

Customs & Excise History Network

Newsletter No.1



November 1996

Welcome!

The *Network* formed recently with the support of the HM Customs & Excise National Museum in Liverpool, is an informal organisation, providing an open forum for anyone with an interest in the history of Customs and Excise. Already there are about 30 members.

The *Network* aims to be a mechanism for preserving and exchanging information about the history of the work of the Department for researchers and others with a general interest in C&E, and to support the work of the Museum in collecting and preserving objects, photographs, ephemera and related

information for the benefit of people today and in the future.

This first newsletter is experimental. The objective is to include: recollections of those who have worked in the Department, the whereabouts of historical source material, research undertaken but not published and articles which have been published but are little known. We will also include updates on the museum and archive work. A tall order for a page or two of A4!

However all contributions will be kept on file for future newsletters, so please send in your articles no matter how brief. In time, the newsletters may be a valuable archive.

The Waterguard at Victoria Station, London

Geoff Potter

For a number of years after the Second World War, and possibly before that time, Victoria Station had a warehouse for the clearance, by Preventive staff, of registered baggage arriving and departing overseas. Some of the baggage arriving from the West Indies went by sea to Italy and then by rail. When it arrived at Victoria any food stuff was distinctly ripe!

Sleeping passengers on the night ferry for the Continent were cleared at Victoria to allow them to sleep through to their destination. An Assistant Preventive Officer based at Dover travelled on the train to maintain segregation of the couchette passengers from the uncleared seated passengers who would be cleared at Dover. The same routine operated on the incoming ferry. The night ferry,

couchette service and the Golden Arrow Pullman trains were often used by VIPs who presumably enjoyed nights of uninterrupted sleep!

Because of the Railway Passenger Duty, the Revenue had a close interest in the railways from 1832 to 1929, but that is a story for another time.

Museum in the Making

Anything to Declare? - The HM Customs & Excise National Museum is a relatively new museum as far as museums go - we only opened to the public in 1994! Behind the scenes, much work continues in three main areas;

- establishing a collection of National importance of objects, works of art, photographs and ephemera.
- raising awareness of the history and work of the Department through the

permanent displays, public programmes and educational activities.

- recording and collecting items relating to the work of the Department today
- More about the museum will follow in future newsletters.

'The End of an Era as Customs Quits Town'

George Bennett

This was a headline in the Oldham's Evening Chronicle on 17 August 1995. The gist of the article is as follows:

'A former Oldham Customs & Excise Surveyor, Mr George Bennett, researched the history of the service in Oldham. From 1714 to 1719 the Land Tax records showed two Excise Officers, one called a "Gaugor" and the other a "Leather Gaugor". A "Gaugor", who worked out of Manchester and is mentioned as early as 1698, paid his Land Tax collections into Oldham Parish Church. In 1730, records mention the first Excise Officer resident in Oldham. There was a gin distillery behind the Greaves Arms and by 1800 there were a number of breweries to oversee. The Land Tax was still collected by the Excise at this time. The Oldham Excise office was in Church Passage but it later moved to St. Peters Precinct and then to Oliver House.

Mr Bennett found the grave of Thomas Williams, an Excise Officer who died in 1789, in front of Oldham Parish Church, on the pavement to the main doors. One of his successors in the 1800s called

Salmon, was buried in St Peters Church graveyard. But when St. Peters Precinct was built the church was demolished and the graves exhumed and the bodies reburied'.

Mr Bennett said that, 'ironically, the Excise office moved to St Peters House and overlooked where Salmon had been buried. So even in death Salmon could not escape from the Excise!'

Ham's Year Book

These year books are a unique source of information about Customs & Excise. They were published from 1879 to 1931 and list all staff, collections, districts and stations. For good measure these books (each runs to about 500 pages) give office addresses, the number and types of traders in each station and digests of the revenue laws and regulations of the time. There are invaluable snapshots of the department, for example in 1914 there were about 100 collections, ranging from Bangor to Kilkenny, and the traders under revenue control included not only brewers and distillers, but also chicory roasters, railways and livery stable-keepers. For good measure the department administered old age pensions, probate (small estates) and much more.



If you are not on the Newsletter's mailing list and would like to be, please drop a line to:

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If you have an item for the Newsletter, please send it to the Newsletter's co-editor:

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