

## THE BRITISH MATCHBOX LABEL & BOOKLET SOCIETY

Oatlands Drive  
WEYBRIDGE  
Surrey

30 August, 1980

Dear Mr. Alderton,

I have read with interest your query regarding the formation of the British Matchbox Label & Booklet Society.

The present Society was started in 1945 by three people, Ian Clarke, R.M. Whiteley and myself following a label "party" which I held at my house in August 1944. Ian Clarke became President of the Society during 1951/52 and has since died; Mr. Whiteley gave up collecting some years later; and I remain.

We circulated about 120 people whom we knew to be interested and 63 of them joined. We numbered those acceptances in alphabetical order, and so Gordon Appleby became Member No.1, I became Member No. 28, Joan Rendell was Member No.32, and so on.

At the 1944 party I had invited those whom I knew had made an effort to form a Society in 1937. The prime movers of that Society were a Mrs. Evans and a Col. Stitt, both of whom I knew well. They both died very shortly after the formation of the present Society. A Mrs. Inman, who had also been in the earlier Society remained enthusiastic for some years and indeed, also became President of this Society (1947/48).

I am still an active member of the Society. I offer guidance from time to time but prefer to see other folk "having a go" in running the Society. I think its survival is pleasing and praiseworthy but in some ways it has not measured up to the hopes which the three of us had when we started. One factor which we had underestimated was the influence of dealers; another the flood of mint labels which keep getting unearthed.

The initial Society ran into money trouble in 1937. The enthusiasm was there but nobody would foot the bills for postage, stationery, etc. The present Society had the same difficulty in its early months when I was left to settle the accounts out of my own pocket.

Sincerely  
J.K. (Ken) Morris

*EDITOR'S NOTE : Ken Morris was regularly seen in London meetings throughout the 80's, some of the time in further service as a Committee Member but sadly, he died in December, 1992.*

Marlborough Hill,  
Harrow, Middlesex

Dear James,

Thanks for inviting me to reminisce about the early days of the Society. It has prompted me into doing what I have long-postponed !

### **MATCHES ARE PRECIOUS - MAKE THEM LAST**

Not, as one might think, last year's Conservative Party Chairman exhorting his members to go "Back to Basics", but a matchbox slogan from fifty years ago. It is a reminder that our Society was born in the last year of the Second World War, at a time of shortages. Matches (like cigarettes, torch batteries and razor blades) were not officially rationed, but shopkeepers operated their own system of sharing out available supplies.

My own match label collecting days began in 1938 when I was twelve. It was not a good time to begin because within a year war had broken out and supplies of matches from overseas were cut off. However, several British factories were still in production and, as well as keeping an eye on the gutters of South West London where I lived, I also wrote to manufacturers hoping for a few "free samples". Mr. Ivan Pritchard (Society Member No.373) of S.J. Moreland & Son of Gloucester generously obliged and put me in touch with Gerald Floyd who ran a duplicated magazine called "Floyd's Label Review". This kept going throughout the war and continued into the early 1960's.

It was through Floyd's Label Review (later renamed The Phillumenist) that I came into contact with many collectors who became early members of the BML&BS. They were mostly older than myself, and some had been members of a pre-war Society. They wrote learned articles about the Nurseryland Series, Norwegian Red Cross, Congreves, the Troy Label, Central Sentry and such like of which I had never heard, let alone possessed. But I found Floyd's Label Review a great educator and during the war years I got used to seeing the same names in its correspondence columns. Consequently when, at the start of 1945, I received an invitation to join the new Society under the auspices of Ian Clark (No.10), Ken Morris (No.28) and Dick Whiteley (No.45), I felt I was joining old friends.

Gerald himself joined the Society in 1946 as Member No.134, and was President in 1961 -62. When I was President in 1966, Gerald persuaded his cousin Mrs. Jean Trotter to perform the opening ceremony. Mrs. Trotter was a direct descendant of John Walker, inventor of the friction match.



The first Society Rally was held on 22nd April 1945 at the Seymour Hall in London, not far from Marble Arch. The No.30 bus which brought me from Putney to Oxford Street still had fabric netting stuck onto the windows to prevent flying glass - a small clear patch in the middle allowing me to get my bearings - a reminder, like blackouts and rations - that the war was not yet over.

Arriving at Seymour Hall, I was approached by Ken Morris, the Society's first Hon. Treasurer, who welcomed me to the Rally in his soft Welsh voice. Ken was by profession an accountant, at that time working for the old Nettlefold Film Studios at Walton-on-Thames. He was a connoisseur of labels and did much to open up overseas contacts at the end of the war. Together with Peter Pinkett (No.53) he later published "The Collectors' Directory".

Members at that first Rally had travelled by train from as far as Swindon and Leicester - a tribute to the efficiency of the railways, which kept going throughout the war. Not many came by private transport. For one thing, far fewer people had cars, and in any case the petrol ration for non-essential motoring was too meagre to allow trips from the provinces.

Ken introduced me to Ian Melville Clark, the first Hon. Editor of the Newsletter. He, too, was quiet spoken with a dry sense of humour. I remember Ian's gentle put-down when a not-so-modest member said to him "I don't collect any old rubbish you know." Ian replied quizzically "Just a particular sort of rubbish?" Ian was the fifth generation to head his family firm of Patent Agents in Lincolns Inn. The third member of the Society's founding triumvirate was Dick Whiteley, the first Hon. Secretary WHO, Like his colleagues, was dedicated to the task of establishing the Society on a firm footing. All three were regular contributors to the Newsletters on a wide variety of topics including grouping of labels, valuations, and compilation of a catalogue.

During the Rally the topic turned to guessing who was the oldest member present. A short, alert and dapper man wearing a bow tie called out "I'm seventy-one!" It was Charles Crampton - Uncle Charles, as he became known. He served the Society well, right up to his death in 1958 at the age of eighty-three. He was instrumental in enrolling our first members in Iron Curtain countries. He did this by writing to the relevant Consular Generals in London asking for contacts (Ministries of Culture, Schools, Collectors Clubs, etc.). There was one snag - members in those countries were not allowed to send money abroad, so British members were sought who would pay the subscriptions in return for labels. I was one of those who did so,

paying four subscriptions for Russian members, receiving many attractive sets of labels, mainly "16 + 1" series in return. Only a few short years ago I took them along to Rodney Hedges for the Society's Approval Service. He tells me they have been in steady demand.

Uncle Charles was not just a label collector. Soon after I got married my wife started basketwork classes. One day she came home with a new textbook "The Junior Basket Maker" by Charles Crampton. Unbeknown to me and, I suspect, to many Members of the Society, Charles was one of the country's foremost exponents of canework. He was employed by Dryad Ltd. of Leicester, a company specialising in all types of craftwork. When our first daughter was born he made her a canework doll's chair. He also made his own albums, mounting each label first on black paper slightly larger than the label, to give the effect of a black border. This he then mounted onto the cream album page. I have two small albums he made for myself and my wife, one with Danish and the other with Yugoslavian labels. Truly a generous hearted person.

The Inmans (Nos.22 and 23), a charming couple, have been written about by early Committee members who enjoyed so much their meetings held at their home in Taplow, Buckinghamshire. I had the privilege of joining a gathering there one Sunday afternoon in July 1946. This was well reported by S.H. Scott-Watson ("Scottie") in NL9, page 108, August 1946. We all had a delightful time, joining in various competitions, including a treasure hunt, before enjoying a delicious tea which, as Scottie said, "In these days of 'No this, no that' was a wonderful achievement."

Two members who joined at the same time were A.J. Johnston and Wing Commander S.H. Bell (Nos. 87 and 88). They had both been recently demobbed and were staying near each other in London's W.2. W/Cdr. Bell invited "A.J." and myself to his flat for an evening's chat about labels. Apart from label collecting I would think they had little else in common. W/Cdr. Bell wore the usual RAF moustache, although without the handlebars, and spoke in BBC English of the period. A.J. was clean shaven and sported a neat crew-cut hair style. His Scottish accent was perfectly intelligible, put occasionally peppered with words that were not heard on the BBC (at that time!). This occurred when he became excited as he described his work in India catching Russian spies (they were supposed to be on our side at the time). Bell and Johnston contributed articles to the Newsletters on specialisation, often putting the opposing viewpoint. They also took part in lively discussions at some of the early meetings held in the Bonnington Hotel, in London's Southampton Row. Almost a double act on any and every issue!



Another of the early members of the Society is Joan Rendell, MBE, whose membership number (32) confirms her long-standing devotion to the hobby. Joan was Hon. Assistant Editor of the Newsletter for four years before taking over from Horace Dear when he had to give up through ill-health. Joan kept the news arriving through our letterboxes for another thirty-eight years - a remarkable achievement for any Editor, let alone an unpaid one! An authoress of over twenty books, including three on our own hobby, Joan is also a professional journalist and she spent many holidays behind the Iron Curtain, including Albania, long before it was the fashionable thing to do.

Early in 1945, Ken Morris enrolled the Society's first overseas member, then the young Sture Sjoberg (No.58) from Stockholm. A typical tall, fair-headed Swede, Sture was soon a regular visitor to Society exhibitions and in August 1946 I was able to go on a cycling holiday to Sweden and Denmark. In Copenhagen I again met Sture Sjoberg at the Scandinavian Collectors Club "Skandia" with fellow members Will Ludwigs (No.99) and John Fransson (No.136). In the nearby Tivoli Gardens they all ordered a beer but I asked for milk, and with much hilarity I was given a half litre glassful - two days ration in England at that time.

Tall and somewhat gaunt, Dick Holton (No.20) was an avid collector of old British labels. He knew his subject backwards, particularly Bryant & May, for whom he worked for many years. He was a good speaker and some older members may remember his talks at Society meetings, but even those who don't will have seen or obtained copies of Dick's serial publication "The Matchbox Label" and "The Junior Matchbox Label" in which he was able to record and pass on his knowledge.

I must mention two other enthusiasts - Horace Ulundi-Bathe (No.60) and John Luker (No.307). With no disrespect, I have always thought of them as the Society's Sergeant Majors! They both had voices which carried - very useful for bring a meeting "to order". They were both efficient and thorough, and ran everything with military precision. Horace was of an older generation than John and I believe the unusual part of his name emanated from Africa, perhaps signifying military connections in his ancestry; John, however, was indeed in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and finished his military service as a "Cdr." When I asked him how he became a 'Commander' in the army, he explained that the abbreviation stood for Conductor, the leader of the mule train in bygone days - it was actually the highest RAOC rank of Warrant Officer. Both served the Society for many years in official capacities.

Although I have been asked to pen these few notes about the early days of the Society, I cannot end without paying tribute to all those past and present members who have supported it so unselfishly whether as Honorary Officials, authors of publications about our hobby, exhibitors at rallies, or as valued contributors to the Newsletters. These are the activities which continue to enable the Society to maintain its position as the foremost matchlabel organisation in the world. It is my hope that it continues to flourish although I can hardly hope to be around to pen more notes for the Centenary Programme - I shall be content to offer all you teenagers reading these pages my best wishes for when it is your turn.

Yours sincerely

Gordon Appleby (No.1)



Launceston  
Cornwall

18th June, 1993

Dear James,

Thank you for your letter asking me to recall some of the early days of the Society. I can, indeed, recall those days with some pleasure.

My first recollection is, I suppose, of the day the actual decision to form a Society was taken. Several of us met at Ken Morris's home in London - Sholto Scott-Watson (the Society's first Hon. Secretary), Sture Sjoberg (then on a visit to London from his home in Sweden), Richard White (he collected only bookmatches), A.J. Johnson (he was always known as "A.J." and I don't ever recall hearing his real name), then there was Bernard Cornwell and Ken himself. Oh yes, Ian Clarke, of course, the first Newsletter Editor, was also there.

We met quite informally and I really cannot remember now exactly how the discussion progressed but we definitely decided to form a Society. Gordon Appleby was unable to be present but he had sent his support for the idea of a society being formed. As we got under way, the first membership list was drawn up in alphabetical order and thus Gordon Appleby became No.1 and with my surname, I became Member No.32. At that initial meeting, "Scottie" was elected Hon. Sec. and Ian Clarke as Hon.Editor. I believe that the other appointments were deferred to subsequent meetings, but my memory fails me on those details.

Gerald Floyd, who published "Floyd's Label Review", at that time the only real link between collectors, was not too keen on the idea of a Society at first but he soon came round when people started joining the new group and still continued to subscribe to his magazine.

The early exhibitions were great fun and real 'events'; they were held in their heyday in the Bonnington Hotel in Southampton Row, London. I used to stay over for two or three nights at the Bonnington when train fares and hotel accommodation were completely affordable, not like it is today!

Early exhibitions were collectors-only events. There were very few dealers and those who did attend did not take up much room and never had vast quantities of stock to offer. The displays were splendid: people really took a great deal of time and effort in preparing their exhibits to make them exhibitions in the true sense of the word. When the 'big boys' of collecting, such as Sture Sjoberg, Otto Lindbohm, etc., came with their magnificent displays of labels it was quite spectacular to see.

After about two years, with membership rapidly growing, Ian Clark decided he needed an assistant editor and I was invited to fill the job. When Ian had to relinquish it due to pressure of business, Mr. Harold Dear took over and I remained as assistant. Unfortunately he, too, had to give up the job, due to ill-health, after only two or three years. That was when I took over as Editor, a position I held until resigning some 40 years later. It was, and I think still is, the longest serving period of any Society official.

There are so many dedicated and deeply knowledgeable members whom I remember so clearly; we were all great friends and the atmosphere within the Society was delightful. Amongst those who immediately spring to mind - although they have now all passed on, include dear "Uncle Charles Crampton, Horace Ulundi-Bathe, Gerald Floyd, Mick Michelson, Dick Woodhouse, Ken Morris, Ian Clark, Raymond Wheatley-Hubbard, and many, many more.

The Society was not without its troubles, of course. There were periods of dissension and some stormy times. Sadly, a few people sought power. I could never understand why; we were a voluntary organisation, dedicated only to the hobby, with everyone being equal; there were no kudos in being a "top dog". However, these disagreements all got sorted out in the end - perhaps not to everybody's satisfaction, but sorted out they were eventually!

Thank you for asking me to write these few notes. In doing so, it has stimulated me to recall some wonderful times with many dear departed friends. I hope that all the Society's members today get as much enjoyment and as many friends from their hobby as I have during my years.

Yours sincerely  
Joan Rendell, MBE