

MESSES B(ERNARD) SAPHRA & CO

The CORRESPONDENCE SERIES is an investigation into the background of recipients of British pre-stamped postal stationery. The "collection" was purchased in South Africa in 1999 as a job lot, the which took me six months to sort and mount, creating a collection spanning 140 years. I have no idea of the provenance.

The Reference work is British Postal Stationery, A K Huggins.1970. The first date with catalogue number refers to the year when the pre-stamped envelope was first issued; the second, the year when the envelope was actually used.

Philatelic Description of the item of Postal Stationery:

1902 (EP40)_Messes B Saphra & Co., 23 Nicholl Square, E.C. (actually used London AP 10 02)

Comment:

Discovering the history of Bernard Saphra is a story of serendipity.

Bernard Saphra was born Emden (East Frisia) on 2 June 1857. His wife, Toni Plaut was born Detmold (Duchy of Lippe) 24 June 1877. They met in London and were married in Detmold by Fr.Caegler on 27 December 1898. They lived in London from 1898-1900 whereafter they emigrated to the Cape, arriving in September 1900.

At the time of their marriage, Saphra was assured by an attorney in London that their marriage was recognised in the United Kingdom and Colonies in terms of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882. This was of import to both parties as, by that time, he was a wealthy merchant and she a woman of independent means.

In October 1907, when they sought to renew their wills, they were informed that the Married Women's Property Act of 1882 did not apply in the Cape Colony. Aghast at the knowledge, they made application to the Supreme Court of the Cape of Good Hope for a Post-nuptial contract containing clauses of an Ante Nuptial Contract excluding marital powers as "there had always been the intention to keep their estates separate". Argument was heard before Sir E.J. Buchanan ¹ and the motion granted on 7 January 1908.

Toni Saphra was the founder member of the Union of Jewish Women in South Africa. She died in 1967 ².

Bernard Saphra continued to be a successful merchant. *Inter alia*, in 1936, B Saphra and Company, sited at 100 President Street, Johannesburg, was described as General Merchants, Indent Agents, Commission Agents, Factors and Brokers. Archival references to the company exist last dated 1941.

References:

1. South African Archives Repository, Cape Town
- 2 Family Search. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. <http://www.familysearch.org>
3. FreeBMD Home Page <http://freebmd.rootsweb.com>

¹ The Hon. Sir Ebenezer John BUCHANAN, Knight Bachelor, Knight of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, L.L.D., Cantab and S. Africa, born Tahiti 1844 died Cape Town 1930.

² TAB MHG REFERENCE 3138/67 DESCRIPTION : SAPHRA, TONI. (BORN PLAUT). 1967. REMARKS: PREDECEASED SPOUSE BERNARD SAPHRA.