

Obituary: The *Bechuanalands and Botswana Society* and its journal the *Runner Post*

by Peter Thy

I first encountered the *Bechuanalands and Botswana Society* (BBS) in around 1989, when I unexpectedly found myself in Botswana with the mandate of teaching igneous petrology and geochemistry in the Geology Department of the University of Botswana in Gaborone. A couple of visits to the philatelic counter of the main post office on the Mall started my Botswana collection. Shortly thereafter I got in touch with the local stamp club that was organized and run Andy Andersson. After a couple of the monthly meetings, Andy told me that it were a 'requirement' that I became a member of BBS and I received the *Runner Post*. Each new issue of the *Runner Post* arrived in Gaborone as one copy and Andy took it to the local photocopy outlet and copied enough so all Botswana members of the BBS could get their own copy. I still have those not always perfect copies. Later I met Peter Lodoen whose stock book gave my Botswana collection a further boost.

In those days, Alan McGregor in Cape Town edited the *Runner Post*. My easy access to the University Library and the National Archives soon led me to explore the early history of the Bechuanaland postal service and in particular the development of the postal rates and soon led to my first articles in the *Runner Post*. Over the years, these few early articles became many more.

The *Runner Post* was born in the spring of 1984 when Roy Setterfield of Sussex mailed a two-page newsletter to a group of collectors that he know might be interested. The newsletter was simply headed "BECHUANALAND" and had a subheading reading: "This is the first attempt at a (newsletter) for our Project..." The newsletter was typewritten and photocopied with a single illustration showing an example of the 'GUBULAWAYO/ BECHUANALAND' cancellation. Roy Setterfield notes in it: "I have a list of about 40 names for this mailing. Whether we progress as a Study Group or similar depends on you. The break-down is something like this: Well and truly hooked (2); Very interested (12); Interested (11); and No-reply-as-yet (10), as well as those who do not collect Bechuanalands, but are sympathetic to our project." The first truly hooked group is identified as Roy Setterfield himself and Brian Trotter. At that point Brian

Trotter was already working on his postmark typology that later would develop into a special postmark study group and eventually a society publication.

We know now that the interest definitely was there and that about 100 issues saw the light of the day until recently in early 2020 when Otto Peetoom was forced to close the society for good. Shortly after the first couple of issues, Alan McGregor in Cape Town got involved in the editorial duties and in December 1988 he assumed the full editorial responsibility that lasted until July 2000. Thereafter, Neville Midwood took over until August 2015 when it was realized that the society had reached a point with little membership interests in taking over important society functions. Otto Peetoom stepped in in an attempt to save the society and kept single-handedly the society and the Runner Post alive until the last issue was distributed in June 2020. With this issue it was clear that the membership had lost all interests in contribution to the society and to the Runner Post. Otto died a few months after the last issue was distributed from a long sickness.

A total of 102 issues were released between 1984 and 2020 with a total of 2467 pages or about 60 pages per year and 24 pages per issue. There are a few subjects such as the postmark study organized by Brian Trotter and later continued by Bruce Warrender that have been an important part of the Runner Post. Other subjects have been John Inglefield-Watson and Peter Thy's 'Postal Stationery News and Views,' and Steve Wallace and Alan MacGregor's rarer stamp study, just to mention a few. The most productive author through the years has been John Inglefield-Watson with well over 100 articles and notes to his credit. Postal auctions have been part of society activities for which auction lists as well as prices realized have been published in the Runner Post. Tony Chilton, Howard Cook, and Brian Hurst have organized these auctions. Jim Catterall has prepared yearly and cumulative indexes.

In 2005, I compiled an index containing a comprehensive table of contents, subject index, and author index. In 2017, the table of content was updated. At the same time, I took over as archivist and organized with Brian Hurst the full electronic archives for the society and the Runner Post. Includes are all issues of the Runner Post, Runner News, indices, auction lists, and publications. The archive is currently posted on the internet in a temporary folder. A limited numbers of the 2017 archive was prepared as a DVD and is available for the production cost and mailing. The society publications also

included are Wessely's Bechuanaland exhibit, Trotter's postmark typology, Trotter and Midwood's revenue monograph, and Thy and Inglefield's Postal Stationery monograph all in pdf format.

The full archive can be accessed by going to

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vq1ie541s01nu4l/AAB67zEdC\\_yWijwd9izeyZWqa?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/vq1ie541s01nu4l/AAB67zEdC_yWijwd9izeyZWqa?dl=0)

The 2017 DVD can be obtained as long as available for £10 including mailing by paying using PayPal to thy@kronestamp.dk, Make sure to give mailing address.

The demise of the BBS is shared by several other specialist societies. For the southern African area of small specialist societies, we have already seen the disappearance of the *Post Office Stone* of the *Postmark and Postal History Society of Southern Africa*. After 140 issues and about 20 Occasional papers the society disbanded in 2014 mainly because of the death of the editor. The *South West Africa Stamp Study Group* discontinued in 2016 after over 400 issues, when the organizer and editor of their newsletter decided to call it quit without a replacement. The *Runner Post* (since 1984) is just one of several small societies that have been lost due to the lack of interest (or energy) of a shrinking and ageing membership. With the recent announced death of Otto Peetoom, two other independent journals will likely disappear (The *Rhodesian Philatelist* and the *Southern Africa Philately*).

To day we have only a handful specialist journals still alive, including the *Transvaal Philatelist* (since 1965), *Cape and Natal Philatelic Journal* (since 1996), *Springbok* (since 1947), *Anglo-Boer War Philatelist* (since 1957), *Bartolomeu Dias* (since 1988), *Orange Free State Bulletin* (since 1953), *Forerunners* (since 1987), and *Rhodesian Study Circle Journal* (since 1951). Some of the societies behind the above journals are healthy, others suffer from the same problems like the BBS of an ageing and declining membership unwilling or unable to step forward to take over important membership functions, like secretary and editorship. Remedies were in 2002 discussed in many societies, including the BBS, prompted by a write paper by Tony Chilton, but sparked little interests in doing anything. It was then and still is clear that many of the

smaller specialist societies will only survive if resources are shared administratively and journal-wise. The attempt by Otto Peetoom to launch a general southern Africa journal open to all was a good step forward, although during the 15 issues under Otto's leadership did not catch on. It is hoped that somebody will take over from the *Southern Africa Philately* as started by Otto.

Let us finally ask were will the collector interested in the philately and postal history of the Bechuanalands now be able to communicate their discoveries, learn about what other collectors know, and how will they meet similar minded people that are 'truly hooked,' like Roy Setterfield wrote in the first issue of the *Runner Post*? Some of the existing societies may in part be able to fill that vacuum. The *Overprinter* may be able to help with subject related to the many British stamps overprinted for Bechuanaland. The *Forerunners* in the US may be able to absorb some of the more general studies, as we already are doing. The *Cape of Natal Philatelic Journal* will be able to take some of the Cape period studies and likewise the *Rhodesian Study Circle Journal* will be able to accept the subject related to the Rhodesian connection. But where will the subject that are too 'small' to fit other places, like the development in new stamps, postmarks, new and closed postal offices, official mail, franking privileges, just to mention a few. The important function of societies like the *Runner Post* is both the past, but certainly also the present. The present have always filled an important recording function in the *Runner Post* and is now lost.

RIP *Bechuanalands and Botswana Society* and *Runner Post*. You will both be missed.



Membership meeting in Johannesburg during a Johannesburg Philatelic Exhibition in 1986. Around the table from left to right are: Tony Chilton, Mike Nethersole, Hamish Campbell, Brian Trotter, Alan McGregor, Philip Cattell, Karl Seligmann, and Andy Andersson. Photo by Howard Cook.



Cover for the Runner Post Archives from 2018



His Majesty's Post passing through the Chobe Swamps, Kabulalbula near Kasane, Bechuanaland. Photograph from E.H.L. Schwarz, 1928, "The Kalahari and its Native Races," Witherby, London.





Otto Peetoom listening to a talk while preparing his own during PSGSA Annual National Convention in 2015, Denver Colorado

# The Runner Post



RUNNER POST No. 10

( ISSN 0953-3754 )

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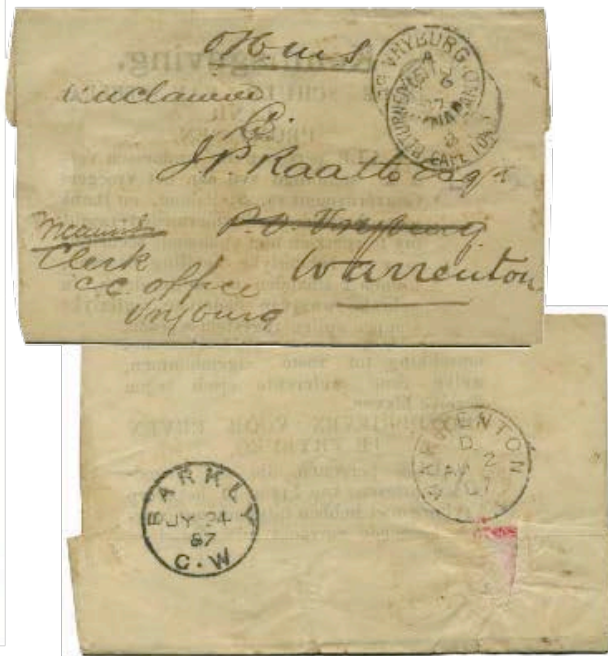
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*March 2005*

**THE BECHUANALANDS AND BOTSWANA SOCIETY**

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ISSN No 0953-3354

Winter/Spring 2013



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The Bechuanalands & Botswana Society



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