

“A SPECIALISED N.Z. COLLECTION”

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I have been collecting stamps for eight and a half years, specialising over the last five. I have concentrated on New Zealand stamps, which rate high in popularity among international collectors, they're also pleasing to the eye.

Contemporary N.Z. issues are unpredictable and have a wide range of subject matter and design. They are colourful, topically interesting and also provide immense scope for philatelic research, (the most important point for me).

Fortunately there is a vast array of information available about modern N.Z. issues, by way of books and more importantly — resident collectors. I have found that an experienced word of advice has save me time, money and effort and also provided encouragement and background knowledge.

Modern N.Z. stamps tend to be overlooked simply because they're modern issues; yet they are easily obtained in large quantities in both mint and used condition. These issues are not overly expensive if you are prepared to “hunt around”. They regularly appear in auction catalogues and may be purchased direct from dealers.



My own specialised collection is of the 1967 Decimal 2½ cent Kowhai. This particular stamp appealed to me because of its historical importance, (being part of the decimal changeover in N.Z. on the 10th July 1967) and because the design has personal significance to me.

My country home, near Gisborne, is bounded by several stands of native bush. Among the entangled foliage is one, old, large Kowhai tree.

Having played around its trunk in all seasons as a boy, I now find that whenever I see the Kowhai flower I'm reminded of my childhood days.

Not having the ways nor means to attend stamp-clubs or visit dealers I had to adopt the correspondence method to achieve my stamp collecting desires. From the **YELLOW PAGES** I obtained the names and addresses of local dealers to whom I wrote. In my letters I introduced myself, explained my interest in N.Z. stamps and asked if they could help. Within a short period of time I had received replies and lists of various items of equipment.

I used libraries regularly to order and borrow books on stamp collecting. Among some of my earlier readings were "*N.Z. Stamp Collector's Handbook*", 1st, 2nd and later 3rd editions, edited by R. Hunt (well worth reading before any major decisions are made).

Also, "*All The Stamps of N.Z.*" by L.G. Franks, gives basic background information about N.Z. issues. From adverts within these publications I obtained the address of the New Zealand Post Office Philatelic bureau, (Private Bag, Wanganui). They print special bulletins on everything happening in New stamp issues in our country and these are posted **FREE** to your home. I wrote to, "*The Marketing Manager, Marketing Branch, Post Office headquarters, Private Bag, Wellington.*"

A booklet that has provided me with the greatest help and one I recommend, "*A Guide For Exhibitors*", compiled by T. Lee, published by 1983 Stampex committee. This booklet covers essential principles of stamp collecting and presentation, including many Dos and Don'ts.

"*Stanley Gibbon's*" catalogues (both British-Commonwealth and Elizabethan) contain helpful introductory information concerning the anatomy of postage stamps, ie. papers, printing process, watermarks, separation — (perforation), gum and their relevance to specific issues.

Using a watermark tray & white-spirits, magnifier and perforation gauge, I applied the information from these two catalogues to the lower valued 1935-47 N.Z. Pictorial stamps. A period of plating techniques which created an abundance of varieties for the study-conscious. Similarly practical "*plating*" material is from the 1960-67 Pictorials. Both issues inspired my liking for flaw and variety finding.

With encouragement, assistance and expertise from experienced collectors, I slowly began to appreciate the finer points of philatelic research. I was persuaded to consider all aspects of "*Specialisation*", including: — printing and production, postal-history, positional flaws and replating.

The possibilities of improvement through competitive exhibiting were pointed out and they impressed upon me the standards required. These I adopted as my guidelines for lay-out. A fluency to the finished presentation is a direct result of their combined help.

Having chosen the stamp in which I wished to specialise, it became necessary to read as much as I could about the issue. The "*Postage*

Stamps of New Zealand", published by the Royal Philatelic Society, volume VI, chapter XII and *Campbell Patterson Catalogue of New Zealand Stamps*", provided good foundation information. Some borrowed back-dated news letters and correspondence with the "Stamp section" Postal Division, Post Office Headquarters Wellington, filled in non-catalogued information; especially concerning "*Counter-coil & Slot machine releases*".

Much of the afore-mentioned literature has been repeatedly studied during the formation of my collection, in an attempt to separate fact from opinion. Unfortunately not all published sources are reliable. I can only suggest you read everything and accept only that which you can illustrate and prove.

It seemed logical and indeed proved essential to gather as much information and data as I could about the photogravure process used for printing the 2½ cent Kowhai. A book called "*Postage Stamps In The Making*", written by F.J. Melville, (later revised by John Easton), and compilations from the Philatelic Congress of Great Britain, titled "*Background To Philately*", provided me with my greatest source. Although published some thirty years ago, both books are well written, easily read, and in the case of the J. Easton re-write, well illustrated.

I collected thousands of used 2½ cent Kowhai stamps from dealers, auction bids and fellow collectors. Sorting through these stamps many times over I found all the listed flaws mentioned in Campbell Patterson's catalogue and an assortment of unlisted varieties. Many "*One-offs*" appeared because transient flaws (not consistently recurring) are common to the modern photogravure and lithogravure printing processes.

For this reason, confirmation of consistency by finding two or three of the same variety was part of my initial sortings.

Sunlight and water also have a harsh effect on modern printers' inks. I discovered that care was needed when soaking these stamps and to treat uncatalogued colour-shade varieties with suspicion. That's not to say, shade-varieties & missing colours, don't exist in modern philatelic printing. They do!

"Flyspeck" varieties, (tiny flaws of seemingly little significance), became such an important part of re-plating this issue. Because of this and the number of unlisted varieties found, I was forced to adopt a much simpler and quicker method of recording exact position details. Individual annotations positioning each variety became time-consuming and wasteful. The use of a "*Thirkell Position Finder*" solved my problem. An instrument that's cheap and once familiar with its easy application, makes flaw re-positioning a simple graph reference, recorded in pencil, on the back of each stamp. (Do not use "pen" under any circumstances).

The Thirkell readings enabled assessment of consistency in a very short time. Also, a quick comparison between used and mint stamps could be achieved.

I amassed a large range of mint, unhinged multiples, many with selvedge. Plate, imprint and value blocks, of six stamps, from all cylinders were purchased. From these I noted plate numbers, colour sequence, imprint-inscription, perforation guide & alignment dies and sheet-value markings. Their respective printed position on the selvedge is in relation to stamps above or below. I also noted in the case of the imprint inscription, the printed size of the lettering and its position within the width of the selvedge.

Sheet selvedge also illustrated imperforate and/or perforate examples. This gave reasonable indication of normal perforating direction. From information read, I knew that certain plates showed the reverse perforation direction.

This would have been easily achieved, simply by turning the double-sheets panes around before they were perforated. Blocks illustrating this particular facet were acquired.

There are fourteen major listed varieties. Among these, the Multipositive flaws, (appearing in an identical position on all 3 plates), row 19/1, Thirkell B-2, plates 1A', 2A1A' and again plate 2B 3B! & The "Butterfly" flaw, row 8/5, Thirkell C-3, Plate 2A1a' and the two states of this flaws' retouch, row 8/5, plate 2B 3B' provide interesting specialised material alone. Other minor multipositive varieties also constantly appear.

The four early plates, 1A, 1B and 2A and 2B were printed on a reel-fed printing press, while the latter two, plates 2A 3A and 2B 3B were printed on a sheet-fed press. This fact can be seen, not only by the consistent positional flaws but also the reverse plate number positioning and the imperf' and perforated sheet-side selvedges.

From the time I commenced building my collection till now, I have been able to re-plate and prove the consistency of a further eighty-four varieties. More expensive specialised material has been added, as and when I was able to afford it; items such as, colour proofs, perforation varieties, Doctor-blade flaws, colour-shifts and counter-coil and slot-machine oddities.

I was lucky to have access to full sheets and large blocks of the 2½ cent Kowhai issue. This made for easy re-plating although the process of recording Thirkell readings of possible varieties and then varifying consistency, remains the same.

It is my firm belief that modern specialised collecting is equally as rewarding, both personally and competitively, as is any other aspect of stamp collecting.

It's not as difficult as it can be made to sound. Regardless of country, issue or particular theme, success will be mainly determined by the amount of reading and research done.

Information is obtainable but is not always correct, It will at least allow you to prove it wrong, and thus learn in the process.