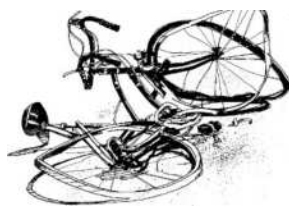


THEMESCENE

March 2015

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BICYCLE CRASH MAIL

John Davis has a possible philatelic first

We have all heard about crash mail. We all know about bicycle mail. But what about bicycle crash mail? In 1979, I and my family were living in The Coombe, in the village of Streatley-on-Thames, in Berkshire, which was separated from its neighbouring village of Goring-on-Thames in Oxfordshire, by the Goring Gap, one of the most picturesque parts of the Thames.


On Saturday 9th June 1979 at 7.45am, we drove to Rugby to visit my sister-in-law and her family. As we were watching the evening news on the television, there was a report about a letter bomb, that at 8.30 that morning, had exploded in the mail bag on the bicycle of a village postman.

After only a few seconds, I looked my wife, Rosemary, and she looked at me, and in unison we said "that's The Coombe, Streatley". We were transfixed by the report, but with a feeling of relief that we were not in residence at the time of the explosion, having left just 45 minutes beforehand. Luckily no one was injured, and the postman, Peter Collingbourne, although shaken, escaped death by a few inches.

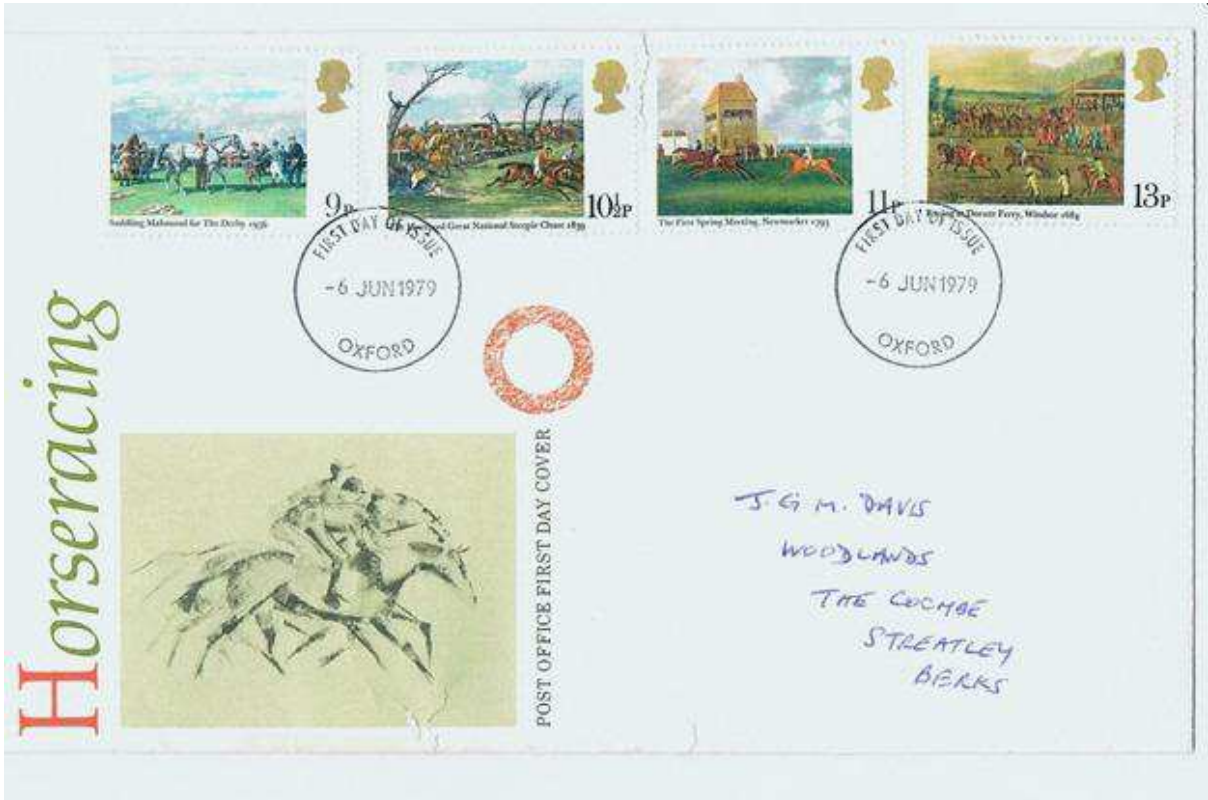
The police questioned everyone living in the Coombe, but as we were not at home on that eventful day, we wondered if we might have been considered as prime suspects. We were visited by detectives the following day, Sunday, but convinced them of our innocence!

The incident was widely covered in both the local and national newspapers. There was speculation that the target for the bomb was a High Court Judge who lived in Streatley, and who, four years earlier had sentenced a member of the IRA to twelve years in prison at Birmingham Crown Court.

Unbeknown to me at the time, in the mail bag, were five items of mail for me, including two 6th June GB Horseracing Paintings first day covers (one for me and one for my son) which I had posted in Oxford on that day. When the first day covers did not arrive, I did wonder if they may have been in that mail bag, and if so, if they survived. To my surprise they were, and did. On 21st July, Mr H. G. Taylor, on behalf of the Manager of the Services Marketing Division of the Head Post Office in Reading, wrote to me enclosing the items of mine that had been in the mail bag, with a letter of apology for any inconvenience caused. Fortunately, the first day covers were still in one piece, although a bit battered.

This story is included in my talks and displays to philatelic societies about the many ways in which mail has been delivered, and which always seems to inspire particular interest. It is possible that the "Bicycle Crash Mail" first day covers are unique! 





Slightly damaged FDC with tears top and bottom

