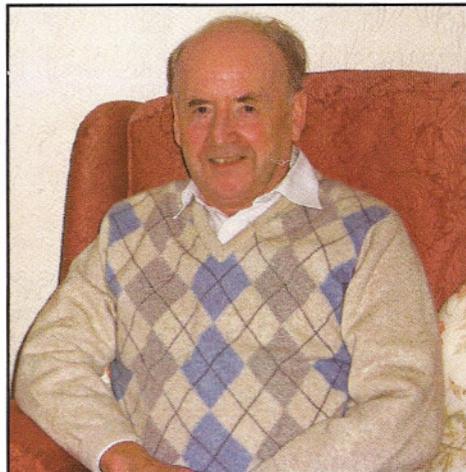


David Muscott—50 Years in the Trade, 60 Years in Business



He did not remain long at the auction house, however, because in February 1974 his father died and his mother wanted him to take over the business. He remembers missing Stampex to attend to his father's affairs and later that year entered into partnership with his Mother to run Muscotts.

David Muscott, the well known specialist stamp dealer from Uplyme, Lyme Regis, is celebrating 50 years in the stamp trade and his business is celebrating its 60th.

The owner of Muscotts, GB and Commonwealth classics, rarities, errors, proofs and postal history dealers, continues to run the business started by his father Maurice in 1947.

Maurice joined the stamp industry quite by chance. Before World War II Maurice Muscott was a grocer and then a successful insurance agent. At the outbreak of War he was called up and joined the Tank Corp at Bovington Camp, Dorset, but convinced the Army he was a grocer and ended up working in the NAAFI.

In 1944 he found himself in Damascus and with a friend decided to explore the town. On the walk he saw some Bedouin sitting on the ground swapping stamps from tins. When he was demobbed in 1947 he borrowed £200 and with no knowledge of the stamp trade, commenced business. In 1948 he decided to open an office in Godalming. By 1949 he was issuing 'Roneoed' list of stock to interested collectors and in 1951 he opened a shop in the town.

Errors and varieties

In the 1950's Maurice decided to specialise in what was then a new philatelic field, 'errors and varieties' and by about 1955 he was the acknowledged leader in GB and Commonwealth errors and varieties. It was during this period that David first experienced life in the stamp trade being used, he says, as 'slave labour' tearing up sheets of new issues!

A big boost to the business came in 1957 with the marriage of Prince Rainier of Monaco to Grace Kelly, the American film star; Muscotts sold many sets of wedding stamps, including several to fellow scholars at Godalming Grammar School!

David himself started collecting with a *Dick Barton Special Agent Stamp Album* and later specialised in New Zealand Health issues. He left school with four 'O' levels and had two interviews with stamp companies, being offered both jobs! Mick Michael of Wingfields offered him £4 a week and Robson Lowe offered him the same—he took the latter job because an auctioneer sees more stamps than a dealer. He said neither man was interested in his academic achievements. He started work with Robson Lowe on 23 September 1957 and found it a wonderful experience. He learnt a lot about describing and valuing from the old hands as well as general business etiquette.

Recorder

During his 16 years at Robson Lowe, David was appointed Recorder to the BPA Expert Committee, where he worked with such philatelic luminaries as Robson Lowe, Arthur Ginn, Allan Leverton, A L Pemberton and W E Lea. His interest in the prevention of forgery and faking continues today and he still serves on the David Brandon Expert Committee.

David attended his first London international in 1960, where he was responsible for the Bin Room and exhibits. He still thinks that this was the best international of the lot. Also in May of that year he was awarded the BPA Diploma in General Philatelic Knowledge, coming first out of the 35 candidates nationwide who took the examination. David thinks the industry should reinstate such philatelic qualifications.

In 1966 David took part in the famous Robson Lowe auction on board the *SS Queen Mary*, travelling from Southampton to New York where bids were received via radio from London, Paris, Basle and Milan (not too successfully he reports!). In Washington he was in charge of Robson Lowe's booth at the Sipex international exhibition held in May that year.

Appearing for the prosecution!

In the 1970s, with a growing family, he enlarged his collecting interests to English provincial banknotes and the Postal History of Godalming and Guildford. The banknote hobby later led him to appear for the prosecution in a famous case involving stolen banknotes from the Lloyds Bank archives. He is a member of the International Bank Note Society and currently has a collection of notes from some 350 different English provincial banks.

A move to City of London Philatelic Auctions in 1973, gave him more experience in a different sort of stamp trade where under Brian Tyrell the company made a good profit on cheaper stamps through volume sales. David learnt a great deal about buying and breaking down collections for auction during this period.

Joined Philatelic Traders' Society

In 1976 he joined the Philatelic Traders' Society and is still a member. His nomination was endorsed by Cyril Harmer. He was co-opted to the Philatelic Traders' Society Council in 1980 and stood for election (successfully) until 1987 when a slight loss of his hearing made attending meetings difficult and he stood down. He served as Chairman of the PTS Business Practices and Ethics Committee for some six years.

When David took on Muscotts the business had become rather run down due to his father's ill health, but he 'inherited' a good staff including John Yorke, with Mrs Yorke acting as Secretary and Andrew Steward, who eventually spent 40 years with the company. Through the forethought of his father who had purchased a block of land next to the shop and gained planning permission, he also owned an office block which provided a rental income.

Between 1975 and 1981 the Bermuda Philatelic Society, in conjunction with Robson Lowe Ltd, held a series of five exhibitions and auctions in the beautiful islands of Bermuda. These provided a wonderful combination of business and pleasure, so Muscotts took a booth at all these well-run events. Partly as a result of these trips many new Bermuda collectors came into Muscotts' books and the firm have continued to offer specialised items from this territory to this day. Sales have included some of the finest examples of the famed Postmaster stamps issue between 1848 and 1861.

Whilst on the subject of travel, David said that between 1979 and 1993 he made 19 visits to South Africa, when the trade was brisk and the Rand offered a good rate of exchange. Other trips included New York, San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto, mainly to attend exhibitions or major auctions. Including the Stampex shows in London, David took Muscotts to over 50 exhibitions between 1976 and 2002.

Widened the scope of the business

While the firm started by Maurice concentrated in new issues, David widened the scope of the business to include Queen Victoria classics and succeeding reigns as well as offering postal history from ancient times. Today one may find unusual pieces from Great Britain and many British Commonwealth countries, including essays, proofs, errors and varieties of all periods, in Muscott's stock. Many have found their way into award-winning exhibits at international level.

David believes that philately is a continually growing subject and his interest in varieties and errors encouraged him to share his new-found items with the editors of the Stanley Gibbons *Commonwealth* catalogues. Numerous additions to the SG listing have come from the firm and the co-operation between the two companies is appreciated by both sides.

Today David lives with his wife Maureen in the village of Uplyme, enjoying the fine views over Lyme Regis and out to sea towards Portland Bill. They have two married daughters and three grandchildren. David clearly enjoys philately and the people he meets as a result. Thus, at an age when most people retire, he continues to give a specialised service to clients around the globe.



The BPA Expert committee in 1960 meeting at 50 Pall Mall, Arthur Ginn, Allan Leverton, Robson Lowe, A L Pemberton, W E Lea and the Recorder, a young David Muscott (standing)