

TRADITIONAL PHILATELY

Robin Gwynn

What is "Traditional Philately"? Basically, that is just a longwinded term for stamp collecting.

"Traditional philately" covers all aspects of stamp collecting, competitive exhibits in exhibitions are considered to be "traditional philately" unless they are specifically entered in some specialised class like postal history, thematics etc.

The first people who set out to get their hands on as many stamps as they could were English ladies of 1841. At that time only four stamps had ever been issued, the Great Britain 1d black and 2d blue of 1840 and the 1d red and 2d blue of 1841.

Today's stamp collectors are likely to find themselves in tears at the thought of such stamps used, as the ladies in question wished to use them, for wallpapering their rooms, stuffing cushions and making paper chains.

But although these pioneers may have begun the idea of saving stamps, they could hardly be called collectors — they were accumulators, pure and simple.

So it could not be said that they were "traditional philatelists": for philately, like other branches of true collecting, involves not just accumulating stamps but sorting, classifying and arranging them.

When back in the 1860s, the first true stamp collectors were active they concentrated on having one or more copies of each stamp.

But philately has developed a long way over the past 125 years.

Modern collectors are acutely conscious of quality as well as quantity, and much care is now devoted to obtaining stamps in the best possible condition.

It is recognised that stamps can be collected in a number of ways: unused and used; as singles and as blocks; on and off cover; in coil strips; booklet panes and miniature sheets. There are then varieties: of watermark, gum, or perforation; of paper and printing. All of these have their place in "*traditional philately*".

Collectors have also found that they can understand more about an issue they are studying if they look at its "*pre-history*" — such items as essays or proofs of adopted or rejected stamp designs.

These too fit into "*traditional philately*", as do other specialised items such as forgeries intended to deceive the postal authorities, or stamps originally intended for fiscal use (that is, to collect money as a form of tax) but used for postal purposes.

Even pre-stamp and stampless covers may have a place in a traditional philately exhibit, although the special regulations governing international exhibitions suggest these should not exceed 15% of the available display space.



The complete 1935 Pictorial set with the additional 9d value.

"Traditional philately", then, is a phrase with a very wide scope. Most young or new collectors tend to start by collecting stamps of the world. They will soon find this approach too great. Many then turn to collecting the stamps of their own country, or of some other nation or group of nations in which they have an interest.

By doing so, they are beginning to specialise. Perhaps at some later stage they will decide that one country's issues are still too extensive, and will concentrate their attention on a particular issue.

A few may go even further, and tackle just a single stamp in all its forms; at a recent national exhibition in New Zealand, one entrant supplied 288 sheets devoted to the 1d Dominion stamp of 1909-26 —and that was only a small part of his collection!

There are as many degrees of specialisation as there are skins around an onion. They all fall within the scope of *"traditional philately"*.

Obviously it isn't possible to tackle them all in a short article, and in our remaining space we will look, not at extreme specialisation, but at how the study of one issue might be approached.

At the present time there are not as many youthful collectors pursuing this line as there are chasing thematics, but the *"traditional"* approach is one with much merit — try it and see for yourself!

Collecting the stamps of one country can be a fascinating introduction to its history, people, customs, geography, animals, buildings, birds, flowers and so on. Tackling just one issue offers more scope to develop one's philatelic skills.

For example let's suppose you have never specialised before, but have decided you want to collect the 1935-43 pictorial issue of New Zealand. It is attractive, including large-size stamps showing Mt Cook, a swordfish, Captain Cook at Poverty Bay and Mt Egmont.

These stamps, at least in used condition, are generally not too difficult to find, nor all that expensive. A simplified set consists of just 14 stamps: but there is much more to the issue than that.

The first thing you will notice from a listing like the Stanley Gibbons British Commonwealth catalogue is that the stamps need to be sorted by watermark.

The first set of stamps, issued in 1935-6, had a *"single"* watermark showing NZ over a star; the second, produced between 1936 and 1943, had a *"multiple"* watermark in which the watermark units are spaced much more closely together. So you will have to learn how to detect watermarks.

As you sort the issue by watermark, you will notice something about the paper. Most 1935-6 stamps, when held in the palm of your hand which warms them up a little, tend to curl from side to side; most 1936-43 ones, from top to bottom.

When you notice this for the first time, you are taking a step towards understanding something about how paper is made. As your knowledge grows, you will discover more about its mesh, which is very useful in identifying a number of New Zealand stamps.



An "Official" set.

You will also find that catalogues list quite a large number of perforation varieties, so you will have to learn not only how to detect watermarks but how to measure perforations and how to distinguish the two sorts of perforation known as comb and line perf.

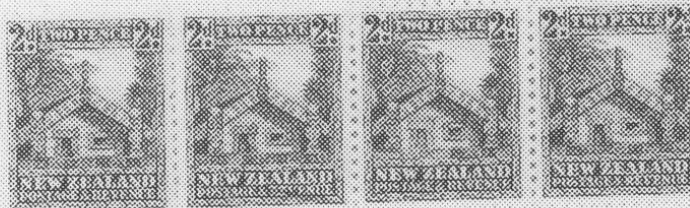
In the case of the 1936-43 issues, some of the perforation varieties exist for an unusual and interesting reason. The firm producing the stamps was that of De La Rue and Company, who were based in England. Their printing works were damaged in enemy action during the Second World War, so some values had to be either printed or perforated by other firms.



*Perforated 14 Line by
De La Rue.*



*Perforated 14x15 Line by
Harrison & Sons.*



*Perforated 12.5 Line by
Waterlow & Sons.*

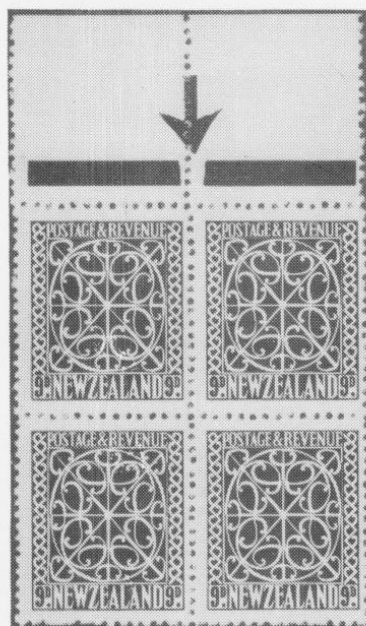
Blitz perfs. Several different printers perfed stamps from this issue after London was "Blitzed" by Germany in Sept. 1940.

These special perforations are known as the "blitz perfs" because of their background; so the issue has introduced you to the wider movements of history as well as to the aspects of New Zealand shown on the stamps themselves.

It will not take you long to realise that the knowledge you develop can be valuable.



Block of 4 x 6d with Line Perforation.



Arrow marking in selvage.

Most dealers have little time to sort their stamps in a specialised way, and so keep them in simplified form in a stockbook or envelopes. If they let you, try going through what they have.

You may be surprised at how quickly you can start picking up items that are a little more interesting than the commonest form of any given stamp: that is part of the fun of the chase!



Plate Blocks.

For instance, I have on several occasions seen the 3/- perf $12\frac{1}{2}$, one of the blitz perfs which is distinctive to the naked eye, but which is also quite scarce and undervalued, priced in dealers' stockbooks as the normal 3/-stamp.

As your collection (and interest) grows, you can move further into the field of varieties.

This issue has many examples of inverted watermark, and some of inverted and reversed watermark (caused by printers experimenting with the opposite side of the paper to the one intended for printing).

There are many plate and marginal marking. There are stamps overprinted OFFICIAL, for use by government departments. Booklet panes and postal stationery exist.



A strip from a counter coil.



A stamp from a booklet with advertising tab.



"CAPTAIN COQK" flaw.

So do many flaws, of which the best known is the 2/- with Captain Cook's name spelt COQK — a flaw which can be found on each successive printing of this value.

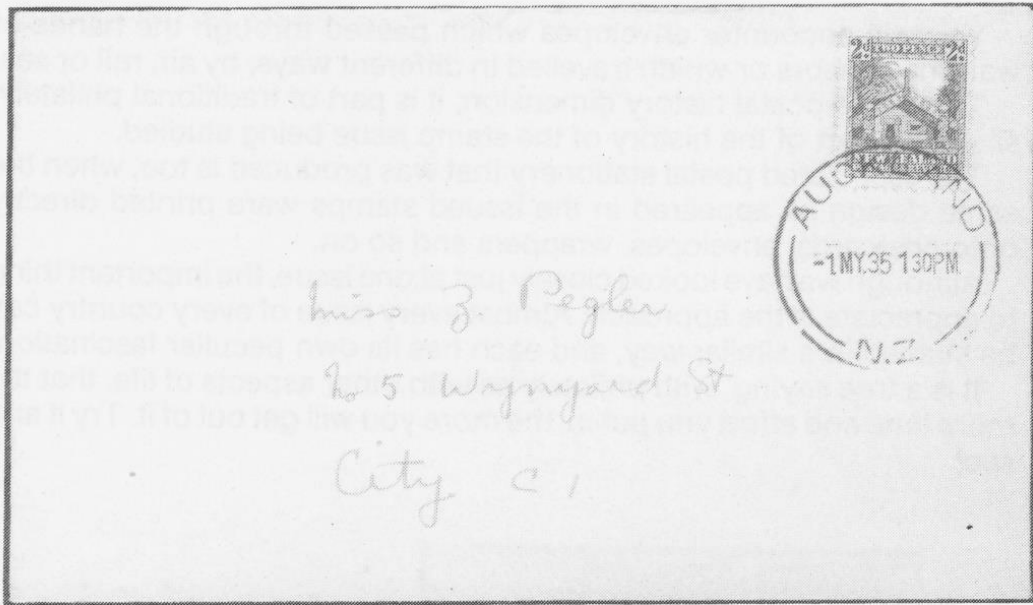
Above all, there are re-entries. This is not the place to consider them, but by the time your interest has been awakened sufficiently for you to chase these, you will be well on your way to becoming a true student of philately.

In the process your knowledge of the whole process by which stamps are printed will have developed enormously. If you have good eyesight, a decent magnifying glass and some patience, you will find that you can make discoveries, and that the process of doing so is rewarding.

There are still further aspects of tackling one issue. Why were stamps of these particular values issued?

One way to answer the question would be to look for each of the stamps on cover, showing why it was used.

In the process you will undoubtedly come across some of these 1935-43 stamps used from Egypt, where New Zealand servicemen were stationed.



2d stamp used commercially.



Avoid using souvenir covers like this in a traditional collection.

You will encounter envelopes which passed through the hands of wartime censors or which travelled in different ways, by air, rail or sea.

This is the postal history dimension; it is part of traditional philately, since it is part of the history of the stamp issue being studied.

The associated postal stationery that was produced is too, when the same design as appeared in the issued stamps were printed directly onto postcards, envelopes, wrappers and so on.

Although we have looked closely just at one issue, the important thing to appreciate is the approach. Almost every issue of every country can be studied in a similar way, and each has its own peculiar fascination.

It is a true saying, with philately as with other aspects of life, that the more time and effort you put in, the more you will get out of it. Try it and see!



W
L
M

This block would be used to show a "Letter Watermark" in the selvedge and on some stamps."