

# POSTAL HISTORY, MARCOPHILY and THE COLLECTOR

**POSTAL HISTORY** is normally defined as "a study of routes, rates and postal markings." This means studying the route taken by mail, the rate charged for its delivery and the postal markings applied to it.

**MARCOPHILY** is often confused with Postal History. Marcophily is the study of postal markings only.

Both Postal History and Marcophily have a place in the majority of collections as well as being specialised studies on their own. This article will look firstly at the specialised study then at the reasons for including this type of material in other types of collections.

## COLLECTING POSTAL HISTORY

Today's mail is tomorrow's Postal History.

Remember this fact because it immediately gets rid of the idea that "Postal History has to be old and expensive."

It has to be stated that the very best collections in New Zealand are of older and more expensive material. This does not mean that the young collector cannot build a very good and successful collection. There are a large number of collecting areas which can be used to build Postal History collections which are interesting and achievable without spending a fortune. Many of these areas have been ignored by the adult collector for a variety of reasons, which leaves the field wide open for anyone wishing to start a new Postal History collection.

Postal History ideas for the collector of N.Z. material.

1882-1900. The "Second Sideface" period

1901-1908. The "1d Universal" period

1909-1925. The "1d Dominion" period

1915-1935. The "King George V" period

1938-1953. The "King George VI" period

Plus of course, the later periods which can be split up in a large variety of ways.

I am not suggesting that anyone should build a collection of Postal History based on any one stamp issue or issues. I am however suggesting very strongly that consideration of the stamps issued in any given period is essential if you are to avoid the very expensive material. It is obvious that any 1d Universal stamp on cover will be less expensive than any 1d Chalon head on cover. Both of these will be more expensive than a 1d King George VI stamp on cover and so on.

The stamps in use at any given time will contribute to the cost of the Postal History of a period

Having selected a period to collect it is advisable to decide at an early stage what sort of collection to build. Take for example the King George V period, you could consider any of the following collections.

### **NEW ZEALAND INVOLVEMENT IN WORLD WAR I**

Admittedly this starts in 1914, slightly before the first K.G.V issue but remember we are interested in the period more than the stamps. This collection could also be split into sections or individual collections and has the potential to become a major collection as it, and its collector, grows. It could start very simply as a collection of material to and from war zones, or as a specialised study of one zone or one type of mail. Hospital mail, military camps, army units, naval units, undelivered mail, missent mail or simply official mail are all subjects which should be included in the whole collection and could be adopted as specialised collections on their own. The choice is almost unlimited.

### **INTERNAL MAIL 1915-1935**

This is another collection which sounds fairly simple at first. This could also become a major collection with many interesting and involved areas. Postcard rates, normal (or base) postage rates, registered mail, airmail, parcel post, express delivery, official mail, postage due mail and insured mail should all be included, or once again treated as individual and specialised subjects on their own.

Once again a word of warning is essential. The more specialised any collection becomes the more expensive it becomes. It is almost always better to start a general collection of a period then build specialised sections of that period as you become older and have more finance available.

It should be obvious from the above that a similar series of comments can be applied to any period of New Zealand postal history. The only limitations are the amount of work you are prepared to put into finding the material, the amount of finance available and the amount of information you can find on those three vital subjects, ROUTES, RATES and POSTAL MARKINGS.

### **COLLECTING POSTAL HISTORY OF OTHER COUNTRIES.**

When we start to consider the possibilities from the rest of the world, the options are literally unlimited. A country, a period of a country, type of mail from a country, mail to and/or from a country and so on.

The warnings given above apply to collecting postal history from anywhere in the world. There is however one significant difference between New Zealand and some other countries. Whilst collecting pre-stamp material from N.Z. is hardly practicable for the young

collector it is distinctly possible from some other countries. The best examples are probably Great Britain, France and Italy, all of which have a Postal History stretching back some 300-400 years. Again, I am not suggesting the oldest material as a practical collecting area for the young. There are however certain areas where material is both available and affordable enough to interest the young collector.

The problem of language must be considered here. If a collector decides to build a postal history collection of a non-English speaking nation then some understanding of that nation's written language is essential. Apart from any other consideration you should remember that the books containing the necessary information will probably be written in that nation's native language(s).

The last problem related to collecting the postal history of other countries is that of obtaining sufficient material. It will be necessary for any person living in N.Z. to buy material from abroad. This comment applies to anybody wishing to build a good collection of any country, including N.Z., but will have to be done more regularly by those collecting non-N.Z. material. Buying from overseas dealers is not difficult, nor is it necessarily more expensive. It does however require a great deal of care in selecting the items to buy, or bid for in auctions. It also requires access to overseas dealers lists and access to auction catalogues. Finally, and probably the most difficult point of all for the young collector, it requires a good deal of patience. It can take 6-10 weeks between bidding in an auction and receiving the material, somewhat less if buying directly from a dealers listing.

All of this sounds very difficult to the beginner, but there are compensations especially for the exhibitor/competitor. The majority of judges will acknowledge the difficulties inherent in collecting material of a foreign country and will take these difficulties into account when evaluating an exhibit or competition entry.

### **PRE-STAMP POSTAL HISTORY**

As stated above, there are distinct possibilities for the young collector in the pre-stamp period.

The material from Great Britain probably represents the best and most achievable for the new collector and rather than giving specific suggestions it may be more beneficial if the correct period is described.

1801-1840 is the period when postal services in Britain were both organised and reasonably well settled. It is also a period of some experimentation, plentiful rate changes and, most importantly, a period from which material was kept. The reason for this is generally accepted as being "legal requirement." Few letters of the time were sent in envelopes, this would have cost twice as much because postal charges were by the sheet, and an envelope counted as a second sheet. This fact allied to the need for solicitors and lawyers to keep copies of correspondence meant that the original letter sheet, with all the appropriate postal markings on it, were filed away in what must have been very large filing systems. Over a period of time this material has

found its way onto the open market, to the great joy of all postal historians. It is therefore possible to still buy material from this era at very reasonable prices and thus build an interesting collection without first robbing a bank!

As outlined above there are a large number of possibilities available for both general collections and specialised collections. All of the standard postal history elements are available from this period, internal and external mail, ship mail, pre-paid, local mail (mainly London), registered, and so on, all of which can be incorporated into a general collection or used for specialisation.

### **OTHER COUNTRIES AFTER THE INTRODUCTION OF STAMPS**

All of the remarks made regarding New Zealand Postal History apply to other countries. The stamps in use at a given time will determine the ease with which the Postal History of that time can be collected. Taking G.B. as an example again it is obvious that the 1840 1d Black on cover will be far more expensive than the 1841 1d Red on cover.

Language problems must be considered, but that apart there is no limit to the variation in collecting possibilities.

### **THE MARCOPHILY COLLECTOR**

Marcophily is the study of postmarks only.

It is therefore a simpler type of collection, or so most people think. The one aspect of this type of collection which must be considered is that, by its very nature, it requires a high degree of specialisation to be successful. Nevertheless it can be, and is, done successfully without spending a fortune. Let's consider the most obvious possibility for the New Zealander, a collection of "Closed Post Offices."

If you are not aware of the fact, N.Z. has had a large number of Post Offices which have been closed after a period.

A number of collections have been assembled of postal markings of these offices, there is still a great deal of material available however and it is certainly not too late to start a collection of your own. Naturally there are a number of very scarce office markings, but with luck and a lot of work these can still be found without having to pay huge amounts to dealers. More importantly, there are a very large number of offices which were open for a reasonable length of time and which can be collected without too many problems. There is plenty of information on these offices, dates of opening and closing, details on which type of markings can be looked for and so on.

As an alternative to the closed Post Offices one could consider a collection of your own area, a representation of all the postmarks used in say, Nelson, between 1860 (or whenever the first Post Office was opened there), and modern times.

Or look at the possibilities of collecting all examples known of the "A" class datestamps of N.Z. (or any of the other datestamps and/or slogan postmarks used) The possibilities in this field are virtually unlimited.

## **POSTAL HISTORY AND THE TRADITIONAL COLLECTOR**

Modern trends in collecting have created a situation where the traditional collector, (who collects postage stamps), should also show examples of the stamps used "as intended." In other words, showing the stamps used on cover to pre-pay correct postal rates. Whilst this is neither postal history nor Marcophily it is using material which would normally be used for those types of collections.

The emphasis here must be placed on correct use of the stamps. It would be pointless to show a first day cover for example as these are normally not correct postal rates. (Indeed the majority of modern first day covers are useless to the student of philately as they are, more often than not, not even postally used. The postmark is applied in a philatelic bureau and the cover is transmitted inside another envelope). It is also important to the traditional collector to have clean covers with good strikes of the postal markings. (These points are of vital importance to the postal historian also).

## **THE POSTAL STATIONERY COLLECTOR**

The collector of postal stationery will also be using a variety of material which is of interest to the postal historian and marcophilatelist. The reverse is also true with the use of postal stationery in other collections.

Correct use of items is, again, the vital factor. An aerogramme postmarked and delivered in Christchurch is useless as it cannot possibly have been flown. Likewise a postcard used to a foreign country without the additional stamps added. It may well be of interest because of postage due markings but is of no interest when it comes to showing correct usage.

## **THE THEMATIC COLLECTOR**

Latest trends in thematic collecting demand a large variation of material be used, including postal history and Marcophily items. The real key to using this correctly lies in selecting items which tie in perfectly with the chosen theme.

Postal history material may be used in a multitude of ways, written by or to famous people, with subject matter related to the theme or with private cachets, (such as those used by the Royal family), which relate to the theme.

Marcophily appears, at the moment, to be more successful with thematic collectors than with the student of postmarks. Placenames and slogan cancellations represent such a high proportion of good thematic collections that one could almost imagine Marcophily to be invented purely for the thematic collector.

At a recent youth international exhibition the "Best Thematic" award went to a collection which contained very few stamps, but a very large number of "Flammes", which is the French word for slogan cancellations. Any thematic collector who fails to take advantage of the vast number of

slogans related to any imaginable theme is doing his or her collection a disservice. These are not quite so easy to obtain when living in N.Z. But the extra effort expended will be more than worthwhile, and of course we must not forget the large number of slogan cancellations which we can obtain and the Europeans cannot, it's not all one sided! Slogans cancellations apart, you should also bear in mind the unusual placenames found in N.Z. There are a great many possibilities here that don't exist elsewhere, all it requires is that little extra amount of work and imagination.

