

Best Practice:

REACHING OUT

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In preparation for writing this article I have been reflecting on a recent visit of myself and some of my philatelic colleagues, to the Grand Masonic Lodge, in Central London, where we had been given an excellent tour throughout the building and a fascinating guide and insight to the Masonic Fraternity and its history.

What has this to do with philately?

Well not much really except that all stamp collectors and philatelists, by the very nature of their chosen hobby, have an enquiring mind, recognising this, the Curator of the Lodge's Museum & Archive, in preparation for our visit, unearthed a half forgotten stamp collection uncatalogued and previously not seen for many years. We hadn't expected the collection to be up to very much, but after the tour politely went along to view the two albums he had selected for us, from apparently a much

albums turned out to be very interesting with a wealth of information annotated within their pages. However, that is not the end, nor the point of my story... As it happened, one of the volunteer members of the Museum 'confessed' to being a stamp collector and was becoming increasingly excited as he viewed the contents of the albums previously unknown to him. Such was his interest that he vowed to spend time in future to sorting and cataloguing the entire collection. We were able to give him some on the spot advice as well as putting him in touch with the Masonic Philatelic Club based in the UK but with a world-wide membership. Overall it was a very satisfactory outcome both for the Grand Masonic Lodge Museum and for philately, and one that had not been immediately obvious at the commencement of our tour. When visiting museums, art galleries, libraries, etc. it may be well worth asking if, like the Grand Masonic Lodge, they have any philatelic items hidden away in their archives, of which you may be able to offer help and advice.



Grand Masonic Lodge photograph (take on 23rd after probate)

larger collection, which had been donated to the museum some 30 years earlier. To our amazement, the

Another way of reaching out to non-philatelists is the example set by my friend the late UK exhibitor Steve Boorn. Steve collected and exhibited, with a great deal of success, stamps and philatelic material in connection with the heart transplant he had received many years earlier. He was very proud of his collection and was always searching for ways to promote not only his hobby but the tremendous work that dedicated doctors and nurses perform in connection with medicine generally, and in organ transplants particularly.

A couple of years ago he approached the famous Harefield Hospital in Hertfordshire England, where he had had his pioneering operation years earlier, and asked if pages from his



Steve Boorn or his display page

exhibit could go on display. The hospital readily agreed and so Steve arranged for a few of his friends to help him erect 8 frames borrowed from his local Federation. Photocopies of his gold medal winning were placed in the frames where visitors to the hospital could view them.

As it turned out not only visitors, but patients, and even the nurses and doctors took a very active and positive interest in the display, and many could be seen at any given time, viewing the pages.

The exhibit was on display for a month and Steve was on hand for several pre-arranged question and answer sessions where the public could meet Steve and discuss his collection. It was a very successful venture and one that, with a bit of effort, could be emulated in schools, libraries, museums, etc. with other relevant collections and static displays.

I have had some very interesting afternoons/evenings, displaying and talking about my World War II Thematic collection, to women’s clubs, business men’s clubs, Red Cross societies, etc. I even had the honour to be invited to give a talk entitled ‘The Post Office Went to War’ to an audience at Bletchley Park, home of the wartime secret Enigma code breakers, and now a very popular museum. Very often there are members in the audience who remember the events of the War, including evacuation, the Blitz, rationing etc. and this can bring some poignant and very often humorous debates. If the event is a totally non-philatelic venue then I find a short PowerPoint

presentation coupled with relevant ephemera (for example gas masks, ration books, wartime Ministry of Information leaflets, etc.) and of course philatelic items from my collection evoke much discussion and memories. It is often a two-way connection, with me learning as much from my audience as they do from me! A very satisfying situation.

Although there are many more possibilities, in the above I have outlined three areas from my experience of ‘Reaching Out’ to a non-philatelic audience; to recap these are:

Contact with non-philatelic curators and archivists, eg libraries, local museums. Static displays, eg hospitals, schools, libraries, local government offices. PowerPoint slide shows to non-philatelic organisations. eg Red Cross, Women’s Institutes & charity organisations, retired business groups, Rotary Clubs, etc.

Although to my knowledge none of these outreach examples quoted directly resulted in active participation or



Me at last years BSAP convention

recruitment of new stamp collectors/philatelists. However, the positive outcome is that the generally uninitiated are at least made more aware of what modern stamps collectors or philatelists are about, and that can only have a positive impact on the long term understanding and continuation of our hobby.