

Harrogate 2008: A Report on the Show

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I have just returned home from a great day out at the ABPS Harrogate 2008 National Philatelic Exhibition, and am tired but happy as I write this report.

Penny Blacks, Two Penny Blues, Portuguese engraved masterpieces, Chilean classics, early transatlantic mail, wartime mails, miniature graphic art from the Commonwealth, Victorian postal stationery, and RAF Indian covers were all on show – and much more besides – in around 500 frames of both competitive and non-competitive classes.

The organisers told me that exhibits were up by one hundred percent over last year due to Harrogate offering the last chance for exhibitors to qualify for the home international scheduled for 2010. Standards were of the highest quality with more Gold and Large Gold medals being awarded this year than for several years past.

Richard Wheatley, Exhibition Secretary, said “Many of these exhibits have taken their owners a lifetime to acquire. This show is a ‘once in a lifetime’ opportunity to view extraordinarily scarce material and to marvel at the history it conveys.”

There were also four excellent invited displays:

- The Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection Michael Sefi, showed, with permission of Her Majesty the Queen, British Wilding issues, Falkland Islands, Jamaica, Hong Kong, Cyprus and Gibraltar material, including artworks, proofs and errors.
- The two prepayment concepts proposed by Rowland Hill, namely the Penny Black and the Mulready envelopes and letter sheets, were to be seen.
- A display of Portugal from 1853-84 examined the die characteristics and flaws associated with three engravers.
- The fourth display comprised Chilean proofs, unissued stamps, revenues and imperforate classics from the designer and engraver, Jose Moreno. Chilean World War One postal history and World War Two aerophilatelic connections to Europe and North America completed this exhibit.

In excess of fifty specialist dealers and auction houses were present, including a few from abroad, giving all visitors the chance to add to their collections. One dealer told a friend of mine that he had enjoyed “a fantastic show, with more money taken in the last hour and a half than I ever thought possible”. (The contribution made by the dealers in helping to balance the accounts of an exhibition by paying for stands cannot be

over-emphasised because around half of the costs of the show are covered by their attendance.)

Four society meetings were held over the weekend, including the National Philatelic Society on the Friday who successfully trialled the reintroduction of meetings outside of London, with forty collectors attending; while the GBPS, Postal History Society and West Africa Study Circle all held meetings on the Saturday. Seven other societies took stands to help promote their respective organisations.

The venue was an inspired choice and offered ease of access for all visitors, being totally on one level and with everything in one large room. The hall was extremely well lit and the exhibits could therefore be admired – a major fault with Croydon where some exhibits had been virtually in darkness.

A free handbook and catalogue was given to all visitors and comprised 48 pages of A5, containing everything that should be expected in order to be of value while at the show and to serve as a useful record of the event afterwards.

For once, the press was very well taken care of, with the electronic press packs that I received from Tony Plumbe, Publicity Officer, offering many lessons for other FIP and National show organisers to learn from. Before the show had opened, I had been sent a map of Harrogate, the location for the show, a list of booked dealers, a Press Conference invitation and Press Release, plus a full record of all the exhibits that would be on display.

For me, there were only two disappointments on the day. Firstly, the total lack of any suitable philatelic souvenir for the exhibition and this is another issue that I had with Croydon last year. The excellent sheets produced by Thematica are a fine example of what can be done; while ABPS Torquay in 2006 produced several interesting additions for collectors of this area of philately that goes back to the reign of Queen Victoria.

The second disappointment was completely outside of the control of the organisers and that was an almost total lack of children – at least on the Saturday, when I saw only two youngsters all day. With an encouraging 42 of the stamp exhibits coming from budding stamp collectors, I had expected to see more of these exhibitors in attendance.

Anyone who had been thinking of attending Harrogate 2008, but then did not go for whatever reason, should be kicking themselves as they read this report, for they missed out on a rare philatelic treat. There was a real 'buzz' about the place and everyone that I spoke to was full of praise for what had been achieved.

The organisers of the next ABPS event will have much to live up to.
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