

Examining passports at Dieppe



permission to leave, called the King's Licence, issued by William the Conqueror. When travel for pleasure became popular with the Grand Tour in the 17th and 18th centuries, letters of introduction were used to ease frontier problems. A traveller would find somebody at home who knew somebody else in the country of destination and one would introduce by letter the traveller to the other person. The traveller didn't have to visit the foreign person, but was able to produce the letter on demand at frontiers etc. to establish his bone fides. These two requirements - official permission to leave the country and the need to establish your identity - came together to form the passport. With the expansion of the British Empire and the industrial revolution came another surge in foreign travel and the need for many more passports.

Strangely, early passports were impressive documents extolling the virtues of the person issuing the single sheet of paper - designed perhaps to impress frontier guards who could not

read - but containing no description of the traveller! Until 1851 British passports were in French, the language of diplomacy. European countries introduced descriptions during the nineteenth century, but not Britain.

Passports had no time limit on them and could be used time and again. They could soon be covered in official and hotel stamps, which created some problems, but a solution was found. An

agent would obtain a passport for you from the Foreign Office and the agent would give it to the customer in a wallet containing a notebook. This notebook was often used for the stamps. By 1914 the British passport comprised two sheets of paper valid for five years only, containing the age of the bearer and profession, but still no description. World War 1 brought changes with the need to detect spies. A description was incorporated into a new leaflet style passport, which also included a photograph for the first time. When folded it resembled what we would recognise as a (pre EC) British passport.

In 1922 there was an international agreement on passport design and the British version lasted for 70 years until the EC passport was introduced for the sake of uniformity, but in fact the passports of all EC countries are different and of poorer quality!

Having traced the development of the British passport, Martin showed us some passports which had interesting stories to tell, including passports that were needed

to travel between towns on the continent. One involved a passport issued in 1826 by Spanish police for a refugee wishing to travel to Marseilles. The official instructions said that in such circumstances the Mayor should send the passport to the 'Home Secretary' in Paris for the asylum claim to be considered. If it were granted, the Mayor knew that Marseilles would have to bear the cost of caring for the refugee, so he cunningly issued another passport from Marseilles to London via Calais. This was not the last time that the French passed on their refugee problems to Britain!

World War I left behind a problem of five million refugees in Europe. Few, if any, had passports. Without one no country would employ them, despite the acute shortage of men. The League of



Nansen passport photograph

Nations appointed Nansen, the explorer, to solve the problem. Cleverly, the refugees were issued with League of Nations passports, called Nansen passports, and by 1929, when Nansen died, the refugee problem had been solved.

When he showed a slide of Prince Charles' passport, Martin explained that all members of the royal family need passports, except the Queen. She, like all other heads of state by international agreement, does not need one. Diplomatic passports are a different colour and there are distinctive passports for the 35 Queen's Messengers, who travel with diplomatic bags, which are always in the messenger's sight (always males), when the contents cannot travel as cargo.

An interesting phrase still in the British passport is 'Her Britannic Majesty's Secretary of State requests and requires....' Surely, it should be one or the other? Either one has the power to require somebody to do something or one does not have the power, but would like somebody to do something. This phrase was originally used to address two



Nansen passport



Queen's Messenger passport

different groups of people as illustrated by a 1659 passport for a German mercenary soldier travelling from Britain to Saxony, which referred to 'requiring those under our control' and 'requesting those not under our control' to allow the bearer to pass freely.

By the end of a well illustrated talk delivered with enthusiasm and humour, Martin Lloyd had amply demonstrated that a passport is not just a boring piece of officialdom, but an interesting and sometimes fascinating insight into one or more episodes in a person's life.

Martin Lloyd has produced the only history of the passport. *The Passport - The History of Man's Most Travelled Document*, a hardback published by Sutton Publishing, price £9.99, is available in most book shops.

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April 2004 Meeting

DOVER'S ALIENS' CLERKS..... Reported by Anthony Lane

OUR USUAL action-packed A.G.M. was completed with a talk by Immigration Officer Martyn Webster, who broke away from his usual theme of memorials to talk about immigrants, a subject on which most of us are prepared to profess an opinion, but whose exclamations are not always based on the true facts surrounding the issue. Recalling this familiar subject, he took us back to less familiar times, commencing in the latter half of the 18th century when few immigration controls existed.

At the time of the rise of Napoleon there was concern of a threatened invasion from France, not by a military force, but due to the possible displacement of up to 80,000

'Europeans' who might feel safer on this side of the Channel. How many of these actually succeeded in reaching these shores was not recorded but the 'threat' caused the government of the day to pass an Aliens Act in 1793, resulting in the employment of a force of Aliens' Clerks at Dover. These clerks required the recording of details by ship's masters berthing at Dover of all foreigners they had aboard. Such information was entered in the registers kept for the purpose. The aim was to reduce to a minimum the entry of 'Spies, insurgents and refugees and those who could undermine the British State.' Failure to report an alien would result in a fine of £10 in 1793 for the shipmaster concerned, a