

Spies and Stamp Collecting!

It is well known that Anthony Blunt was a Russian spy and that he was but one of the *Cambridge Five* spy ring. Kim Philby, Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean and John Cairncross together with Blunt comprised the *Cambridge Five*. It is also known that Anthony Blunt collected stamps – this writer saw a couple of his childhood collections in the recent past at Mowbray Collectables. His collections were nothing outstanding apart from one very scarce attractive item – see figure 1.



This Indian ½ anna green postal stationery postcard, uprated with King George V 3 pies grey cancelled at Gantok from Thomas Brokeback on the 1933 Mount Everest Expedition, was hand addressed to Anthony Blunt whilst he was at Trinity College, Cambridge. It bears a superb strike of the “EVEREST EXPEDITION / BASE CAMP / 1933” triple ring hand stamp in purple; upon arrival showing two postage due hand stamps and bears a 2d British postage due cancelled with Cambridge oval 31 July date stamp. The item in figure 1 was sold in London in 2010.

The accompanying biographical note advised that: “Anthony Frederick Blunt, born 26 September 1907 in Bournemouth, was a British art historian exposed as a Soviet spy. He taught French and was Professor of History of Art at the University of London, director of the Courtauld Institute of Art, Surveyor of the King’s Pictures. Known as Sir Anthony Blunt KCVO between 1956 and 1979, he was exposed as a member of the Cambridge Five, a group of spies working for the Soviet Union from the 1930s to the 1950s. Following the defection in May 1951 of fellow spies Burgess and Maclean, Blunt came under suspicion as he had been a long time friend of Burgess from their time at Cambridge. He was interrogated by MI5 in 1952 and was interviewed a further eleven times but gave little away.

In January 1964, Michael Straight, an American who also studied at Trinity College had become friends with Blunt, Philby, Maclean and Burgess, claimed that Blunt had tried to recruit him to become a Soviet spy. MI5 now equipped with Straight’s story, went to see Blunt again and this time Blunt made a confession. Queen Elizabeth II was informed shortly thereafter. He admitted being a Soviet agent. In return for Blunt’s full confession, the British government agreed to keep his spying career an official secret for fifteen years and granted him full immunity from prosecution.

Blunt’s role as a secret agent was exposed – albeit under a false name – in Andrew Boyle’s book *Climate of Treason* in 1979 and he was publicly named by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the same year. Queen Elizabeth II stripped Blunt of his knighthood. Blunt died from a heart attack at his home in London in 1983, aged 75.”¹

It would not be surprising if other spies were involved with stamp collecting. An earlier famous spy, Baron Gabriel de Gunzberg/Gunzburg conducted business from a stamp shop in Shanghai over one hundred years ago!

Baron Gabriel de Gunzburg (1855-1926) lived in Chungkiang, China, in 1895, as evidenced from an 1895 cover offered on eBay in January 2012. The accompanying biographical note advised that he was: "A most popular figure in Parisian high-life clubs and drawing rooms. He was the son of Naftali Herz, Baron Horace de Gunzberg a Russian businessman, philanthropist and vigilant fighter for the rights of his Jewish co-religionists in the teeth of persecution by the Russian government. His father was the philanthropist Joseph Günzburg. His son David became a prominent Orientalist and bibliophile."²

The local unfranked cover depicted in figure 2 bears a 10c Chinkiang orange postage due tied by oval TO PAY and CHINKIANG / POSTAL SERVICE / 5PM / 19 AP 95 cds.



Baron Gabriel de Gunzberg was responsible for many covers of the Chinese Treaty Ports. The cover illustrated in figure 3 was recently sold by Universal Philatelic Auctions for £310. It is addressed to the Baron at 14 San Souci Terrace, Bubbling Well Road, which is one of the major roads of Shanghai. The other mark is the manuscript of *L.P.O.* (Local Post Office).

The background to this cover, displaying one of the Shanghai Local Post Symbolic Cancellations is: that the sender paid the postage direct to the post office clerk who then applied the stamp and passed it directly into the postal system. This is qualified by the Chinese writing on the rear of the cover which reads *full postage paid*. Also, on the back of the cover is the receiver mark which reads SHANGHAI LOCAL POST OFFICE / C / DE 8 / 96. This canceller was used between 9th May 1896 and 1st February 1897.



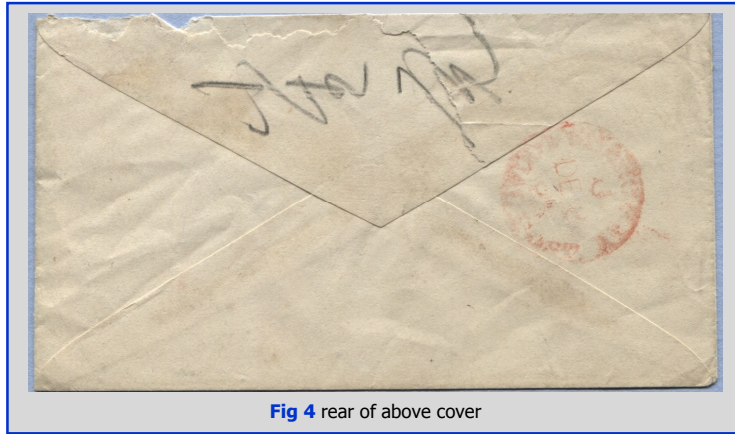


Fig 4 rear of above cover

The Gunzburgs were a Jewish family living in St. Petersburg, Russia and were educated in all things oriental. They owned a major bank in St. Petersburg from which they made their fortune. Gabriel's grandfather (Joseph) was a major contributor to the building of the Stock Exchange Hospital, a trustee of the School of commerce of Tsar Nicholas II, a major financier of the Russian Railway network, and an Alderman of St Petersburg. In addition to these he was the founder of the Society for the Protection of Culture among the Jews in Russia. This society was a highly successful organisation that disseminated Jewish culture into Russian language. He was frequently advising both the government and individuals on the laws dealing with the Stock Exchange and other business institutions.

The title of Baron was handed down from father to son and eventually reached Gabriel. He then became known as Baron Gabriel de Gunzburg. Gabriel settled in Shanghai in the early 1890s. He had been a bad boy of the family and was shipped East on a remittance. He supplemented his income by becoming head of the Russian Secret Service (Okhraneniju) until the war with Japan broke out in 1904, and by dealing in postage stamps.

Gabriel was made head of the Otdeleniye Po Okhraneniju Obshchestvenney Bezopasnosti I Poryadka (Department for the Defence of Public Security and Order 1881 – 1917). By 1917 he had moved to Paris, and where many renowned philatelists visited him to discuss stamps. It was while in Paris that he revealed the following issue about several stamp forgeries.

When the postmaster was relieved it was found that he had a deficit of \$5000 at the Ning-po sub-office, and the postmaster was condemned by the Municipal Council to make it good. He saw that the simplest way was by printing more stamps, and set to work accordingly, producing the *Pemberton reprints*. These are distinguishable by the worn state of the central die, and the character in the lower left-hand corner, which is set at an angle. Before he had got to his tally, the die – which was made of ivory – split and he ordered a replica to be made. The forging of a seal was a major felony in China, so the cutter never made an exact copy. The dragon either has more than five flukes to his tail, or not the right number of bristles in his beard. Later the stamps were electrotyped in mass and sold to tourists.

In addition to this famous attempt at forgery above it was known that the Chinese were slow on the uptake that there was money to be made from used stamps, and it was the Japanese who started the forgery racket on a big scale. Tourists were offered the Empress Dowager set at Kobe and Yokohama. They were extremely crude copies, which would not have deceived any philatelist. All were printed on thick, white unwatermarked paper, usually with a Tientsin cancellation of an oval grid, much thinner than the genuine postmark. The colours were also wrong.³

Baron Gabriel de Gunzburg took an important part in Russia's Far Eastern policy as Secretary of the Military Attaché in China. As such he is mentioned in the *DIARY OF J. J. KOROSTOVETZ Pre-war diplomacy, the Russo-Japanese problem, treaty signed at Portsmouth, U.S.A., 1905*. Korostovetz was the Minister of Russia in China, and Secretary to Count Witte at the Peace Conference at Portsmouth, U.S.A.⁴

Perhaps today's best known spy (or traitor if you are an American!) is Edward Snowden, currently residing in Russia. Edward Joseph Snowden is an exiled American computer specialist and former CIA employee and NSA contractor who disclosed classified details of several top-secret United States and British government mass surveillance programs to the press.



Fig 5 Edward Snowden

His stated hobbies include skateboarding, triathlon, reading, and blogging.⁵ Perhaps Edward Snowden ought to take up stamp collecting; then he would be in good philatelic company with some other illustrious or infamous spies!

A few years ago, New Zealand's spy agency – the Government Communications Security Bureau (GCSB) was in the news for allegedly spying unlawfully on New Zealanders as well as about the method of appointment of the chief of the organisation and the Prime Minister's involvement of this. In 2014 New Zealand's government passed the GCSB Bill allowing it to legally spy on New Zealanders.

Claims and counter claims were made about what the GCSB did and did not do and on 15 September 2014 New Zealand's Prime Minister (John Key) was reported in *The New Zealand Herald* as saying that, "The GCSB undertakes cyber security operations to protect individual public and private sector entities from the increasing threat of cyber-attack, and this is very important work."



Fig 6 parcel address label to New Zealand's spy agency

The stamped parcel label on piece, illustrated in figure 6, was originally sent in 1991 from Onekawa to the GCSB in Wellington, with perhaps some vital security information. Perhaps this was how spying was done in New Zealand in the old days before the use of cyber technology with computers?

Collate it and send it by post, because as we all know (from the Wells Fargo motto) "*The Mail Must Go Through.*" Whatever the contents, (commercially sensitive information/security information or perhaps even "*How to Become a New Zealand Spy, 101*", exam papers) the postage of \$3.30 covered the cost of a sizable sending to the GCSB.

David Smitham

Acknowledgements:

The author thanks Universal Philatelic Auctions for their help with this article.

References:

- 1 Spink, London 17/18 November 2010 auction – lot 959.
- 2 <http://www.worthpoint.com/worthopedia/china-1895-postage-due-cover-269163136>
- 3 Details supplied by <http://www.upastampauctions.co.uk/> with lot # 3919, UPA sale 50, 9 July 2013.
- 4 DIARY OF J. J. KOROSTOVETZ *Pre-war diplomacy, the Russo-Japanese problem, treaty signed at Portsmouth, U.S.A., 1905*, page 15.
- 5 Wikipedia

