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## The Stamp of Approval by D. Cairns

It may be looked upon as something of an impertinence by readers of this journal that a non-member of the Society should be writing about Swiss railways. Very much like teaching one's grandmother to suck eggs! However, the object of the exercise is to draw attention to another aspect of Switzerland's major transport system which may have escaped the notice of most of that country's railway enthusiasts; namely the philatelic theme.

Railways and the Swiss postal service became inextricably linked within ten years of the day in 1847 when the first rail service was introduced. From 1858 onwards the Travelling Post Offices expanded in direct proportion to the expansion of the rail network and the study of the various TPO markings from that time onwards has been of great interest to many Swiss philatelists. Where postage stamps were concerned, in 1932 the 50th Anniversary of the St. Gotthard Railway was commemorated by an issue of three stamps depicting the gentlemen who were the prime movers in the construction of that line, whilst a miniature sheet was produced for the line's Centenary. At various times since 1932, Swiss railways, the

locomotives, stations and those who worked for the service have been the subject for the designs depicted on a number of issues of postage stamps, the most recent being a set of four for the 150th Anniversary of Swiss Railways in 1997. Railway Stamps from 1874 onwards and used on railway company document provide some philatelists with a very specialised field of study, as do aspects of postal stationery which carry a railway motif.

So, the Swiss railway enthusiast and the Swiss philatelist have much in common. Indeed there are, I know, some of the latter group who are members of the Swiss Railway Society. The group on whose behalf I am writing this short article is the Helvetia Philatelic Society, which issues a monthly newsletter and arranges meetings on a regular basis both in London and Leeds. Should you wish to know more about the society or perhaps attend a meeting just out of curiosity, please contact the General Secretary, John Cordingley (tel. 01654 710020) or myself, Dennis Cairns, the Northern Group Secretary, (tel: 01282 812956). Swiss postal products, like Swiss railways are usually a joy to behold, so both merit our Stamp of Approval!

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I would like to thank all of you who returned the forms, one comment that quite a few people made was that they liked the content of Swiss Express. I have enjoyed my time as editor, but must now move on!