Technological Impact