

HOBBY HISTORY

Foreign Made: I

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The years between the First and Second World Wars in Britain were probably the golden era for match label issues and variety. It probably coincided with an increase in cigarette smoking, and, for a time anyway, a period of rapid economic growth and stability.

Whilst there were upwards of a dozen local factories servicing the British market post WW1, there was also a thriving import business, which changed in nature from the import business which existed prior to hostilities. Whereas importers pre 1914 were essentially agents or subsidiaries of the match manufacturing factories of Sweden, Austria, Belgium and Norway, for example, these were joined post 1918 by a whole lot of individual importers registering their own labels, and sourcing the matches from wherever they could obtain the best deal. Thus "The Enterprise" label was registered by Ginner, Morton and Goddard, "The Festival" by E. Conti, "Fire Queen" by O. Moenich, "The Mason" by I Goldstein, and so on for many well known labels. These importers endeavoured to obtain a following for their labels in price, quality and label design in competition with the established domestic factory made products which dominated the market.

In addition, post WW1 Europe was very different to that which had existed per war, and a whole lot of new low cost match producing countries were created. Thus, the importers had the opportunity of sourcing their matches from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland and Czechoslovakia, all newly created countries, as well as existing sources in Poland, Russia and Belgium, but that meant reprinting labels whenever the source of the matches changed.

However, the most important factor for the

match importing industry which existed post WW1 was the rise of communist Soviet Russia in a world which was increasingly becoming more right wing throughout the 1920's and 30's. This posed problems for importers of Russian matches, which had already been an established source of supply pre WW1, and was to become a major player after it. Whilst some labels of the inter war period do carry the "Made in Russia" or "Made in the Soviet Union" imprints, it was clearly a marketing negative for many in that environment. This is also probably why one significant match marketing organisation remaining in Britain in this period, Arcos, was an arm of the Gosspitchsyndicate SSSR, a syndicate of Soviet match manufacturers and was clearly controlled by the Soviet State. Incidentally, this organisation introduced the famous "Criterion" label to the UK market at this time. Having said that, there were also importers who appeared to import direct from the USSR, such as Continental Match Distributors.

Thus, by the late 1920's, in a booming match market, importers were faced with two problems. Firstly, the cost of always having to change their labels under the existing merchandise marks act, which stipulated that labels must show average contents and countries of origin, whenever they took on a contract from a different country, and secondly, what to do when they wanted to source from Russia, when putting "Made in Russia" on their labels was going to result in upsetting some customers.

Typical Pre-1939 Foreign Made

