

THE POST OFFICE IN MINIATURE

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There is a Bible quotation that includes the passage: "...but when I became a man I put away childish things". Not so! Since becoming a man I have spent even more time in toyshops than when I was a child. The reason is that I collect Post Office related toys and models.

The purpose of this article is not to present the reader with a catalogue of available items (for the subject is too large and complex for even the wealthiest person) but to give an idea of the range of material available in the hope that it might inspire others to form such a collection.

The Letter Box has been used extensively by the toy industry and manufacturers of model railway accessories and money box makers. There is therefore, a vast range of items available ranging in size from one half of an inch to over a foot tall. It is for the collector to decide, as with stamps, what items will go into the collection. I have amassed about fifty boxes and am about to concentrate on boxes that are no more than about two inches in height as these have the most appeal to me. Examples are available in tin plate, cardboard, glass, lead, brass, plastic and china including the ever-popular Goss crested ware. They command quite high prices when sold in antique shops but bargains can still be had at toy swapmeets that are held up and down the country on a regular basis and

the Bath Postal Museum have produced some really attractive miniature boxes with more to come in the future. Letter boxes have also appeared as containers for fruit sweets, bubble bath, handkerchiefs and Easter eggs and to conceal a cigarette lighter, so keep your eyes open in your local supermarket as well as toy outlets.

Post Offices crop-up less frequently but with perseverance it is still possible to acquire examples in cardboard, tin plate and china.

The postal service could not exist without postmen and, yes you've guessed it, miniature models of them exist. For the best ones it is necessary to mention the Bath Postal Museum again as they have an on-going series that no true collector could pass by. They are superb in every detail and have included a post boy on his horse, a Bellman and even members of the Post Office Rifles Regiment.

Postal transport has also been well represented over the years by the die-cast and plastic model industries and a collection can be formed for a reasonable outlay. Condition is of paramount importance and will always dictate the price that you pay. Experienced model makers may care to purchase chipped models and repaint them adding the freely available transfers. Do not however, run away with the idea that they are all cheap for this is simply not the case. A few years

ago I purchased one of a limited edition of forty reproductions of the Royal Airmail Service van for £12, which at the time I thought was exorbitant until I was told that an original in similar condition today would cost well in excess of £200! There are mailcoaches, parcel lorries, telephone vans, telegram boys on their bicycles, Land Rovers, racing cars with advertisements of Datapost and Travelling Post Office (TPO) carriages. As you can see the scope is large but again one is free to collect just one aspect if need be.

Once purchased you will probably want to display your new collection and I have found that there are lots of different types of display cabinets on the market, one of which is bound to suit the decor of your home and (more importantly?) be tolerated by your partner. The models are definitely better behind glass as they require much less dusting and need not be re-arranged so frequently thus reducing the risks of paint chipping.

Another most attractive display method is the diorama, that is to say a street scene made up of various models. I intend one day to make one with a backdrop of a parade of shops including, of course, a Post Office, outside which is a letter box being cleared by a postman with his mail van parked in the roadside. They can look quite realistic.

I have only touched upon items relating to the British postal service. There are also lots of models in the vehicle range especially that relate to the rest of the world, many of which are available in the United Kingdom. So, if you are a specialist in the stamps of, say, the United States or most of the major European countries you should be well catered for.

There are many other items that can be collected relating to the postal services such as stamp boxes, actual letter boxes (I know of one collector who possesses over one hundred!), post horns, weighing scales - the list is endless. I think that you have enough to be going on with for now though, don't you?

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