

HISTORY OF LOCKS

By Brian Morland



Locksmiths Leisure Activities

Locksmiths, by their very nature, are passionate about their chosen trade. Indeed this trade, perhaps more than any other, requires a certain proactive approach to things like market trends, product knowledge and training. At the end of a full-on day there is nothing better than immersing oneself into some sort of recreational passionate activity; a break from the day job but equally motivational.

For me there is no difficulty in switching to lock restoration, lock study or indeed reading through some of those Victorian ledgers; all equally fascinating and of course very therapeutic.

It occurred to me that there are several leisure activities where our particular trade could in one way or another be the background theme and of course perhaps involving other members of the family or maybe joining a club or society – so here I have set out just one of my secondary interests but still very much connected with locks and keys; an idea that might well start be the catalyst to starting your own collection inspiration.

Stamp collecting with our trade as the theme is one idea based on locks keys and security. A few years ago the Ilco Unican Corp of North America issued a key blank catalogue featuring a cover with a philately theme, this was what inspired me to put together a stamp collection which has developed into an interesting album. The inside cover of the catalogue explains the cover picture thus:

“The cover of this book suggests visually, the universal and historical nature of the key blank”

From earliest times, man has found ways to fashion locks and keys. Primitive hand forged methods have given way to the sophisticated computer aided manufacturing technology employed at Ilco Unican.

The stamps making up our cover background are representative samples from a unique collection compiled by Dr Cyril Gryfe of Toronto Canada.



[Dominion Lock Co Catalogue No. 60 cover of 1988.](#)

The collection was given to Aaron Fish by Dr Gryfe, a friend for over 40 years.

The following narrative is an excerpt from the introduction to the collection:

“One of the hallmarks of civilised man is his concern for the material security of his person and property. The invention and development of the lock and key not only attests to his preoccupation with security, but also provides an important example of technology and design. The central function of the key, with its implication of selective control, has been expressed frequently in mythology, heraldry and in the graphic and plastic arts

“Postage stamp design has drawn heavily from these general areas of human expression. From the hundreds of thousands of stamps which have been issued by national postal authorities since 1840, only a relatively tiny number have incorporated the image of a key or lock, and usually as a mere incidental element in the main purpose of the design. My search for stamps has yielded this modest collection. Dr Cyril Gryfe.”



[The Milner Tower featured on a Isle of Man 8p stamp of 1978](#)

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A page from the HoL stamp album. The Vatican city and countries with a strong Papal following are good contenders for stamps featuring keys.

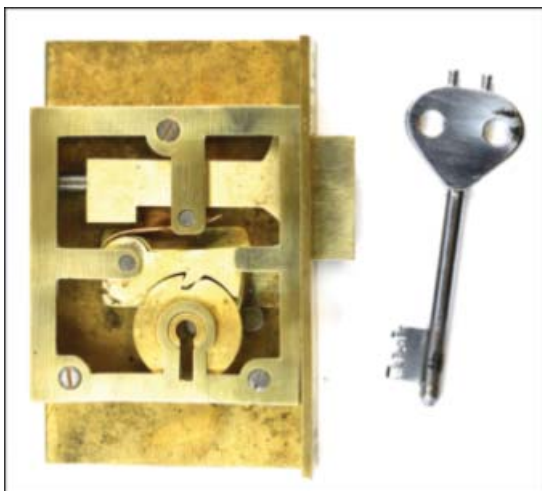
Since the aforementioned catalogue was published quite a few additional stamps have been added to our collection, some such as the Isle of Man issue featuring the Milner tower high on the cliffs overlooking Port Erin. This is where historical knowledge and the back stories greatly enhance a collection. Another association for the stamp collector would naturally include bank notes, coins and also post box locks of which there were quite a few designs.

Postal history is as much a part of a stamp collection, especially when connected with locks and security, we quote from the Chubb Collectanea of 1968:-

“Throughout the first century of the company the name of Chubb became not only better and better known, but also a symbol of excellence. A number of tributes of the company’s fame and achievements have survived, many of them of unusual character. For instance a Chubb advertisement was used in America as a postage stamp design.

Dissatisfaction with the appearance and utility of London pillar boxes and the lack of uniformity of design led, in April 1856 to authority being given for the Department of Science and Art, South Kensington, to prepare new designs. Fifty of the approved designs were ordered from Smith and Hawkes of Birmingham, fitted with Chubb locks and keys. Chubb’s used the illustration picturing the first London box at the corner of Fleet Street and Farringdon Street as an advertisement.

Two years before this, one George Hussey started an independent postal service in New York. He issued his own stamps and organised his own



A Chubb post box lock from c1920's, a five lever lock with a curtain restrictor and a button trap.



The London letterbox No.1, from about 1856, was fitted with a Chubb Lock,

post-offices. The designs for the first two stamps carried a Greek temple on one and the Smith and Hawkes/Chubb letterbox on the other. Incidentally fifty of these boxes were ordered at a cost of £9 18s 0d. each The locks cost 14 shillings each. Thirty-two were set up in London, eleven in Edinburgh and seven in Dublin. Like the boxes in Paris, they were all painted bronze.”

So this is just one idea where a nice collection can be assembled connected with our trade but is also relatively inexpensive, but more importantly you will have a great deal satisfaction searching out stamps at antique fairs auctions etc. and you never know you might even come across the occasional locks as well. There are other themes and ideas that are lock related and they will be visited in future articles.

Brian Morland, curator of the Heritage Collection of locks and keys, welcomes comments and corrections on historical aspects of locks and keys. Brian can be contacted by email: brian@emorlands.com

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MLA Heritage Room News

Latest News about the items on display at MLA HQ.

Everybody by now knows that the Aubin trophy is now on permanent display in the Heritage Room; special thanks to all those that came along on the open day and helped to make it such a success. Special thanks also to Bob Callard, Simon Treagust and Bob Newton for artefacts donated on the day and to all those that promised additional items. The showcase that houses the Aubin Trophy is being additionally furnished with other highly decorated locks from those great Victorian exhibitions and also contemporary production examples of the trophy representations. Don't forget you can visit the Heritage Room whenever you wish (weekdays 10am-4pm advising HQ of your visit beforehand), I also attend about once a month with the HoL computerised digital archive, so do visit if you can, email me for the next date when we are open on a Saturday.

A few pictures from the Aubin Trophy open day.



THE PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT FOR THE LOCKSMITH WHO HAS EVERYTHING?

From Paul Etheridge

Since I've retired and have nothing to do but wander aimlessly about I came upon this sculpture in an art gallery in Worthing.

It's made of key blanks and is going for the reasonable price of £3500.00.

The sculptor is Shaun Gagg

And just in case one of our members fancies investing it's in the Room with a View gallery on Warwick Street

