

The Postal Services and the the U.P.U.

The establishment of the post office and the postal services are not just a century and a half old, as many may be inclined to believe, for even in Scriptural times, there already existed arrangements for the quick carrying and delivery of messages from remote parts to different chief towns of the times. Going through the Scripture, one finds numerous references to primitive postal systems and amongst these we find a quotation by Job that his days were fleeing away swifter than "a post". Yet another reference that "One post shall run to meet another and one messenger to meet another, to show the King of Babylon that his city is taken at one end" is to be found in Jeremiah, chapter 51.

Cyrus the Great had a complete system of messengers. Saddled horses stood ready at a day's journey apart to carry him tidings from the remotest parts of his empire. All the earlier postal systems were intended primarily for the transmission of government reports. Private persons depended on special messengers or entrusted their communications to travellers going that way. The emperor Diocletian is praised for permitting government couriers to carry letters for private persons. Charlemagne maintained a postal service between the larger cities for his vast empire. The earlier Universities of Europe appear to have had postal systems of their own. Beginning with the thirteenth century, the University of Paris had a regular system of carrying letters and moneys for its students to and from all parts of the civilised world.

The early introduction of the public postal system is usually attributed to France. A public system of posts was founded on June 9th, 1464 by an edict of Louis XI.

In Great Britain, in 1591, Queen Elizabeth issued a proclamation prohibiting the transfer of letters between countries except by authorised messengers. With the accession of James I to the throne, communications between England and Scotland became more frequent. In the year 1603 the lawful charge for horses for the use of those riding post haste was fixed at two and a half pence a mile. The keeper of each post was required to have no less than two horses in readiness for the conveyance of government dispatches. These letters were not to be detained at any post more than a quarter of an hour. In 1635 a public post was established to between London and Edinburgh. At the same time other routes were established to Wales, Ireland and to other parts of England, in all eight main routes.

In 1680 a London merchant, William Dockwra, initiated the "London Penny Post". This service extended from Hackney to Lambeth and from Blackwell to Westminster. In 1784 a system of conveyance of letters by means of mail coaches was put into operation. The next great improvement was the postal reform of the period from 1836 to 1842.

The Act of 1839, by which the Treasury established a uniform penny rate for the whole of Great Britain was a direct result of the pamphlet "Post Office Reform" by Rowland Hill. He advocated a uniform penny postage throughout the United Kingdom so as to collect a revenue which would at

least cover the average cost of postage of a single letter. His plan proved quite successful and resulted in an increase in the volume of letters and a subsequent increase of revenue.

Later on the nineteenth century the establishment of other postal systems in the dominions, in America and in Europe followed each other in quick succession.

It was in 1874 that an international congress was held in Berne for the purpose of unifying the efforts of the different existing postal systems and create a postal union and thus Universal Postal Union came into being. One of the chief promoters was a German postmaster by the name of Dr. Heinrich Stephan.

This newly created postal union began to organise congresses for its members, which were held in different capitals of member states, throughout the world and up to the year 1969, sixteen congresses have been held during the hundred years of its existence. The first congress after its foundation, was held in Paris in 1878. Business connected with the improvement of the postal services were discussed and resolutions, to be later adopted by its members were taken. We find that at the first congress, the international parcel post was established and at the seventh Congress held in Madrid in 1920, the postal franking machines, (already in use in New Zealand since 1905) were generally adopted by the U.P.U.

For the sake of uniformity and expediency the U.P.U. recommended, not to say laid down, different colours of stamps for franking letters to different destinations and we find that the $\frac{1}{2}$ d green stamp or its equivalent in the currencies of other member countries were to be used for local postage whereas the $2\frac{1}{2}$ d in blue colour or its equivalent were to be used on letters destined for overseas countries. This arrangement was discontinued before the start of the Second World War.

Another important resolution adopted by the postal administrations throughout the U.P.U. is that each member state should send three specimens of every stamp, or set of stamps, postal stationery, reply coupons, etc., issued by every country to the postal administrations of every member state.

In 1909 the monument in memory of the foundation of the U.P.U. was inaugurated at Berne and this was the work of the artist Monsieur Rene de Saint Marceaux.

It is certainly worthy of mention that Malta was amongst the first to join the U.P.U. in the year 1875, followed by Gibraltar in 1876.

The first set of postage stamps with a U.P.U. theme was that issued by Switzerland on July 2nd, 1900, to commemorate the 25th Anniversary of the foundation of the Union. This country, very aptly, as it houses on its territory the official seat of the Union, again commemorated the 50th Anniversary in 1924 with a set of three stamps in 1949, and in 1974 the centenary with another set of three stamps. In fact Switzerland is the only country to have commemorated, at twenty-five years intervals, the jubilees of the Union.

Up to the end of the first World War, when different countries, it seems, had not yet woken up to the great possibilities of the postage stamp as a means of propaganda as well as a source of revenue, the first six Congresses of the Universal Postal Union were left to pass philatelically "unhonoured and unsung", whereas all following ones from the seventh, held in 1920 at Madrid to the sixteenth held in 1969 in Tokyo have all been duly commemorated by a stamp or a set of stamps. Amongst these are included three rare and expensive sets of stamps of Sweden for the eight Congress, which incidentally was issued along with another set of the same number of stamps to mark the 50th Anniversary of the U.P.U. The set of 1929 of Great Britain to mark the 9th Congress has been registering fantastic rises in value and no doubt has a brilliant future.

In 1949 the 75th Anniversary of the Foundation of the U.P.U. was philatelically commemorated by all member countries and a truly omnibus issue celebrated the event. The first centenary of the U.P.U. fell in 1974 and this yet more important event has been befittingly commemorated by member countries and an omnibus issue celebrated the event.

Thus the Universal Postal Union was one hundred years old last year and I venture to state that it is one of the oldest, if not the oldest international organization in existence; a living monument to true collaboration and goodwill of people of different races, languages and creeds, continually doing a sterling service to the many millions of people throughout the vastness of our terrestrial globe.

Dr. J.H. Mercieca.

* In part this article is based on material published in the consolidated Encyclopedia, 1939.

DR. K. CLOUGH'S VISIT TO MALTA

The monthly meeting of the Society for May was different from the usual meeting in that for the occasion we had a guest speaker who also displayed his specialised and vast collection of Malta. Dr. Kenneth Clough comes from the vicinity of Manchester and he is no new comer to Malta, having served here in 1945 as a Naval Medical Officer at Manoel Island and has since then visited Malta on four occasions.

It was during his stay in Malta in 1945 that he took a fancy for Malta stamps which he started collecting in earnest and in which he has maintained an unabated interest up to the present day.

Dr. Clough is a founder member of the Malta Study Circle, and in this connection, the President of the Society, Dr. J.H. Mercieca, in a welcoming speech before the meeting, held on Monday, 5th May, 1975, expressed pleasure in welcoming "amongst us members of the circle as I feel that these contacts between the two societies serve to further strengthen the ties of friendship and collaboration between us".

Dr. Clough has exhibited parts of his Malta collection at various Exhibitions in the United Kingdom. In 1970, he won a silver-gilt medal for his entry of Malta Proofs and Specimens at the British Philatelic Exhibition. For the same entry he won a silver medal at Philympia in the same year.