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Prestige Points #147 Postal History Auction

1. This auction has been a long time in the planning. The idea came about as a result of a long lunch with *Rodney Perry*, who suggested that it was about time we conducted a sale dedicated to postal history. As this area has been my passion for 40+ years, I didn't take much persuading. However, with all the other projects on our calendar over the past twelve months or so, it took some juggling to slot it into our programme

In fact, it was the upcoming *Melbourne Stampshow 2009* in late July that provided the impetus to get things happening. We figured that a national stamp exhibition was a good place to have viewing because these shows tend to attract a lot of people who like nothing better than to rummage through boxes of covers.

Well, have we got covers for you!? We've got huge cartons of covers. We've got boxes of covers. We've got packets of covers. We've got single rare covers. We've got philatelic First Day Covers. We've got commercial airmail covers. We've got that cover you've been hunting for these past ten years. And we've got ranges of covers that will provide excellent "collection starters".

2. The prospect of introducing new collectors to the fascinating world of postal history (and its attendant parts, postmarks and postal stationery) provided much of the motivation for the sale. And, of course, there are many long-term philatelists who might be encouraged to take up a completely new challenge. (If you are already converted, skip this next bit and start browsing!)

One of the key dynamics of "The Great Collectables Boom" of the 1970s is that "average" collectors found themselves priced-out of the market for fine Kangaroos, Penny Blacks, and even sheets of current decimals!! Rather than irresponsibly risk financial ruin by competing with the wealthy speculators, many of them turned their attention to other fields, such as revenues, dead countries, and covers.

30 years on, the market is fundamentally different in that it is underpinned by affluent collectors (as opposed to investors or speculators), but a similar scenario has been unfolding. As prices for popular stamps in superb condition keep trending upwards, more and more collectors are finding that it is a tough world out there. They either have to pay prices that inflict acute financial pain, or resign themselves to having inferior examples or empty spaces in their albums.

For these players we believe that a radical reassessment of their collecting might be in order. **Rather than face constant frustration in the auction rooms of the world, why not seek out a field that is relatively untouched?** It could be stamps from an unpopular country, picture postcards that evoke the lifestyle of a bygone era, or covers that have an often fascinating story to tell.

If this idea appeals to you, then this sale may be the start of a whole new life for you, as a Postal Historian.

Here are a few ideas, to which we could add dozens more, that might excite you. How about collecting inwards mail to a major country from all the other countries in the world? Perhaps covers with stamps from more than one issue, or more than one postal administration, might entice you. What about entire letters to or from notable people. You might consider chasing the postmarks from where you live, or a particular region, or those with a mining or shipping context. Military subjects are many and varied. Then there's taxed mail, official mail, unclaimed mail, and all the various sub-types of postal stationery.

I would like to see someone seriously take up collecting parcel usages. A collection of how the *UPU* regulations have impacted on international postal operations would be another worthwhile project. If you want to be controversial, put together an exhibit of postal stationery that exposes as being quite ridiculous the "official" definition of what is, and isn't, excluded from this major subject.

If the "collection-starter" idea appeals to get you going on a new quest, then you might like to investigate these options. Lot 34 is a group of covers marking Japan's surrender at the end of World War II. Lots 79 or 80 will provide you with a start on a modern postmark adventure. Make World War I come alive by purchasing Lot 293 or Lot 744. Lot 333 will give you the chance to emulate *Trevor Davis'* achievements with Australian Colonies destination mails.

From Victoria, we have several terrific opportunities, including military camps (Lots 461, 467 & 528); 19th century datestamps (Lot 468), Barred Numerals (Lot 514); and "relief" datestamps (Lots 522 & 529).

Something completely different? Try postal history of Nigeria: Lot 821!

Starting out doesn't have to be expensive either. How about Lot 87?: more than 100 advertising covers, and no reserve! Lot 156 offers 48 Australian 1930s-1960s commercial covers with an estimate of \$4 per cover. Hundreds of French postmarks for a few dollars each: Lot 688. What other 19th century articles can you expect to pick up for such low prices?

There are no limits to how many potential subjects are available to you. Take the time to read through this catalogue, to be mesmerised by the beautiful illustrations and, you too, could in time join the ranks of the world's leading postal historians.

3. IMPORTANT NOTE: This auction is on a MONDAY afternoon.

We decided that to take full advantage of running the auction in connection with the exhibition, we should hold the sale immediately after that event. If you are coming to the show, consider staying over for an extra day or two and visiting us in the beautiful Blue Dandenongs. On the Monday, **we have this sale at 1pm, followed at 6pm by Brian Peace's "New South Wales Pre-Stamp Postal History"**. (It's worth checking that catalogue as well in case something there grabs your attention.) Then **on Tuesday 28th at 4pm we are offering Peter Troy's sensational "British New Guinea & Papua"**.

In like vein, if you are contemplating coming to Melbourne for one or more of these three terrific sales, why not arrive a couple of days earlier and take in the stamp show at Melbourne Park Convention Centre: see our inside front cover for the opening dates and viewing times. We have booked a double stand - **#37-38** - to enable us to having viewing for all three auctions at the exhibition venue.

4. You might like to take note of our revamped page-footers scattered throughout the catalogue. They include promotional paragraphs for a number of **specialist philatelic societies that have a strong postal history emphasis**. I am a long-term member of all these groups - and numerous others - and strongly urge you to join and support those that cater to your field(s) of interest.

5. Finally, all of us at Prestige Philately appreciate your support and wish you success in our July auctions.



Why I Collect Postal History - by Gary Watson

For as long as I can remember, I've been fascinated by events on both a localized and global stage. Who did what to whom, and when? Why was this area preferred for development over another? How did Indians get to Fiji, or Jews to China? Who were the movers and shakers in all periods of history? Who built the Brooklyn Bridge, the Great Wall of China, and "Raheen?"

It's no surprise to anyone who knows me that my personal collecting interests are heavily influenced by my passion for history and biography. I **love** beautiful stamps but I would prefer to **own** an intriguing cover. For me, there is little excitement to be had from filling the spaces in a hingeless album, or ticking off all the numbers in a *Gibbons* catalogue. I prefer my stamps to be on their original envelopes: after all, this is what they were issued for. I want the whole story, not the frustration of a stamp displaced from its vehicle or, worse still, a stamp that never even got to fulfill its destiny! Of course, a valuable perfect stamp on an interesting cover? That's exciting!

I get great enjoyment from solving the puzzles that a cover can throw up. How did it travel, and by what route? Why did it get returned? Is that an official or private endorsement on the back? On and on. And then there's the subject of postage rates. Accursed and headache-inducing, they are also the very essence of postal history. Solve a tricky rates problem and it's as exhilarating as that perfect throw of a Frisbee (no, I'm not kidding, I've got young children).

And then there's the intrinsic beauty of the things. It's hard to find perfect stamps. Try finding perfect covers! Now there's a challenge worth taking up. Then try to find the perfect cover that is also a thrill to behold. And they do exist! I've been fortunate to offer many of them over the years and have even delighted in being able to add a few to my own collections.

Of course, perfection in postal history is not always about quality. If you collect crash mail, the last thing you want is pristine material. No! You want charred edges, stamps washed-off, and explanatory blame-somebody-else labels pinned-on by the post office. Mail into combat zones is hard to find. You **want** it to look like it's been lovingly folded into a soldier's breast-pocket. (One of my all-time favourite "covers" is a piece of cardboard used as a makeshift postcard from a digger at Gallipoli. It has a piece out of the middle. The writer calmly comments: "Excuse the hole. A piece of shrapnel just went through it!")

There are famous stamps about which great stories are told. But they are stories of ownership and outrageous value. With postal history, you can unearth \$10 covers that have great stories to tell, about their own adventures. I would like to **sell** the great stamp, but **keep** the fascinating cover.

I collect the postal history of Melbourne, partly because it's essentially my home town, and I have a strong emotional connection with the material. (As you may know, I was born in Ballarat but have lived around Melbourne for most of my life.) I collect postal history from Ceylon partly because I am entranced by the country and its people (not least my stunning wife, Lakshini). I collect aerogrammes from the Arabian Gulf "Sand Dune States", partly because that's an area that has had lousy press over the years as a result of the post office excesses of the 1960s.

I can be captivated by enthusiastic collectors talking about their stamps, but there's a limit, and it's often reached quickly! However, I can get lost in a collection of postal history for literally hours at a time. Aside from contrived material (which generally doesn't interest me), no two covers are the same. They all speak to me and I'm an eager listener.

There's always something to learn, a theory to be expounded or debunked. There's always something completely new turning up, usually not in what I collect (though I could tell you tales)...but that's irrelevant. It's like people: it matters not what country they're from, they're all interesting.

Why do I collect postal history? I could write a book...

Comments Regarding Condition of Postal History

If you are already part of the Postal History Fraternity, you will have a good understanding of the points to be made here. However, if your philatelic journey to date has been focused on stamps, especially if you have been fixated on centring and gum, then you could benefit from reading these notes.

Discerning collectors will always value perfection. However, **the postal historian who insists on acquiring only the perfect cover will doom himself to having either a very small collection, or an incoherent one.** By definition, items of postal history have passed through the mailing system where they have been exposed to careless, incompetent, even mischievous handling, all of which can result in damage ranging from minor insult to major injury. The cover that arrives at its destination un-battered has been fortunate indeed.

Even worse than the travails of the travel, are the problems that can afflict a cover once it has arrived at its destination. It could be unceremoniously ripped open, used as a drink coaster, tossed into a wastepaper basket, stored in a dank attic as vermin-fodder, exposed to excessive sunlight or humidity etc. And, of course, the stamps could be torn-off.

Considering all these real-life events it is perhaps surprising that so many covers have actually survived. To refuse, then, to acquire an item because of a minor blemish, a small tear, or a damaged flap is like denying shelter to a road accident victim because he has a bloodied knee!

I have great respect for collectors who insist on perfection: they have the pick of the best material and their collections are a joy to behold. But, back in the real world, the rest of us are exposed to doggy corners, indistinct postmarks, and stamps with pulled perfs, etc. I am a firm believer in buying the best you can afford but often the "best" is not a factor of price, only of availability. And that best available is often not perfect.

One of the key elements of "The Prestige Difference" is that we **share with you the gradings we assign to material:** (for the details see page 5.) Flip through this catalogue and you will see many items we think are good enough to stand on their own in a Prestige catalogue with gradings of "B" (minor faults) or "C" (significant faults). Frankly, **"B"-grade covers or postmarks will be acceptable to the vast majority of collectors, and "C"-grade covers are eminently collectable.**

As a passionate postal historian, I believe it is a mistake to focus on the condition of the material. Far more important is the story each item has to tell. If it has a compelling story, then I can easily turn a blind eye to whatever defects, real or imagined, might be present. (Of course, price is an important factor. I would never persuade you to pay top dollar for rubbish. So you are not misled, **our aim is for our estimates to be consistent with the gradings we have applied.**)

We often encourage bids by stating "When will you see another one?" Given the individual nature of postal history items, that statement becomes especially relevant. Collecting covers is a very different matter from buying stamps. It certainly isn't for everyone. But if you are into history, or have an enquiring mind, and don't need a *Gibbons* catalogue to tell you what to collect, I can assure you that the odd blemish here and there will not detract from your enjoyment of your hobby.

Having said all that, we do stand behind our grading system. **If you feel we have over-graded an item, or that there are undisclosed material problems, then we expect you to return it, for full refund.** That's another aspect of "The Prestige Difference". (You might like to know that our returns for reasons of condition amount to less than 0.1% of all lots offered.)