

A History of the Exhibition Study Group

We owe our beginning to a small group of collectors of exhibition memorabilia. Andrew Brooks and Fred Fletcher were the joint authors of "*British Exhibitions and their Post Cards, Parts 1 & 2*" published in 1978, and Don Knight was author of several books on exhibitions at the White City and Wembley. It was at the Bipex Post Card Fair in 1978 that the three authors came together, and talked about their interests in exhibitions, and about forming an Exhibition Study Group.

At about the same time Andrew had made contact with Stanley Hunter, who was then editor of the "*Scottish Stamp News*" who was also interested in the idea. Andrew then wrote to various magazines informing their readers of the forming of the Exhibition Study Group, and this raised a few more members, including Bill Tonkin.

The Group's interests range from the 1851 Crystal Palace onwards, from the stamps, and special postmarks used throughout this period, advertising labels, crested china, commemorative plates and other china ware, medals, post cards, printed ephemera, books, and the whole range of souvenirs commemorating exhibitions, both British and Foreign, including Congress and Philatelic Exhibitions. This is a truly vast collecting field with items costing from pence to rare pieces well into four figures, or more if the Wembley die proofs are included.

Andrew took on the jobs of Secretary, Newsletter Editor and Treasurer. Newsletter No 1 was published in 1980 and was circulated to just ten members. Sadly, of the original ten members only Andrew and Don are still with us.

Membership

From the original ten in 1979 membership grew to 59 in 1989, 83 in 1995 and peaked at over 100 around 1988. Numbers declined to 90 in 2005 and currently (2026) stand at 45. The latter figure includes nine who have joined in the last two years.

Aims and Objectives

The purpose of the ESG is to encourage and assist those who are interested in, or are doing research into, the various subjects related to Exhibitions; to publish details of their work in the Journal so that it can reach other members who may be doing similar work, and the collating and eventual publication of this information, either through the Journal or in book form.

It is a very sad thing that a collector may spend most of their adult life researching and accumulating knowledge on a subject and leave no record behind at the end.

Details of ESG publications and publications by ESG members are given elsewhere.

ESG members have also assisted with research on Perfin on Wembley Stamps carried out by the Perfin Society, and this has been published by them.

Newsletter / Journal

Newsletters came out very spasmodically in the beginning, and only seven were published in the next seven years. No 7 came out in February 1987, and in this Andrew announced the holding of our first one day convention, to take place at York, in the October of that year (see below).

Bill Tonkin took over as Editor in 1992 (No 24) and four editions a year have been produced since then. The title was changed from 'Newsletter' to 'Journal' in Autumn 1995 (No 38). Bill was assisted by Fred Peskett from Winter 2005 (No 79) until Spring 2023 (No 148) then, following Fred's death in April 2023, aged 86, Bill continued as sole Editor until Winter 2024 (No 155). Bill died on 18 January 2025, just one month after his 99th birthday.

There was a short hiatus until David Ogden took over as Editor in Autumn 2025 (No 156).

Conventions

Annual Conventions were held from 1987 until 2018 at York (four times), Manchester (once), Crystal Palace (fourteen times), Wembley (five times), Portsmouth (three times), Glasgow (once), Bradford (once) and Hatfield (twice). The 2019 Convention had to be cancelled when the venue was condemned. 2020 was cancelled due to Covid restrictions. The last Convention to be held was in 2021 at the East Barnet Valley Bowls Club.

Since then the only Group gathering has been to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the opening of the 1924 British Empire Exhibition when, on 23 April 2024, fourteen members enjoyed a tour of the 'new' Stadium followed by a pub lunch. After lunch Karl Illingworth displayed a range of items from his extensive collection of BEE memorabilia.

Archives

We were pleased to be able to purchase all of George Ithell's notes and records on the Irish Village 'Ballymaclinton' after his death in 1997. Although he had published his work in 1982 he had continued his research, and it would have been a tragedy if this material and knowledge had been lost.

The Group also holds a small selection of other books, articles and publications which are available for members to borrow. A list was published in Journal 158 (Spring 2026).

David Ogden

August 2026