

A keen collector lacking direction found inspiration not so much in the stamps on a letter but in the secrets hidden in the cancellations and discovered that he was able to trace its rail journey from beginning to end



Why I collect Egypt – Sami Sadek (ESC 559) – Portsmouth, UK

As a schoolboy I collected stamps from all over the world and dutifully stuck them in their rightful place in Catalogues. Then I lapsed. University took over, and stamp books were stored.

On immigrating to the UK in 1980 my interest in the stamps and history of my country of birth was rekindled and I started looking on eBay and buying Egyptian stamps with Balian catalogue in hand. But I was browsing with no clear direction. That is when I joined the Study Circle many years ago. The meetings were well attended, with incredible and wonderful material on show explained by real experts. It opened my eyes to a whole new dimension of collecting and research

Although stamps per se remained core to my collecting, my true fascination was with postal history and the letter's journey from writer to receiver. But a clear direction of research remained elusive.

Then one day my stamp dealer friend in Cairo, the late Raouf Ramzy, gave me a 1939 rail timetable whose detail included not only the Egyptian State Railways but more importantly the rare narrow-gauge routes. I had a small collection of travelling post office covers and started to look more closely at the cancellations, I soon discovered that by combining the train number in the cancellation (T 16 in



the illustration) and the detailed timetable I could actually track the full geographic route of the cover.

Peter Smith's 1983 monograph on TPOs, classifying them by cancellation type. was my constant companion. I was hooked. I acquired as many collections as I could afford (and bought some that I could not !!)

I started to learn the geography of Egypt and looked up obscure town names on the maps, spending hours tracing the routes and gaining immense satisfaction from untangling the arcane but well-planned movements of a letter travelling a three-TPO journey. TPOs continue to fascinate me. I have other projects and material, but I still find hidden TPO gems. My latest discovery was the first documented cover bearing not just three but four TPO cancels.

Finally, here is one of my favourite covers.

It has the first Egyptian TPO (ALES-CAIRO) marking. It was posted in Greece. So I asked a Greek friend to read the various cancellations. He took a quick look and said: "I was born in Kefalonia."



● We hope to make this column a regular feature of the QC, and welcome all members' stories