

SEPTEMBER 2005

MONTHLY SOCIETY MEETINGS

JULY – The July meeting was held on Saturday 2nd July, the eve of General Elections in Mauritius, at Collège du St Esprit, Sir Virgil Naz Avenue, Quatre Bornes at 2 p.m.

The first item on the agenda **USA** by Ah Lan Lam Yan Foon was carried over to August.

Explanatory Markings on mail from abroad by Mico Antoine were mainly “Received with Tape” and “Received in this Condition” items with handstamp markings. A range of covers from the UK, Russia, South Africa, France, Japan and Australia formed part of this display. “Postage Due” markings from abroad for which the dues were not claimed in Mauritius, Royal Mail and Mauritius Post Ltd sealing labels and some Censored World War II items were also shown.

Patrick Kwan put up a supporting filler display of several items from his B53 collection.

Several items of Comorian postal stationery and the Mauritian *prêt-à-poster* envelopes were shown.

Attendance was very good and sales of covers, stamps and accessories satisfactory.

AUGUST – The August meeting was held at Collège du St Esprit, Quatre Bornes on Saturday 6th August at the usual time.

The **USA** by Ah Lan Lam Yan Foon, carried over from July, was the main subject. The display was mainly of very modern “wallpaper” including Movie Stars and Chinese New Year sheetlets. Also included were some Caribbean Islands stamps on Madonna, John Lennon and other show business personalities.

The **Postal Services** set of four stamps was examined. A new type of Official First Day Cover (made in India) with several security features and some outrageous claims reportedly made by Mauritius Post Ltd in a local paper were noted.

Researching the Railways – Rose Belle – New Grove was a photo display of a walk by Mico Antoine from the ex-Rose Belle loco shed to the “Astroea” railway bridge over River La Chaux, up and down the former railway track now *Chemin Madame Lolo* then on to the ex-New Grove railway station where the letter box slot on the door of the derelict post office still survives as well as the vandalized platform and destroyed sugar shed and other vestiges of the Mauritius Government Railway. This display was accompanied by detailed maps of the railway network of the region.

The winner of the June **Mauritius Commercial Cover** contest was Dr A N Maderbokus with his Curepipe Road – Chemin Grenier double-rated undelivered multi-cacheted cover.

The Society’s publication “**Mauritius 2004 – Stamps, Cachets and Postal History**” was distributed.

SEPTEMBER – The September meeting was held on Saturday 3rd September at 2 p.m. at the usual venue.

The main item on the agenda was a general display by Mico Antoine and Ah Lan Lam Yan Foon which included stamps of BIOT, France and Mauritius. Maps of Mauritius, misspelt place-names and the corrected Roches Noires rubber handstamp markings were examined. Several aspects of Postal History of Mauritius were explained. Detailed printing history of the Environment and History definitives together with all the relevant stamps were shown.

News Items 2005.2 of June was distributed.

Stamp magazines, auction catalogues, official stamp programmes and philatelic journals from China, Taiwan, Iran, Korea, Thailand, Australia, France and other countries, surplus to the Society needs, were distributed free of charge.

Members were told about the Society's Stamp Exhibition scheduled for October at the Mauritius Institute in Port Louis.

Attendance was above average with Paul van Bodegraven of Holland present.

MONTHLY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

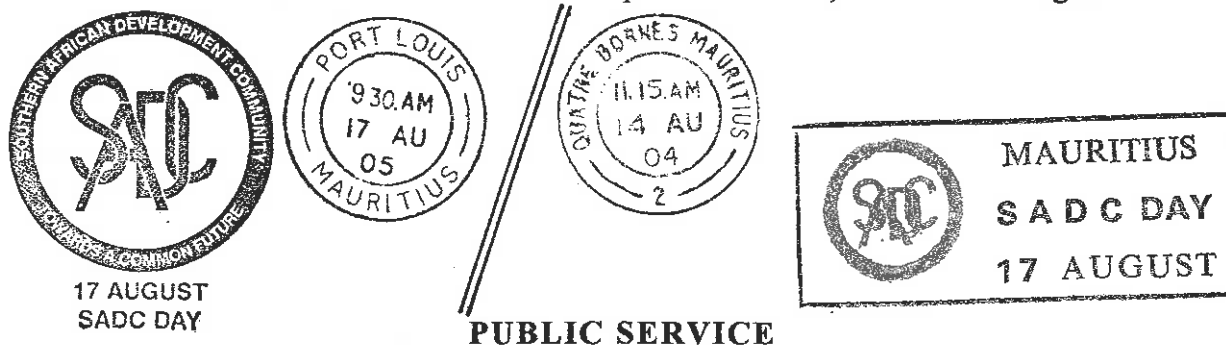
The Monthly Management Committee meetings were held on Saturday 2nd July, Saturday 6th August and Saturday 3rd September at 1 p.m. at Collège du St Esprit, Sir Virgil Naz Avenue, Quatre Bornes.

SADC

New "SADC – Southern African Development Community – Towards A Common Future – 17th August SADC DAY" rubber handstamps were used at nine offices of the Postal Services in August to mark SADC Day and the end of the one-year presidency of Mauritius over the community.

The offices were SSR Office of Exchange (Plaisance Airport), GPO Sorting Office (Port Louis) and the post offices were Beau Bassin, Rose Hill, Curepipe, Mahebourg, Chemin Grenier, Goodlands and Central Flacq.

The Society has not been able to obtain any information as regards the duration of the application of these cachets to mails. Some "philatelic covers" were made on 17th August and the cachet has been seen on commercial covers postmarked 15th, 16th and 17th August.



PUBLIC SERVICE

The Mauritius Post Ltd continues to develop its other business lines. In July some 18 post offices began to accept payment for the renewal of Motor Vehicle Licences (Road Tax) for several types of vehicles.

The Society will attempt to establish a definitive list of new business lines developed during 2005 and publish them in the March 2006 "News Items".

SPECIAL COVERS**CATOVAIR AIRLINE**

Catovair, the private Mauritian airline with a single 18-seater Beechcraft 1,900 D 3B –VIP Aircraft, of the IBL Group, made its first commercial flight from Plaisance Airport, Mauritius, to Plaine Corail Airport, Rodrigues, on 1st September 2005.

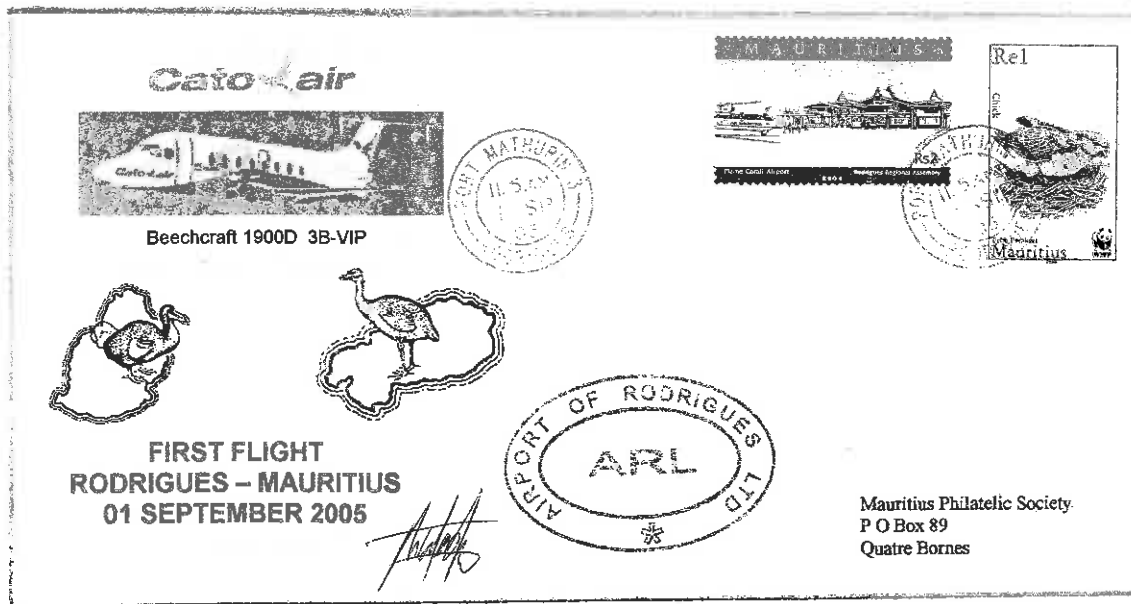
Some 30 covers (we are told) were carried on the outward and the return flights by the operator of the airline.

The outward cover is franked with two Re1 Echo Parakeet stamps and postmarked at SSR International Airport, Mauritius. The flight number is OC401.

The return cover is franked with a single Rs5 Echo Parakeet stamp and postmarked at Port Mathurin, Rodrigues. The flight number is OC402.

Both covers are signed by the pilot Eric Tobaillem. The envelopes used are commercial Catovair self-sealing envelopes and sadly for First Flight Covers both envelopes are not backstamped. The outward flight cover is addressed to a Port Mathurin address (with a spelling mistake); the return flight cover however is unaddressed.

Ed. note: - A couple of aerophilatelists from the Society made First Flight Covers to commemorate this event. These covers are illustrated, are franked with appropriate stamps, are backstamped, are cacheted, are signed, are without spelling mistakes.... No comparison!!



Reduced

MAURITIUS COLLEGE

Mauritius College marked its Golden Jubilee, 1955-2005, with a special commemorative cover postmarked on 7th September at Curepipe. The cover is illustrated with a portrait of the founders and the emblem of the college and is franked with three stamps namely one Mountain (Piton du Milieu), the Gandhi's Centenary stamp and the Jorge Reinel Maps of the Southern Indian Ocean stamp with a total face value of Rs43.00. 200 covers were produced.

Note that in 1995 Mauritius College marked its 40th Anniversary with a special commemorative cover.

STAMPS

POSTAL SERVICES

A set of four special stamps was released on 14th July 2005 titled **Postal Services**. The stamps feature:

- Rs2 Counter Services
- Rs7 Mail Sorting
- Rs8 Mail Distribution
- Rs10 Mail Transfer

The stamps were designed by Ross Watton and printed by BDT International Security Printing Ltd of Ireland.

The Official First Day Cover priced at Rs65 is illustrated with Flic-en-Flac Post Office.

A report in the local press quoting Mauritius Post Ltd read « *une première car la conception et le design de l'enveloppe et des timbres ont été faits localement. C'est la première fois que l'enveloppe composant le First Day Cover (FDC) est produite localement en dehors du circuit traditionnel du Crown Agent. Les enveloppes contiennent des éléments de sécurité décelables uniquement sous lumière UV.* » Not true.

The designer is Ross Watton, from photographs supplied by Mauritius Post Ltd. The gumless envelope was produced in India. On verso the date 14 JULY 2005 and the security element visible under UV serve no useful purpose. Many First Day Covers (FDC) have been produced in Mauritius in the past. As for the « *répondre aux aspirations des philatélistes.* » Philatelists don't like to be fleeced – the face value of the four stamps is Rs25, the price of the FDC Rs65!! That is Rs40 for security elements and other useless conceptions!

N.B. This set was released one month later than programmed.

OLD STONE BUILDINGS

The set of four stamps announced for September has been rescheduled for October. It will be a set of three stamps and will be titled **Stone Buildings**.

THE PRESS

Le Week End	17.07.2005	Nouveaux timbres en vente.
Le Matinal	22.07.2005	La poste aux postiers.
L'express	22.07.2005	Le Centre Nelson Mandela relogé à La Tour Koenig.
Le Week End	24.07.2005	Retour à la case départ pour le Centre Mandela.
L'express	25.07.2005	Cachet de la poste.
L'express	04.08.2005	The historical significance of the General Post Office.
L'express	08.08.2005	La cour du bureau de poste en mauvais état.
L'express	17.09.2005	Bâtiment Historique.
Le Défi-Plus	17.09.2005	Réaménager la poste Centrale.
L'express	19.09.2005	Le facteur ne passera plus.

MAURITIUS PHILATELIC SOCIETY = POSTAL HISTORY OF MAURITIUS

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2005

News ItemS 2005.3

La Poste Centrale

By Mico Antoine

The Central Post Office, the main post office of Port Louis better known locally as *La Poste Centrale*, was built specially for the General Post Office and it was occupied by them from 21st December 1870 to 29th May 2004. The date AD 1868 chiseled in the stonework of the building does not denote the year of first occupancy.

In August 2001, Paul Raymond Bérenger decided on the advice of a single slavish “Adviser” to house the African Cultural Centre in *La Poste Centrale* and to relocate the main post office of Port Louis to Dumas Street. Bérenger, at the time Deputy Prime Minister of Mauritius, offered as justification for this scheme (he was the medium through which all the stratagem and statements about Government plans for the African Cultural Centre were made) his contorted and convoluted scientifically communal “*parcours culturel*” project for the Port Louis Waterfront.

Mauritian civil society in the main remained deafeningly silent. NGO heritage protectors and other fancy titled outfits, behoven to their masters for funding, remained tongue-tied. Condescending cowards! The only concerted protest came from H Ramcharitar, President of the Common Front of the Union of Post Office Workers and his colleagues.

On 12th February 2003 the Society wrote to the then Deputy Prime Minister requesting a meeting (with him) in order to discuss *La Poste Centrale*. On 24th February 2003 the Society received a reply on the letterhead of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance signed *Paul*. Paul Raymond Bérenger, GCSK, Acting Prime Minister at the time, referred us to “your parent Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunications, Minister Pradeep Jeeha.”

On 18th March the Society delivered under signature a letter dated 14th March signed jointly by two Committee Members of the Society and the President of the Union of Post Office Workers to the “parent Ministry.” On 15th April a copy of the same letter was delivered, again under signature, to the same “parent Ministry.” The Society never received any reply to the two deliveries. Normal behaviour of the deluded and arrogant Government of the day.

The then President of the Society did not sign any of the two letters, as there was some disagreement within the Management Committee with regard to the Society’s role...

During the period from early 2003 to mid-2005, H Ramcharitar’s efforts and pressure to repossess *La Poste Centrale* for the Postal Services were relentless. The Society stood by him and the collaboration was constant even if low-keyed.

After throwing *La Poste Centrale* out of its premises the total absence of any development at the site by the African Cultural Centre or the Mauritian Cultural Centre and the Bérenger Government will remain one of the most bizarre events in the annals of scientific communalism in Mauritius.... no “*parcours culturel*” to mark the Bérenger tenure of office – just bluff and bluster; in the end a massive hoax.

The General Elections of July 2005 resulted in Bérenger’s Government being swept from office, and at a special cabinet meeting of Thursday 21st July 2005 the new Government announced that *La Poste Centrale* will be returned to its original occupants. The new Prime Minister, Dr Navinchandra Ramgoolam, had made good on an undertaking to return the building to its historical owners.

Notwithstanding the dauntlessness of H Ramcharitar and his colleagues or the far too few letters to the press by some genuinely concerned citizens or the long-winded, self-serving exaggerations of an auto-proclaimed observer of society, the harsh Mauritian reality is simply this, the transfer of *La Poste Centrale* to the African Cultural Centre was a political decision, the return of *La Poste Centrale* to the Postal Services was a political decision.

Inexplicable and irrational ways of doing things on the island can always be explained away as... the Mauritian way.

As an aside, the Post Office Savings Bank, a dependable and significant source of funds for the Government, was also detached from the Postal Services and “corporatised” into a commercial bank by absorbing a cooperative bank on the verge of collapse. The new Port Louis GPO opened for business in the ex-cooperative bank building on Dumas Street on 31st May 2004 notwithstanding the fact that the Postal Services had acquired and paid for the ex-BNPI building across the road from *La Poste Centrale*. Paul Raymond Bérenger, now elevated to the post of Prime Minister, simply moved the new Mauritius Post and Cooperative Bank from Dumas Street to the ex-BNPI premises because it suited his purpose.

POST OFFICES

ROCHES NOIRES

The place-name of the new post office at Roches Noires which opened on 16th June 2005 was corrected in both the registration rubber handstamp and the Postmaster’s straight line rubber handstamp during July and August respectively. The exact (first day) date of use of the two corrected handstamps has not yet been established. The earliest date (so far) seen is 13th July (Reg. Item No 112) for the registration handstamp and 10th August (Reg. Item No 240) for the Postmaster’s handstamp. At 10th August therefore the place-name Roches Noires is spelt correctly on the double circle circular date stamp, the registration handstamp and the Postmaster’s office handstamp.

For the record between 16th June 2005 and 10th August 240 registered items were recorded at Roches Noires post office, that is, an average of five items per day for the 48 working days.... a good “economic reason” for opening a brand new “one man office” in the locality notwithstanding the fact that the Postal Services have been drowning in red ink since “corporatisation.”

Ed. note: - This place-name is misspelt on many maps of Mauritius. It is possible that, in good faith, the Postal Services made an unintentional mistake – possibly relying on a school atlas. Look at some maps of Mauritius – you will be surprised how many maps have Roches Noires misspelt, e.g. a couple of tourism brochures, a 2005 bank diary and a school atlas.

