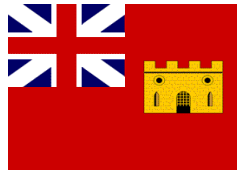


Customs & Excise History Network

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A Personal Message from your Editor

Apologies and greetings from retirement!

I am very sorry that this edition is so late getting to you – it is still just about summer, although from the recent weather one would hardly think so. This is entirely down to me as I retired from HMRC in March this year and have been incredibly busy with other things – like Am Dram and making driftwood garden furniture! It's amazing how quickly, even after more than 37 years with C&E and HMRC, one can forget about everything connected with the various departments that now carry out the activities of the erstwhile H.M. Customs & Excise. So, while I can't promise you a scintillating issue, with luck it will contain enough of interest to keep members reading and wanting more.

LADY SMUGGLERS (from the *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* Dec. 27 1888)

A female inspector employed by the Customs Department at New York, the other day gave a reported an interesting account of some incidents which had come under her notice in connection with her duties. One of the latest was as follows: - Among the cabin passengers on the Cunarder *Etruria*, was a young lady, a thin-faced delicate creature, who appeared rather abnormally developed above the waist. Her appearance struck me as somewhat suspicious as she came up the deck from her state-room, and, as considerably as the circumstances would permit, I requested her to return with me to the apartment she had just vacated. Well, I found in the lining of her corsets a quantity of jewellery, valued at several thousand dollars, which had not been declared among her dutiable goods. She was evidently a new hand at the business and was quite amazed when I told her that the jewellery must be confiscated to the uses of the Government. Yes, there a large number of lady searchers in the employ of the Customs authorities. When a woman is suspected, she is taken into a private apartment and compelled to remove her clothing. Garment after garment is taken off and her boots and underclothing are examined rigorously. This is done despite the most affecting protestations on the part of the victim. It very often happens that a lady will pass the ordeal successfully. Nothing dutiable is found upon her and the searcher is afraid a mistake has been made, but a lucky rip of the corset covering, dress or hat lining, brings a glittering mass of carefully concealed precious stones or costly laces.

"I presume you are obliged to put aside all sentiment (remarked the reporter) in making your searches?"

"Most assuredly. We become the most matter-of-fact people in the world. As a class, female smugglers imagine in their early efforts that their sex will protect them from a personal examination. An amusing incident of this comes to my mind. One of the steamers to arrive recently brought over a lady passenger who was detained by the authorities upon information received. A stout, elderly looking female, who had been the suspected passenger's companion on the voyage, accompanied her friend to the search room. The stout lady was loud in her denunciations and threatened all sorts of vengeance on the bold, bad Customs people who were giving her friend so much trouble. But I found a quantity of fine laces and several unset diamonds. Now, here is an amusing part of this case. When the old lady and her friend were about leaving the room after the goods had been seized, one of my lynx-eyed assistants observed something peculiar about the set of the unsearched woman's dress. In an instant we knew that something was wrong. We examined the old lady's skirts, while both women shrieked. Now, hanging around the woman's dress, securely tied with tape, were some highly valuable violins, which are subject to a heavy duty.

I recall another case which occurred off the Pierrepont Stores Dock in this city. A line of steamers from Hayti [sic] puts in at this pier. I was watching the landing of one of these steamers one day, when the appearance of one of the female passengers aroused my suspicions. She was middle-aged and wore a profusion of jet black hair. Her face was wrinkled and careworn and offered a noticeable contrast to her youthful looks. I politely intimated my desire to search her and began by exploring the mysteries of that beautiful hair. I discovered it to be a wig so skilfully constructed that the chignon concealed a number of precious stones. This led to a more thorough examination and I can assure that I was amply rewarded for my trouble.

An old trick of female smugglers is to have rare jewels and laces sewed up in the folds about various parts of their dresses and underskirts. Not long ago I seized some fine Lyons velvet done up in this way. Sometimes I discover precious stones lightly covered with cotton and secreted in the bosoms of these passengers. I searched one woman who was completely enveloped in lace, wound about her person – lace of such a cobweb texture that a roll of three yards of it could be passed through a lady's finger ring. In the days when wide loop skirts were in vogue, I saw a slightly-built woman walking, as I thought, rather heavily, and I felt sure she required my services in relieving her of some dutiable articles. I found hanging from each wire on the inside of her skirt a selection of valuable gold watches – in fact, quite an invoice of timekeepers. I learned afterwards that the lady was not a professional smuggler, but that those watches were for friends who had personally solicited her to get them English timepieces. She looked very much confused when detected, and innocently asked whether we could not allow her to have the watches, because her friends would be so disappointed. The informant further said that every day attempts to evade the Customs laws were detected.

And, to bring matters more up to date.....

The Evolution of Passengers' Baggage Controls

by John O'Keefe, late retired Customs Officer

Introduction

Until the mid 1960s the examination and clearance of the baggage of passengers arriving in the United Kingdom was by individual confrontation. Each passenger was seen by a Preventive Officer or Assistant Preventive Officer (if deemed of sufficient seniority for these duties). All baggage had to be identified and the passenger shown and invited to read Customs notice No.2, which spelled out the requirements to make a full declaration of imported goods, alongside the dire penalties for smuggling. The Officer was then required to ask the passenger what was known as the "prescribed question" which if memory serves, was on the lines of:-

"Have you read and do you understand this notice? Have you in your possession or in your baggage any articles obtained abroad or during the voyage or from the United Kingdom free of purchase tax? If so they must be declared whether worn or used or not and whether or not intended as gifts. Have you anything to declare?"

The passenger then made a declaration, baggage was examined (or released without check at the Officer's discretion) and any duty due on declared goods taken, or smuggling action begun in the event of a detection of undeclared goods.

This was the theory of how things were to be done in accordance with Customs Code Vol.1 Part 4 "Examination of Passengers' Baggage". In practice most officers developed an early profiling system based on their assessment of a passenger's likelihood to be smuggling. Initial questioning was in many cases restricted to, "Have you anything to declare?" a question the travelling public well understood. Any passenger felt to be worthy of further examination would in most cases be asked the full question. A further factor was that the length of the prescribed question itself, in attempting to cover every eventuality, precluded constant repetition, particularly when faced with large numbers of passengers all anxious to be on their way home.

Types of Passenger traffic

Prior to the growth of car and coach traffic in the 1960s, most passengers arrived at the major seaports, such as Southampton, Liverpool and Tilbury, coming from all over the world and in many cases having spent several weeks at sea. The types of arriving passengers varied enormously, from American tourists arriving on

the "Queens " at Southampton, returning colonials from Africa and the Far East at Liverpool & Tilbury, troops returning from distant overseas postings and, from the 1950s, newly arriving immigrants. Short sea traffic was confined mainly to the Cross Channel Ports of Dover, Folkestone and Newhaven. Harwich had daily sailings to the Hook of Holland and travellers crossing the Irish Sea arrived at Liverpool and Holyhead . Many of the arrivals and sailings were linked to train services both in the country of departure and in the United Kingdom. Passengers on these routes were in most cases making family or business visits or were troops on leave from the large numbers then stationed in Germany. Tourist traffic had not yet taken off to any great extent and such as there was tended to be drawn from the more financially advantaged.

The major Airports which exist today and which handle so many of the arriving and departing passengers had not yet developed. London Airport (LAP) as it was then known was growing from the late '50s but flights were nowhere near as regular or as far reaching as today, catering mainly for business men and the wealthier traveller. Regional airports had limited flights mainly to the Republic of Ireland or the near Continent of Europe.

Passengers did arrive at a variety of locations other than the above major ports and airports of entry. Railway stations at Belfast (The Enterprise from Dublin) and London Victoria (The night sleeper Golden Arrow service from Paris), RAF, Royal Navy and USAF bases as well as places approved occasionally for exceptional events. Seaside piers at Southend, Margate and Deal were also occasional locations for baggage examination for the Royal Daffodil day trips to Calais and the pier at Douglas IOM for the examination of returning day excursionists from Dublin.

Baggage halls

The physical layout of baggage halls handling foot passengers varied from place to place, with benches generally arranged in a rectangular or oval pattern (a deployment common to both seaports and airports), with the examining officers moving about behind the benches to deal with the passengers and examine baggage. Occasionally benches would be arranged in a line to form a corridor. In ports such as Liverpool in the heyday of the Transatlantic, West African and Far Eastern passenger ships, baggage, much of which consisted of heavy trunks and packing cases, was arranged alphabetically on low platforms for passengers to claim, with officers circulating throughout the hall. Where passenger traffic was irregular, temporary arrangements were made for the clearance of baggage in e.g., dock sheds - frequently ill-lit and dirty - conditions which soon ceased to be acceptable. For a number of years officers at Folkestone dealt with baggage from the cross-Channel ferry in a shed on the quayside and had on occasions to halt their work whilst the railway engine for the London-bound train was shunted through.(Health & Safety where were you then?)

In addition to benches for the examination of baggage, offices were also required for search of person and questioning of passengers as well as a lock up for the security of goods taken into official charge, or for baggage sent in advance as registered luggage awaiting collection by passengers arriving at a later date. In addition, staff needed a general office as well as kitchen and toilets.

Responsibility for the provision of these facilities was split between the port operator who, under the terms of the port approval, had to provide anything directly connected with the actual clearance of passengers: baggage halls, search rooms etc., The Crown being responsible for the provision of staff accommodation, locker rooms and kitchens. Although the demarcation of responsibility did not lend itself to easy planning, port operators, by and large, were anxious to provide facilities which reflected well on themselves given that they were likely to be seen by many thousands of travellers during the course of a year.

A complication in the planning process for new developments was the involvement of other agencies, such as H.M. Immigration, Police, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, (as it was then titled), local port health authorities, the AA and RAC, all of whom might require accommodation in or adjacent to the baggage or car hall.

One could have a certain sympathy with port operators asked to extend or even completely redevelop comparatively new facilities which had been overtaken by the dramatic rise in passenger numbers and the advent of car traffic. Temporary solutions were often required and in the summer of 1965 in Dover these took the form of what was in effect a large tent to deal with overflow car traffic.

(to be continued.....)

Behind the Scenes at the Museum

The current climate continues to present us with some challenges, but we are still managing to work on some exciting projects.

Upgrading the gallery orientation, to clarify visitors' route in to the museum, has been completed. It makes a loud statement at the main entrances letting people know that Seized! is there to explore, entice and sometimes surprise. Its success can be clearly seen in the increase in visitors coming to the museum following its installation in October 2010. The theme was a set of strong and powerful x-ray images, revealing concealments that can be found on gallery. A family gallery trail based on a character called Matt was included as part of these upgrades, and is proving highly successful with our younger visitors.

To provide something new on gallery and act as a focus for press activity we have also completed a couple of quick wins. The first was in partnership with Maritime Archives when we utilised two bottles from the SS Politician (of Whisky Galore fame), which were on display between January and May 2011. In line with our extended story of including immigration, our most recent quick win was displaying Albert Einstein's landing card which we collected from Heathrow. Einstein visited Britain in May 1933 following an invitation from Oxford University, but he never returned home to Germany. We explore his visit to Britain, and the environment this was set against. The full stories can be seen on our website, using the following links –

SS Politician <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/archive/displays/politician/>

Albert Einstein <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/collections/seized/objects/einstein/>

We are now developing the design outline examining the departmental role in the Olympics next year. For this we are hoping to suspend from the ceiling an 1984 eight-man Olympic standard rowing boat (on loan from Liverpool Victoria Rowing Club), which should be alongside a 1920s four-man rowing boat from the Maritime Museum's collection. Next year they should make quite an impression on the ground floor of the Maritime Museum (logistics willing).

The other display we are beginning to prepare will incorporate within our existing gallery space the role of UK Border Agency in controlling immigration. To assist this we recently received a report from Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Liverpool that provided a highly detailed overview of people movement in and out of Britain. It described State policy on migration and the impact this had on communities, set within a broad social, political and historical perspective. It's an excellent resource.

I would like to remind members if they have not done so, can you please return your updated membership form to the museum. We are keen to ensure that our records are up to date. Can we also please ask members to consider receiving newsletters by email (to help save stationery costs). At the same time to increase access to the newsletters we have started adding them to the website - the link to the last one: <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/maritime/collections/seized/documents/History-Newsletter-29.pdf>

Finally, - we would like to wish our editor Mark Bullen a very happy retirement. We are delighted to announce that, as you can see, he has very kindly agreed to carry on editing the newsletter and continuing to find fascinating stories and insights in to departmental life.

You can obtain a set of back numbers, from 1996 till now, in a thermal binding, by sending £5.50 (inc. p&p) to John Pink, 6 Anns Court, Grove Road, Surbiton KT6 4BE email: johnrpink2@o2.co.uk also www.jrphistory.co.uk

If you would like to be on the mailing list, please drop a line to: **Karen Bradbury, Curator, UK Border Agency National Museum, c/o Dock Traffic Office, Albert Dock, Liverpool, L3 4AX**

!!!!..NOTE NEW CONTACT DETAILS BELOW..!!!!

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