

HELVETIA PHILATELIC SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Founded in 1946 by Edward H Spiro

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BRITISH INTERNED IN SWITZERLAND IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR PART 1

DERRICK SLATE



Did you know that there were British interned in Switzerland during the First World War? I didn't until about 12 years ago! This article is based on a collection that I have amassed of British Internees' mail - Illustrated Cards and Official Envelopes sent by British Prisoners of War interned in Switzerland during the First World War to loved ones and officials back home. I have selected a representative sample to illustrate what is a fascinating story. To leave room for articles on other topics it is necessarily only for a brief overview. Nevertheless the messages and pictures do give a flavour of the experiences of individuals caught up in a very complex and ever-changing logistical exercise. The article will appear in several parts over the coming months.

The pictures above show some of the interned British soldiers arriving at Mürren Railway Station and a Swiss young lady marrying a British soldier in Mürren.

1. Introduction

At the outbreak of the First World War, the Swiss mobilised. In the spring of 1915 the Federal Council met with German, French and Belgian ambassadors in Bern to negotiate victims' conditions. Originally it was agreed to intern tubercular cases in Switzerland, then "all kinds" of sick and wounded, except those with infectious diseases. The Federal Council entrusted the work of picking men out from the camps in Germany to Chief Field Medical Officer Colonel Hauser and the medical division of the army. The basic cost of hospitalisation was borne by the countries concerned. The first German and French internees picked, arrived in February 1916. Internees were housed in hotels, small pensions or were hospitalised. Generally, there were not many per establishment, but as the number greatly increased, especially of the German and French, special arrangements had to be made.

2. British Internees

Later, discussions took place with the British Government. The first British contingent crossed the frontier at Constance on 28th May 1916. The troop train was due to arrive in Zürich at 8.30.am (29th May), then proceed on to Bern, Montreux and finally Château d'Oex. There were 32 officers and 272 men. On 30th May the second train load of 150 men (no officers) crossed the frontier and were also sent to Château d'Oex. However, there was not enough room and some soldiers had to stay in the nearby villages of

Rossiniere and Rougemont. Among these groups were a few Irish, a few Canadians, (including one volunteer of over 60), a few sailors, and two soldiers of the Indian Army.

On 11th August 1916 the third train with 37 officers and 394 men crossed the German frontier at Constance, bound for Zürich and then Bern. At Bern they were divided: 8 officers went to Château d'Oex, 47 men to Leysin and the remaining 29 officers and men to Mürren, where they arrived on 12th August. The fourth train carrying 29 officers and 347 men crossed the border on the 12th August, all bound for Mürren where they arrived on the 13th August.

At Mürren the officers had the advantage of being housed in first class hotels under the direct supervision of the Senior British Officer of the Camp. Lt. Colonel F. H. Neish, Gordon Highlanders. At Mürren, cases requiring special treatment were sent to the District Hospital at Interlaken or to hospitals at Bern, Lucerne and Fribourg.

On 25th August 1916 : in Château d'Oex there were 404 British Internees in 13 hotels and pensions, in Rossiniere 43 in 2 hotels, in Rougemont 77 in 4 hotels and in Mürren 478 in 7 hotels and pensions. By 20th January 1917 there were 3 Officers and 95 Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers in Rougemont 13 Officers and 34 Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers in Rossinieres and 34 Officers and 725 Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers in Mürren.

In Leysin there were 1,200 French and Belgian soldiers in hospital and arrangements were made to accommodate an additional 200 British. The first contingent consisted of 47 British (12th August 1916). Many of the British patients sent from Germany to Leysin by the Internment Commissions were on mere suspicion of tuberculosis. After a residence at Leysin from 6 months to a year a large proportion of the sick were cured and were sent on to Château d'Oex or Mürren. On 20th January 1917 there were 6 British Officers and 194 Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers. Ten months later, on 20th December 1917, the number had dropped to 4 Officers and 89 Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers.

Other train loads and small groups of British Internees arrived between 14th December 1916 and 7th December 1918. In addition to the main large groups in Château d'Oex and Mürren there were small numbers of between 1 and 52 in over 40 towns and villages throughout Switzerland. For example, in Geneva it is recorded that there were 4 British Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers on 20th December 1917. In Neuchâtel there were 2 British Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers and 283 French and 103 Belgian Soldiers on 20th January 1917 and 9 British Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers and 371 French and 67 Belgian Soldiers there on 20th December 1917.

Some of the Internees benefited from a training programme organised in the camps' schools and workshops, for example in leather working, tailoring, motor engineering, shorthand, typing or automobile engineering. The British Government (and companies) sent staff over to help with the training. Some wives were allowed to visit their husbands, normally, for one week only and usually in rotation. Some internees were also returned home to Britain.

The most British Internees in Switzerland at any one time (apart from late 1918) was between January 1917 and January 1918 when there were under 1,900. General Statistics of British Internees from the start of 1916 until 11th November 1918 was : 308 Officers, 788 Non-Commissioned Officers, 2,934 Soldiers and 51 Civilians (Interned). On Armistice Day (11th November 1918), 2,247 were in Switzerland, 1,774 had been repatriated, 51 had died, 7 escaped and 2 had been sent back to German POW camps ! The final party of 160 British Internees returned to Britain on 20th December 1918, leaving just a few unfit to travel and others engaged in special duties.

3. Internees' Mail

Internees were entitled to send letters and cards free to addresses within Switzerland and to their homeland. Any correspondence to other countries, special delivery and registered mail was charged normal postage less the domestic rate. Army personnel hand-stamped the mail with a two line straight mark : "Internement des Prisonniers de Guerre" or "Kriegsgefangenen - Internierung" and in some cases "en Suisse" or "in der Schweiz" and the name of the camp on the second line. Mail was then delivered to the regular post office where the normal dated Federal postmark was applied.

Set out below are illustrations and descriptions of a number of cards, covers and photographs that help to illustrate the story :

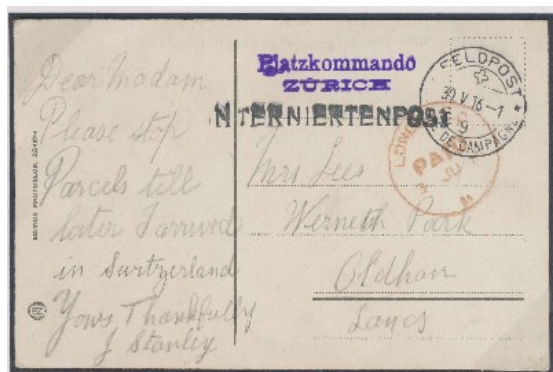


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Fig. 1 - A very rare postcard to Oldham, Lancashire from one of the 150 men in transit who arrived in Zürich on 30th May 1916, probably on the second train. Violet hand-cancel: "Platzkommando ZÜRICH" = Military Command HQ. The Command Centre was the liaison point between the Army and the Local Authorities etc. The authorities had registers of all persons in military service or reserve. When moving from one place to another they had to be registered in both their old and new domiciles. Large black hand-cancel "INTERNIERTENPOST" : this cancel was only used for a person crossing the Swiss border and still in the hands of the Military and later sent to an Internment camp. Federal cancel: "FELDPOST 9, 30. V. 16 POSTE DE CAMPAGNE" which were used at Divisional Fieldpost Offices or Feldpost Centres which had complete postal facilities and acted as collecting agencies for mailings. The feldpost acted as intermediaries between the civilian postal system and the Military unit Fieldpost system. The pencilled message on the card reads : "Dear Madam, Please stop Parcels till later. I arrived in Switzerland. Yours Thankfully, J. Stanley". Arrival date-stamp - "LONDON PAID 3 JU 16". Such a date-stamp was applied to Military mail so that anyone handling the mail would know it was free of postage.

Fig. 2 – Very rare postcard to Mrs. Frith in Handsworth, Birmingham from 'Eddie' who was probably one of the wounded British soldiers on the fourth train across the frontier at Constance. Written when he was in transit to his internment destination. Large blue hand-cancel "INTERNIERTENPOST". Federal cancel: "FELDPOST 9, 13. VIII. 16 POSTE DE CAMPAGNE", Pencil writing: "Dear Mother, Am in Switzerland now hear from me soon. Eddie". Red straight-line arrival date-stamp - "LONDON F. S. PAID 24 AUG 16". F. S. stands for Foreign Service ('F.S. PAID' denotes 'free of postage').



Fig 3 – Picture postcard with the Federal cancel from Château d'Oex on 23rd June 1916 from a person staying in Vevey to South Kensington London. The title on the picture side - 'English Prisoners of War at the First Roll-Call, Château d'Oex'. As this card was sent by a civilian it did not benefit from the free postage arrangements for internees, thus the Federal stamp and the lack of an Internment hand-cancel.

REPORT OF THE NORTHERN REGION MEETING – OCTOBER 2011

DAVID HOPE

The Northern Group were pleased to welcome Eric Lienhard, the Society's Vice-Chairman, to their October meeting. Eric gave two presentations. The first, entitled 'Meine Heimat', was based round Degersheim in Canton St Gallen where there were lots of family connections. Eric showed a variety of postcards of the town and the surrounding area pointing out some of the places connected with his early life. This was followed by a display of postmarks from the 19th-century through to recent K-cancels on mail from and to Degersheim, including some relating to his mother's brother who was valet to Douglas Fairbanks senior. Examples of internment mail from the Second World War recalled that his mother met his stepfather at this time. Also shown was a postcard picture taken by a family member which was used on postcards issued by the PTT in 1932 and a photo of his grandmother's brother who was involved in bringing the railway to Degersheim. Eric ended the first section with a number of cards and postmarks relating to the Bodensee-Toggenburg Railway, together with a card showing the Zeppelin over Degersheim in October 1930. A fascinating presentation which exemplified what can be done when collecting material from a single town or region.

Eric's second presentation concentrated on revenue stamps used on legal documents and various registration and revenue collection documents. He began by showing some federal issues and then went through the cantonal issues. He illustrated the wide variety of designs, from the plain to the pictorial, pointing out that some included dates on them. Among specific uses were those for hospitals, motor cycles and the railways prior to the issue of railway stamps in 1913. He finished his display with some rare examples of the Jura Industrial Railway stamps and a variety of documents with revenue handstamps. In the absence of the chairman Eric was thanked by the Group's Secretary for two varied and interesting presentations.

CONTACTING YOUR SOCIETY'S OFFICERS

Are you taking full advantage of the Society's services ? In case any members don't have the necessary contact details, here they are :

The Chairman, David Hope Tel. 0161 303 0091.

The Secretary, Peter Vonwiller - see details in the heading on the first page of every Newsletter. Email : peter.vonwiller@btinternet.com

The Treasurer, Norton Wragg - Tel. 01625 613654 Email norton.wragg@ntlworld.com

The Packet Secretary, Richard Akers - Address : 'Belmont', Church Lane, Stoke Bruerne, Northamptonshire NN12 7SG Tel. 01604 863328 Email : rjakers@hotmail.co.uk

The Librarian, Derrick Slate - Tel. 01992 421784 Email : derrickslate@googlemail.com

The Webmaster, Fred Hoadley - Tel. 01403 711987 Email : fred.hoadley@btinternet.com

The Publicity Officer, Adrian Keppel. - Tel. 01557 500510 Email : rerrick@btopenworld.com

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Newsletter Editor, Richard Donithorn - see details in the heading on the first page of every Newsletter. Email : katedonithorn@hotmail.com

The Society's Packet Secretary, Richard Akers, writes : "If there are any members who do not currently receive the packet and wish to do so please contact me. Please can I remind members that if forwarding the packet by post they must phone ahead and confirm on the slip that they have done so as this is now mandatory for the terms of our insurance. Finally I would like to thank all our contributors without whom there would be no packet and to you the members who I hope have all found some interesting items to purchase. If any members have an e-mail address please could they inform me on : rjakers@hotmail.co.uk"

The Webmaster, Fred Hoadley, writes ; "I would welcome suggestions, comments and contributions from Society members to keep the Website informative and up-to date."

The Newsletter Distributor, Rosalind Ragg writes : "I am able to supply photocopy or, in some cases, original HPS Newsletters back to 1986, if requested." (Editor)

TIMES GONE BY

ADRIAN KEPPEL

The Society's Publicity Officer, Adrian Keppel, came across these Swiss-related items in the 1909 volume of Gibbons Stamp Weekly which he thought would be of interest to our Members. The Society is grateful to Stanley Gibbons Ltd. for permission to reproduce these articles in our newsletter.

'The Swiss Germania' (14th August Page 164)

The designs of the current low-value stamps of Switzerland, even in their modified form, have been so generally and heartily condemned that it will hardly be a matter for surprise if they are rejected altogether before long. Two more inartistic designs it would be impossible to conceive and so great is the outcry against them that the Federal Post Department will soon require a special library to hold all the cuttings adversely criticizing the issue. The design showing the small son of William Tell hiding behind a gigantic cross-bow is already popularly known as the "Walti's dwarf" - a poor compliment to the artist - while the somewhat forbidding masculine looking Suffragette on the 10, 12 and 15c. stamps has been nicknamed the "Gemanian-Helvetia" ! What have our Teutonic friends to say to this insult ? And Switzerland without a Dreadnought, too !

'Cancellation to Order of Swiss Stamps' (2nd October Page 328)

Hitherto it has been against regulations in Switzerland for post office clerks to cancel stamps sold over the counter when requested to do so by the buyer, the only exception made being in the case of the Postage Due stamps, which were only sold in a cancelled condition.

Owing to numerous requests having been made by tourists and others for current stamps to be cancelled, a new regulation has been issued recently, to the effect that postmasters *may* do so, if they so wish, but only when the stamps to be cancelled have actually been purchased there and then ; they are also obliged by regulation to cancel them with the ordinary cancellation stamp set to the date when the application is made ; they are strictly forbidden to alter the date-stamp backwards or forwards for the purpose of cancelling stamps to order.

'Our Swiss Letter' by A. de Reuterskiold (9th October Page 353)

"I have not given you any news from this country for a very long time, as collecting here has been slack of late, and the various new issues of our stamps have been most thoroughly criticized in the stamp journals. The purchase of the Mirabaud Collection by Mr. Zumstein made many collectors look up their albums again, and although the fine blocks and greatest rarities from the collection have gone to England, many a collection in Switzerland has been considerably improved, and the interest in Swiss stamps revived. A Committee has lately been formed composed of Messers. Arnold, Füre, de Reuterskiold, Shieb and Zumstein, to get up an International Philatelic Exhibition at Bern in the autumn of next year. A suitable hall, the newly-built Casino in the centre of the town has been secured, and the Committee hope to have the programmes out before the end of the year. It is expected that a large number of visitors and exhibitors from England will be able to take part in it, as the date will correspond with that on which so many tourists, who have been spending their holidays in the mountain resorts, are on their way home.

The Monument of the Universal Postal Union is to be unveiled on October the 4th and two commemorative postcards, 5c. and 10c. are to be put on sale on that day in all Swiss post offices. They will be adorned with reproductions of the statue of Berna, from the monument, and the arms of the town of Bern, with beautiful inscriptions. These cards will not be demonetized, and although there will only be one printing, it is estimated that they will be obtainable for at least a month. The U.P.U., therefore, instead of doing its best to stop the issue of commemorative stamps, is for the second time going to issue this rubbish itself; the designs for the cards having been furnished to the Swiss Post Office by the Bureau of the U.P.U.

The Unpaid Letter stamps of the new design are said to be printed, and will be put on sale as soon as the stock of the present ones is exhausted. Some of the current values, viz. 1c. and 100c, with the new watermark are likely to be rare, as they are not yet available at many post offices. This is a lot of news for one letter, but you must not expect another for a long time !"

A NEW MEMBER

The Society welcomes yet another new member, Mr. Malcolm Caroan. Malcolm lives in East Anglia and found us via a friend's use of the Internet. We look forward to seeing him at future Society events.

THE RORSCHACH – HEIDEN RAILWAY

DERRICK SLATE



The colourful, chromo-litho postcard (Fig. 1 above) gives us nostalgic glimpses of this small private railway. The pictures on the card show a steam train with distinctive double-decker carriages designed to give their occupants a good view of the surrounding landscape. The Railway, completed in 1875, was one of three rack and pinion lines laid on standard gauge: 4 feet 8 inches. It starts at the Rorschach Harbour Station of the Swiss Federal Railways on Lake Constance which is featured on one of the stamps of the 1947 Bundesfeier issue – Znr. B35 Rorschach SBB Mainline Station (Fig. 2). Trains travelling between the Harbour and the Town stations use the SBB mainline. The line then turns inland to climb approximately three and a half miles to the pleasant hill resort of Heiden, situated at 2,600 ft. above sea level.

Fig. 3 shows an official Heiden R.H.B. handstamp on letter and Fig. 4 a Fiscal stamp cancelled by Rorschach Railway Station official handstamp. The Railway line has long been electrified, but the two cards below dating from the early 1900s (Figs. 5 and 6) give a good idea of the scenery traversed and of the rather bizarre appearance of the early trains with their steam engine and carriage with its novel viewing platform.



Fig. 2



Fig.3



Fig.4

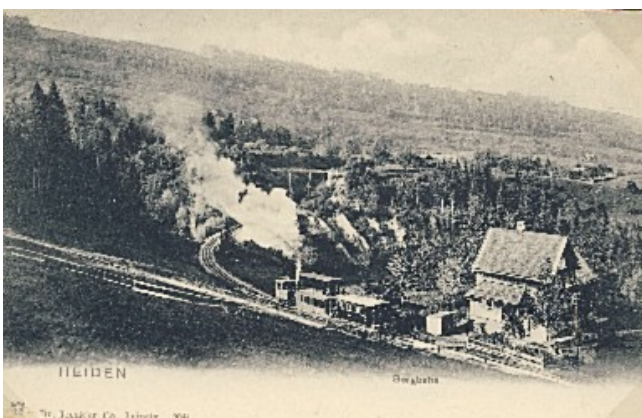


Fig.5

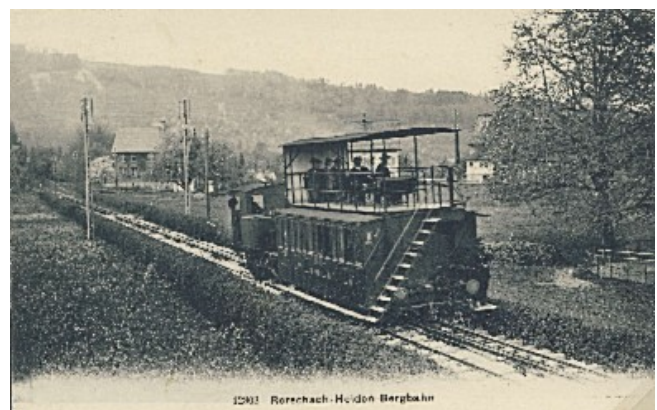


Fig.6

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT – A DIGITAL RESEARCH LIBRARYFRED HOADLEY

After months of preparation, the Society is now able to offer its members a “Digital Library for Swiss Philatelic Research”. Priced at £5 (including postage), this comes in the form of a DVD-R containing the following electronically archived documents:

- 📖 Helvetia Philatelic Society Newsletter 1948 -2006
- 📖 The Swiss Philatelist 1951-1986
- 📖 Helvetia Bulletin 1938 -1957 *
- 📖 Helvetia Alphorn 1969 -1974 *
- 📖 Helvetia Herald 1970 -1974 *
- 📖 TELL Journal 1975 -2006 *

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The disc contains scanned images of the above philatelic publications, digitally reproduced in a format that enables the user to quickly locate passages of text relating to their subject of interest. This collection of portable document format (PDF) files can be viewed and searched on any computer with Adobe Reader installed (downloaded free from www.adobe.com). Collectors, from beginners through to mature students of Swiss philately, will benefit considerably from these compilations.

Would members interested in purchasing a copy of the DVD please register their interest with Fred Hoadley, the Society's webmaster at: webmaster@swiss-philately.co.uk or by phone: 01403 711987.

AUCTION NEWS

We have received the 'List of Prices Realised' for Corinphila Auktionen AG's auction held in Zürich on 6th - 10th September 2011. In their accompanying letter to the Society they state : 'One look at the hammer prices and you can see how well the market is doing and the special position Corinphila has in the market. There has been a perceptible rise in demand for serious philatelic items and collections. Collectors appreciate the significance of the postage stamp as a valuable cultural artefact and are participating eagerly in Corinphila Auctions; whilst at the same time investors have been incurring losses on the volatile financial markets. Their investment models have sometimes been complex. Nowadays investors are getting more interested in traditional havens for their money, especially havens which are under-pinned by consistent demand. After all, you can touch a stamp, you can display it and stamp collecting is a pleasurable activity.....'

The Company's next auction takes place on 24th - 28th April 2012 in Zürich. If any Members consider selling some of their material at this auction or need any further information they should contact Corinphila Auktionen AG at Wiesenstrasse 8 CH – 8034 Zürich, Schweiz. Telephone : + 41 – (0)44 – 389 91 91. Website : www.corinphila.ch The Catalogues for the last auctions in 2010 and 2011 and the '2011 List of Prices Realised' can be borrowed from the Society's Librarian on request. (Editor)

PROPOSED VISIT TO NABA STANS 2012

There has been no response to the article that appeared in the August edition of the Newsletter and it will not now be possible to negotiate a special Group rate with a hotel in Lucerne. Members who ultimately decide to visit the Exhibition will therefore need to make their own arrangements in respect of accommodation as well as travel. If you do decide to go solo the odds are that there will be one or two fellow members to join up with in Switzerland. (The Society's Secretary)



RÖLLI PHILATELY

- Online Auctions: at irregular intervals throughout the year
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THE HPS NEWSLETTER QUESTIONNAIREYOUR EDITOR

I am constantly striving to improve our Newsletter, but I am conscious that I only have feedback from a relatively small proportion of the membership on which to base my judgements. It is important that the voice of 'the silent majority' is heard. To this end I have produced a questionnaire (enclosed with this edition) which I encourage you all to complete and return to me.

I have largely adopted the approach of my distinguished predecessors, on the basis of the old adage 'if it ain't broke don't fix it!' The comments that I have received from readers during my editorship have been largely favourable and encouraging. However I am always very open to change, provided that I can be assured that it is clearly desired by the large majority of the membership. One proviso, I don't think that I can cope with producing much more than 12 8-page editions a year!

I need to know what aspects of the publication you like or dislike, whether you are happy with the format and what topics you would most like to see covered. It should be noted that the content of the Newsletter is largely dependent on the subjects chosen by our volunteer contributors. Virtually all the material I receive from members is published, usually within two months of receipt. I could include more articles first published in other journals, including past copies of the HPSN, but personally I would prefer to use 'home-grown', fresh material whenever possible. Philatelic articles are important in increasing our knowledge and appreciation of our collections, but equally, I believe, a true newsletter should provide Society news and act as a means of dialogue between fellow members and with the Society's Committee. I would print more readers' letters, responses to questions posed, items for sale/exchange or members' news if they were sent to me!

In this digital age it is important that we ensure that the Newsletter is complimentary with the information on the Society's Website. There is great potential in such new media formats. Your suggestions on how best to maximise the combined benefits of the two would be much appreciated.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE QUESTIONNAIRE as soon as you can. You don't have to answer all the questions if you don't want to, but it would help! Feel free to use the back if you feel that the questions constrain your opportunity to get your 'real message' across. It is anonymous, but you can divulge your name if you wish. I will analyse the results and report back to your Committee and the membership in the New Year. Thankyou – Richard.

2012 SOCIETY ANNUAL NATIONAL MEETING - A PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT

It is planned to hold this increasingly popular event in Wells, Somerset on **16th and 17th April** next year. Yes the dates are correct - a Monday and a Tuesday. Full details together with an application form will be circulated with the December Newsletter but do put the dates in your diary now. (The Society's Secretary)

NEXT NORTHERN REGION MEETINGS

Saturday 5th November 2011 – 'Swiss Postal Coaches' by David Hope, Future meetings : 3rd December - 'MPOs and Special Cancellations', 7th January – subject to be determined, All Members. All the meetings will take place at Corporation Mill, Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire commencing at 2.00.p.m. Further details from David Hope Tel. 0161 303 0091.

THE CANTONAL STAMPS OF GENEVA – HELP WANTED

Your Editor is looking for someone to translate a speech in French made by Professeur Alphonse de Candolle promoting the introduction of postage stamps in Geneva in 1843. He was a Professor of Botany at the University and a Deputy of Geneva's Grand Conseil. Volunteers please!

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THE HPS NEWSLETTER QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete and return to the Editor (10, Park Drive, Felpham, West Sussex, PO22 7RD), preferably by the end of November. Any queries – please telephone Richard on 01243 583237. Feel free to use the reverse, if you need to. Tick either 'yes' or 'no' where appropriate. Thank you Very Much.

1. What are your main collecting interests ?

2. What do you like/dislike about your Newsletter ?

3. How could its content be improved ?

4. Is the balance between 'philatelic articles' and 'news' about right ?

YES/NO

If not, how could it be improved ?

5. Do you think the subject matter is - too specialist / about right / too superficial / simplistic ?(please tick)

6. What subjects would you like to see covered in more depth ?

7. Would you like to see 'key articles' from previous newsletters reprinted in the Newsletter ? YES/NO

If so, have you any in mind ? -

8. Would you like to see more articles from other journals reproduced in the Newsletter ? YES/NO

If so, have you any in mind ? -

9. Are the content and roles of the Newsletter and Website complimentary/fully compatible ? YES/NO

If not, how could this be improved ? -

10. Do you use the website addresses quoted in the Newsletter ?

YES/NO

If not, what contact details would best suit your needs ? -

11. Any comments on the format, layout, typeface (incl. size), illustrations, frequency, distribution system, other ?

12. Should we devote more space to commercial advertising/auction news ?

YES/NO

13. Other comments ? - Plenty of room on the reverse !