

"It all started over a shop in Clapham"

A History of National Philatelic Society

Just over 125 years ago, on 11 November 1899 to be precise, the 16-year old Fred Melville held a meeting over a shop in Clapham, south London which proved to be a landmark in the history of philately in this country. Melville was holding the first ever meeting of the Junior Philatelic Society (JPS) which he set up after his application to join what is now the "Royal" was rejected on account of his age.(1).

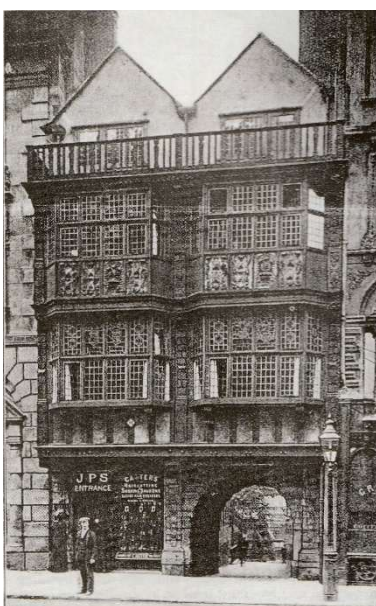
Fred Melville was soon joined by Herbert "Johnny" Johnson. Melville was the writer and propagandist, while Johnson was the businessman and organiser. He gave his name to the annual Johnson Literary Award, now a familiar annual fixture for readers of Stamp Lover who are asked to choose their favourite feature published during the previous 12 months.



FRED J. MELVILLE 1882-1940
THE DOYEN OF PHILATELIC JOURNALISTS

Meeting Venues

The Society soon grew and by 1905 moved its meetings to central London – initially at Exeter Hall in the Strand and then (from 1908-1922) at Prince Henry's Council Chamber over the Inner Temple Gateway at 17 Fleet Street (*pictured*). This was one of the few half-timbered buildings to escape the Great Fire. Prince Henry's Room is open to the public.



NO. 17 FLEET STREET.
Where the Junior Philatelic Society's Meetings were held from 1908

Subsequent meeting places included the National Liberal Club and the ill-fated London International stamp Centre off the Strand before the move to the British Philatelic Centre at 107 Charterhouse Street. The Society remained there until the building was sold in 2007.

In subsequent years the Society met at venues in the Mount Pleasant area but since September 2022 it has returned to a philatelic setting – 15 Abchurch Lane in the City of London, the premises of the



Royal Philatelic Society. This move also re-united members with the Society's Library that after being based in the British Philatelic

Centre and then at the Postal Museum & Archive, had been transferred to the Royal after being located in Berkshire for a number of years.

Success led to branches



Success in London led to the formation of branches in Manchester, Liverpool and Brighton in the early 20th century. The Liverpool Society was formed in 1906 but its connections with London did not last long, despite retaining "Junior" in its title until 1940.

The Manchester Junior Philatelic Society declared its independence after taking exception to London's attempts to muscle in on the organisation of the Exhibition and Philatelic Congress that Manchester itself was hosting in 1909. (Hence the *Stamp Collectors' Fortnightly* cartoon, shown alongside). The philatelic politics of the tensions between the JPS in London and Manchester were described by Alan Spencer in the December 2022 edition of *Stamp Lover*.

Brighton's affiliation continued until 30 September 1942 when it was amicably terminated on economic grounds.

Exhibitions

Barely two years old, the JPS had held its first exhibition in Clapham in 1901 followed in 1905 by a two-day exhibition at the Exeter Hall in London. Afterwards, the dealers present treated Melville and the organisers to a dinner and it was revealed that the event had covered its costs –making a net profit of 15/7d (77p).

The JPS itself went on to organise major exhibitions in 1908, 1912 and 1923, and played a prominent role in other exhibitions in the inter-war years.

After the second World War, the Society worked with the Philatelic Traders Society (PTS) in organising the annual exhibitions that became Stampex. Later the PTS became the sole organisers of Stampex, but the NPS remained involved through running the Information stand until Autumn Stampex 2019, when a number of members also displayed at the show.

Publicity

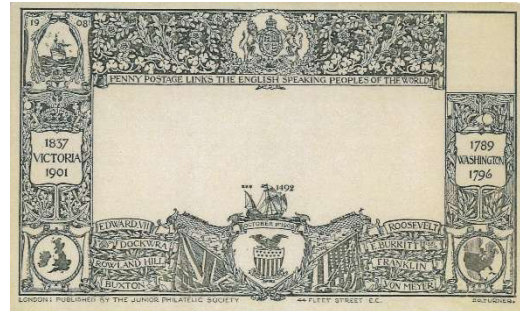
Publicity was always to the fore and the society was quick to use postal developments to this end. The extension of Penny Post to the USA in 1908 prompted the production of a commemorative



envelope and promotional letter to potential members in the USA.

In 1911 the Coronation and the new King George V stamps resulted in a first-day circular promoting the society and the Jubilee Exhibition that it was organising for 1912 (see illustrations).

When the first King George V "Downey Head" stamps proved unsuccessful, the JPS went on to organise a competition to find the "Ideal Stamp". The winner of the competition was Mr H Schubert; the stamps were printed in various colours and perforated by the Stamp Factory set up at the 1912 Exhibition.

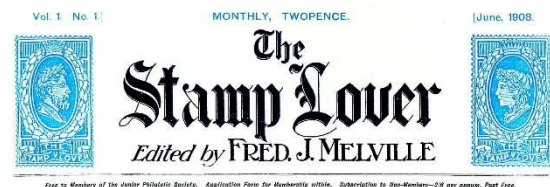


Stamp Lover

The history of *Stamp Lover* is inextricably bound up with that of the JPS and NPS. Initially the JPS journals were the *Philatelic Trader* and *Stamp Collecting Fortnightly*. But in June 1908 Fred Melville launched *Stamp Lover*. In his first editorial he wrote, "The keynote of *Stamp Lover* will be enthusiasm - an enthusiasm for stamps and stamp collecting, and an enthusiasm for the JPS, which this journal is to represent."

With just a short break in 1915, Melville remained editor until his untimely death in 1940. To describe Melville's career as a philatelic writer would take up an entire feature, or even a book. He was able to explain philately to the public in plain English, and explain even complex philatelic issues in a simple way.

He had a weekly column in the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote many philatelic works and even prefaces to



Free to Members of the Junior Philatelic Society. Application Form for Membership within. Subscription to Non-Members—2/6 per annum. Post Free.

Important Notice

One of the first duties of THE STAMP LOVER is to extend the influence of the Junior Philatelic Society. The Society, formed in 1899 by a small band of juniors, has gradually attained a position of high importance, and we confidently look upon the advent of THE STAMP LOVER as a means of greatly increasing its strength.

As the ordinary meetings for the season 1907-8 will be over by the time this first number appears, the Committee has decided to take an important step which will, we feel sure, meet with a cordial response from large numbers of collectors who considered it too late in the season to join after the installation.

The Committee will close the receiving of subscriptions for 1907-8 on the 31st of May, this year, and on and after 1st June all subscriptions received from new applicants for membership will also be received. New members the privilege of membership from the date of joining, until September 30th of next year, 1909. This means that a new member joining in June of this year pays his usual twelve months' subscription, but it holds good for sixteen months.

In view of the fact that THE STAMP LOVER starts in June, this means that anyone joining the Society on 1st June gets sixteen numbers in his first subscription.

In order to cope with the influx of new members the Committee has appointed a special Sub-Committee to select approved applicants without delay. If you are not already a member of the Junior Philatelic Society you should send in your application at once, accompanied by a postal order, to the Hon. Secretary, Mr. Arthur Sullivan, 3 Paper Street, Eekrows Street, London, E.C.

The annual subscription to the Society is 2s. 6d., with no entrance fee for collectors under 21 years of age or for ladies. The entrance fee for gentlemen over 21 is 2s. 6d.

To The Stamp Lover.

The keynote of THE STAMP LOVER will be enthusiasm—an enthusiasm for stamps and stamp collecting—and an enthusiasm for the Junior Philatelic Society, which this journal is to represent.

To get the highest enjoyment out of a study, a sport, a recreation or a hobby there must be enthusiasm. The like warm man never gets there. His power storage lives out before he can arrive. Enthusiasm makes enthusiasts, and so feeds itself.

We can imagine no greater pleasure in any pastime than that of Frank Walton in his favourite pursuit, nor can we imagine anything so hopelessly futile as to follow Walton's pastime without at least a good measure of his enthusiasm. It is useless, indeed, to follow any business, art, science, what you like, in the hope of achieving anything while lacking a real enthusiasm for the particular pursuit in which one is engaged.

Now, the designation of our particular pursuit implies enthusiasm. *Philately* implies the love of stamps; *philatelist* implies a lover of stamps, or, in the form of the title of our journal, a "Stamp Lover."

The Junior Philatelic Society, more than any other stamp society, is composed of enthusiasts—stamp lovers—and our policy in endeavouring to create this keynote of enthusiasm for stamps throughout this new journal will, we feel confident, meet with the warmest approval from the seven hundred and more stamp lovers for whom we are primarily to enter in these pages.

Thus, in presenting a new journal, chiefly for the benefit of the wonderfully successful Junior Philatelic Society, we have taken our cue from the prime factor in the remarkable growth of the Society itself and trust that it will lead the journal to success, and also extend the influence and spread the enthusiasm of the Society which we shall endeavour worthily to serve.

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stamp albums. He was working on the masterly “Postage stamps in the Making” for the 1940 stamp Centenary when he suffered an untimely death.

Subsequent editors have included the brothers, L & N M Williams (1940-64), Michael Furnell and David Alford, who introduced colour and produced the special 90-page 2008 Centenary Issue. He was succeeded by the present editor in 2009. Today, about one in three members receive the publication electronically.

Change of Name and Centenary

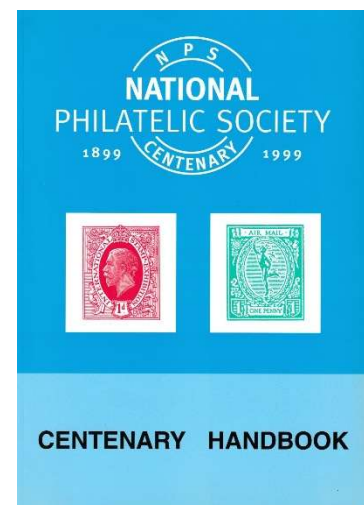
By 1965 it was felt that the original title hindered recruitment by suggesting the NPS was aimed at minors (2) and so it was as the *National Philatelic Society* (NPS) that it celebrated its centenary in 1999.

A centenary is a milestone for any organisation and the NPS celebrated it in style, beginning with a Celebratory Reception hosted by Phillips Auctioneers at their fine Bond street premises on the evening of Thursday 11 November, followed by a Dinner at the Royal Overseas League in st James attended by 83 members and guests on Friday night, 12 November. Finally, Saturday 13 November brought The Melville Centenary Lecture at University College, London when Stephen Holder’s subject was “Fred Melville – his life and influence on the National Philatelic society”.. After this, back at the British Philatelic Centre, the afternoon meeting included a special Centenary Auction.

There was a special Centenary Display at the Royal Philatelic Society in May 1999 for which a special 16-page special brochure was issued. There was also a display at Spring Stampex on 3- 7 March, for which a 28-page brochure was produced. A 64-page handbook, entitled *National Philatelic Society 1899-1999 Centenary Handbook* (edited by Michael Furnell), carried a series of articles devoted to historical aspects of the Society, including a mass of historical data about individuals who were in some way connected with the Junior and later National Philatelic Society.

The Society also produced a limited edition "Boots pane" featuring a 1st class Machin. Only 500 were produced.

Also in 1999, three bodies - the British Philatelic Trust, the Association of British Philatelic societies and the National Philatelic society - got together to develop the UK Philately website covering “Stamp Collecting plus much, much more”, the aim being to promote the hobby generally and the three bodies in particular – a move truly in the Melville tradition. In those days, he had already promoted the hobby through slide shows.



The NPS today

Recent years have not been without their challenges. The COVID pandemic resulted in the suspension of live meetings and room auctions, but the NPS continued to serve members through *Stamp Lover*, the Circulating Packet and Postal Auctions.

2022 brought the re-introduction of regular Auctions with Room and Postal Bidding. six London Meetings a year at 15 Abchurch Lane, now alternate with on-line Zoom meetings reaching members wherever they live. With twelve meetings a year, six auctions, the Circulating Packet (which operates throughout the UK), and *Stamp Lover* (available in paper or electronic form), we believe the NPS has plenty to offer collectors and philatelists everywhere.

Our membership was increased in 2023 when 80 new members joined us from the London & Provincial stamp Club. They have not only boosted our numbers but brought in new members willing to help run the society and contribute to *Stamp Lover*.

The Society has not only achieved 125 years, but continues to thrive with members throughout the United Kingdom and Overseas. We hope this article will explain some of the history of the JPS and NPS to our new members and remind our existing members of this special anniversary



NB: Much of the material for this article was included in a presentation by Peter Mellor to the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain in Birmingham in September 2022. It drew upon the National Philatelic Society Centenary Handbook (1999) and featured in a report in *Stamp Lover*, December 2022.

Footnotes and bibliography (Our thanks to Brian Birch for his research)

(1) According to Brian, the society's original name was the Junior London Philatelic Society. The Society quickly removed 'London' from its name following a complaint from the [Royal] Philatelic Society, London regarding similarity of names and potential for confusion.

(2) [James Negus (Editor)]: 'A new name for the J.P.S.: Views of members sought', *Stamp Lover*, March 1965, Volume 57, Issue 2, p.34. 'Given that the term Junior does not reflect the membership of the Society, the

Editor calls for the views of the members.' 'The change of name', *Stamp Lover*, May 1965, Volume 57, Issue 3, pp.65-67. 'Contributions to the debate from members. The J.P.S. becomes the National Philatelic Society'. *Stamp Lover*, November 1965, Volume 57, Issue 6, p.169. 'The announcement of the change of name.' Arthur J. Brown: (Letters to the Editor): 'National Philatelic Society'. *Stamp Lover*, January 1966, Volume 58, Issue 1, p.15. [An additional comment on the name change.]

Additonal Reading, courtesy of Brian Birch.

A Junior: *Story of the Junior Philatelic Society.*, *The Postage Stamp*, 7th March 1908, Volume 1, Issue 23, pp.298-300. *The foundation and growth of the Junior Philatelic Society.*

Ralph Wedmore: *The Story of the J.P.S.*, *The Stamp Lover*, October 1909, Volume 2, Issue 5, pp.89-92. {Reprinted as a brochure by the Junior Philatelic Society, London, UK, [1909], 4pp.} *A brief history of the Society.*

H. P. Terry: *The Secret of the J. P. S.*, *Junior Philatelic Society*, London, UK, n.d. [1922 from the text], 12pp. *A combined prospectus and concise history of the Society. Its primary purpose was to attract new members.*

Ralph Wedmore: *The Junior Philatelic Society. Past, present, and future.*, *The Stamp Lover*, October 1929, Volume 22, Issue 5, pp.117-120. {An updated version of this history was published as a pull-out insert in **The Stamp Lover** of December 1951.} *A brief account of the inception, objects and undertakings of the Society.*

A Member: *The J.P.S. in King George's reign.*, *The Stamp Lover*, May 1935, Volume 27, Issue 12, p.348. *The development of the Society over the 25 years since King George V came to the throne.*

C. B. Purdom & W. Darwen: *In the beginning: Memoires of the early days of the J.P.S.*, *The Stamp Lover*, October/November 1949, Volume 42, Issue 5/6, Front cover & pp.64-65. *Personal memories of the early days of the Society with a couple of historic mementos.*

The Great Jubilee, *The Stamp Lover*, December 1949, Volume 42, Issue 7, front cover & pp.106-108. *Details of the 50th Anniversary celebration.*

The Junior's story, *The West-End Philatelist*, January/February 1953, p.11. *A brief history of the Society.*

From a parlour in Clapham to Fleet Street Headquarters, *Stamp Weekly*, 14th December 1967, Volume 1, Issue 14, p.12. *A brief history of the Society.*

The National Philatelic Society: A special feature to mark the 75th anniversary of this famous society, *The Stamp Magazine*, September 1974, Volume 40, pp.62-64. (Also included in this feature are **John Grimmer:** *Why I am a member of the NPS.*, **G. E. Wilson:** *The Exchange Packet.* and **R. A. G. Lee:** *A message for all from the President.*)

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