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THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING COLOUR

By Warwick Paterson

Reprinted from "Stamp Collecting Weekly"

Our old friend, Hercule Poirot, would probably not have experienced too much difficulty in ascertaining the series of events and accidents of omission which led to a sheet of postage stamps being sold over the Post Office counter minus one or more of the component colours of the design. Philately has its share of knowledgeable who have already applied their minds to this task and most of the likely causes are well documented.

Not so well researched, however, are the undoubtedly strange motives for collecting such varieties; "Ah", you say, "you might as well ask why people collect stamps". But I'm not convinced. Obviously, people collect stamps for a hundred different and entirely personal reasons, as often as not only guessed at by themselves.

It occurs to me, however, that the collecting of "errors" - and missing colours are "errors" of the first magnitude - is a feature of stamp collecting which, although certainly not new, has lately attained much greater importance than it ever had before. There always were some errors, of course. In the New Zealand field of collecting one immediately thinks of the 6d. Kiwi red of 1900 with its spectacular double print (none of your blurred or "chatter" prints this one, but a full-blooded, doubly-printed sheet) and the "offsets on back" of the same pictorial series.

Most varieties in the early New Zealand issues - and, in fact, right up to the photogravure era - were not errors at all. Sheets re-perforated to correct misplaced or absent rows of perforations, short-lived provisional papers, short-lived variations in perforation gauge or type, re-entries, short-lived shades, experimental perforations, - *these were all the result of deliberate action on the part of the printer to produce a better job or to make do with the materials available.*

Inverted watermarks and plate flaws could be described as relatively-often seen "errors" in early stamps, but by no means "spectacular" for the most part. Varieties had a "legitimate" quality about them which helps to explain the suspicion of many traditional collectors towards the modern "errors". However, those early "legitimate" varieties often attained high prices by the same route - sheer scarcity. The early "errors" were also sought after because of their bizarre quality and, in the main, have assumed a classical aura. ➡

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"MISSING COLOURS" (CONT.)

The post-war period has seen the proliferation of modern high-speed printing of stamps by methods based on the photographic process. The fact that so much multicolour printing has resulted has had a far reaching effect on attitudes to variety collecting. In multicolour printing the same sheet of paper may pass under as many as twelve printing cylinders. Logically, the odds in favour of some major error occurring have increased not merely by the number of colours printed but by the increase in speed and by the increase in quantities printed as well - try checking every detail of 500 printed sheets in a pile.

So the "error" has assumed a greater importance relative to flaws and "legitimate" varieties which have declined in number through standardisation of plate manufacture and materials used. There just are not the variations today: the mark of the craftsman, if you will, has gone and the skilled human quality of variation and self-regulation in his work has all but disappeared in our technological age.

The missing colour, however, has brought a spectacular charm, and even a humorous aspect, to variety collecting. My experience suggests that the most popular missing colours are not necessarily the rarest ones. Top of the list I would put the error where some vital inscription - the name of the country or the value - is missing, making the variety different in some essential way but still recognisably the same stamp.

Second in popularity comes a stamp where a background colour is omitted, the stamp design remaining basically intact in all respects but hauntingly different in that intermediate tones and even basic colours are altered subtly by the absence of that component colour. Sometimes an entire area of background will be absent, as with the 1970 4c. Puriri Moth, missing blue (S.G.919) - in my opinion a better looking stamp without the blue: (unfortunately, only one sheet was found). Last in popularity come colour omissions which are hard to detect.

Overall rarity still plays a leading role, of course. Where a handful of copies are known - for instance the 1959 "missing Red Cross" (catalogued by C.P. at \$800) - the sky's the limit. Where a sheet exists (but no more) you have a fine variety (up to 75?), and where a number of sheets have slipped through the printer's net the collector who can read the signs should "play it by ear". Except in the latter case, the value of a missing colour variety will be decided chiefly by the degree of its spectacular impact. Ours is a wholly visual hobby.

TRAP FOR YOUNG PLAYERS

I reproduce a salutary item from the March 1976 issue of "Captain Cook" official journal of the Christchurch Philatelic Society.

"Copies of the 3c Rose stamp have been reported in imperforate condition. We are given to understand that these stamps and similar varieties of the 4c, 5c and 6c values are from a supply of sheets removed from the premises of Harrison and Son Ltd., London. They were later offered for sale. We are informed that an ex-employee of the printing firm has been arrested in connection with the matter."

Editor's Note: Applying one of our cardinal New Variety rules to this variety we refused to buy some of these stamps when offered to us for the simple reason that they could not have been sold legitimately over the Post Office counter (think about it!). To the many collectors who have approached us since seeking advice we have given this opinion and left them to make their own decision. Every new variety purchased from C.P. has this type of criteria applied to it and is guaranteed as, in our opinion, genuine; collectors who like to buy with confidence could ponder this.

7c Leather Jacket Mr. F. W. H. Hewit of England has shown our English Branch a used copy of P9a with inverted watermark. This will be a new listing in the C.P. Catalogue

1893 ADVERTISEMENTS ON SECOND SIDEFACES

In the "good old days" these "Adson" stamps used to be quite common. No longer! It is seldom we can offer as wide a range as below. Quantities are limited and early ordering advisable. All stamps are used and all perf 10 unless otherwise stated.

1d Sidefaces with Advert

- 9(a) First Setting....a delightful vertical pair - both "Beechams".....\$5.00
 (b) As above "Cadbury Bros." some short perfs at foot.....\$2.00
 (c) 2nd or 3rd Setting, adverts in bright red - 2 different.....\$3.00
 (d) As above, six fine examples with mauve ads. Includes a superb horizontal pair fine used and three singles with fiscal (or 'm/s?) cancellations. Also one "Cadbury" clipped perfs at top.....\$6.00
 (e) As above, a lovely vertical pair with "TAIPA 30/4/94" m/s cancellation and purple 3rd setting adverts.....\$10.00
 (f) Thirteen ads. in red-brown, a splendid lot, including a strip of three, three pairs and four singles.....\$16.00
 (g) 1d, with blue ads: this lot includes a vertical pair, fine, and a "Cadbury" single with small thin.....\$9.00
 (h) 1d, the very scarce green advert - one only.....\$10.00

2d Sidefaces with Adverts

- 9(j) With chocolate brown adverts, six (2nd or 3rd setting) including a fine pair (with "A99" postmark) and a "Cadbury" with one straight side.....\$20.00
 (k) 1st Setting; a fine "Bonningtons" in bright red - some short perfs at top right.....\$2.00
 (l) A particularly attractive lot of 14, all 2nd or 3rd setting, all red-brown ads. One pair is included.....\$20.00
 (m) A small lot of five, all 2nd or 3rd setting; adverts in mauve....\$6.00
 (n) An attractive lot of the scarce green adverts, eight in all, incl. a pair clipped at foot and a deep green "Bonningtons" with "Port Awanui" postmark (1878 to 1936).....\$35.00
 (o) The very scarce 2d with perf 12x11½, third setting "Poneke".....\$7.00
 (p) Higher Values with ads 2½d (2), 3d (2) (one has blue pencil line), 5d (1) 6d (2) (one has a straight side), 8d (1) (crease). The set of ten.....\$35.00
 (q) 8d value only, 2nd or 3rd setting, scarce.....\$15.00

FULL FACES - SOME MORE RICHARDSON PRINTS

- 391 (a) SG9 2d Pale Blue (thick) Superb! Four margins, light mark. Fine colour.....\$35.00
 (b) SG9 Ditto Marginal copy. Two huge margins, good colour. Light "18" in bars obliterator (usually associated with the 1/- "bisects" (Dunedin).....\$25.00
 (c) SG9 Ditto Margins close-cut at bottom. Quite good appearance.\$4.00
 (d) SG9 Ditto Four margined, lightly marked copy of superior appearance. Minor thin at top. Colour good and true and most unusually brilliant.....\$7.50
 (e) SG9 Margins close cut and thinned but appearance good.....\$5.00
 (f) SG9 Copy with major thins but four margins and appearance ridiculously good.....\$2.50
 (g) SG9 Copy with terrible thins but quite acceptable appearance..\$1.00
 392 (a) SG10 2d Blue Attractive strip of three. Margins present (if close) three sides, two corner of one stamp cut into. Marking not bad if a little untidy. A superb chance to include an impressive and scarce multiple.....\$40.00
 (b) SG10 Ditto Superb copy with four margins. Light to non-existent marking. Delightful print. Red mark of London receiving post office intrudes but this is Richardson at his skilful best.....\$30.00
 (c) SG10 Another nice one. Corner crease of minor dimensions is its only fault.....\$20.00
 (d) SG10 Four margins - intact if heavy mark - given away.....\$15.00
 (e) SG10 Superb copy - probably used but could almost be unused. Its only faults - thinning and no margins but it looks good...\$5.00

SOME CHOICE PICKINGS

Sorry to have to say it but the type of material we have listed below is nigh UNOBTAINABLE today. The evidence is quite unmistakable and we make no apology for stressing it. If you pass up your chance to buy this type of material now you may find that you have missed your last chance. This is our advice - remember who gave it to you and where you read it.

1906 Christchurch Exhibition

- 404 (a) S1a ½d Green - Mint - Block of four (top left selvedge serial no.) One stamp somewhat creased - but a magnificent piece.....\$30.00
 (b) S1a Ditto A superb mint single.....\$10.00
 (c) S1a Ditto Copy with minor stains.....\$2.00
- 405 (a) S2a 1d Vermilion - Mint - Glorious mint block of four - perfection.....\$40.00
 (b) S2a Ditto Perfect mint single.....\$9.00
 (c) S2a Ditto Copy with slight crease or stain.....\$2.00
 (d) S2a Ditto Superb used with Exhibition postmark.....\$7.50
 (If requested while stocks last) or not so fine.....\$1.50
- 406 (a) S3a 3d Brown and Blue - Mint - In gorgeous block of four - almost unrepeatable.....\$150.00
 (b) S3a Ditto - superb mint single.....\$35.00
 (c) S3a Ditto - Copy mint with minor stain or creasing.....\$15.00
 not-so-fine.....\$4.00
- 407 (a) S4a 6d Pink and Green A not-so-fine copy - unused.....\$25.00

Auckland Exhibition

- 408 (a) S5a ½d. Green Superb mint single.....\$8.00
 Copy with minor stain.....\$4.00
 Not-so-fine copy.....\$1.25
 (b) S5a Ditto - used - "Good" used.....\$5.00
 Not-so-fine.....\$1.25
- 409 (a) S6a 1d Rose-Carmine - mint in superb block of four.....\$30.00
 (b) S6a Ditto Lovely mint single.....\$7.00
 Copy with minor stain.....\$4.00
 Not-so-fine copy.....\$1.00
 (c) S6a Ditto "Good" used.....\$3.50
 Not-so-fine.....\$1.00
- 410 (a) S7a 3d Chestnut - Mint in superb block of four RARE!.....\$275.00
 (b) S7a Ditto "Good" used.....\$50.00
- 411 (a) S8a 6d Carmine Mint - a block of four (one stamp has a tear but appearance superb.....\$350.00
 (stamps now catalogued at \$115 each)
 (b) S8a Ditto Lovely (perfect!) mint single.....\$115.00

Airmail Issues

- 1931 Issue
- 412 (a) V1a 3d Chocolate Superb in mint block of four.....\$25.00
 (b) V1a Ditto in fine mint single.....\$6.00
 (c) V1a Ditto in perfect used - lovely postmark.....\$6.00
- 413 (a) V2a 4d Purple in perfect mint block of four.....\$25.00
 (b) V2a Ditto in superb mint single.....\$6.00
 (c) V2a Ditto in fine used.....\$6.00
- 414 (a) V3a 7d Brown-Orange in superb used copy.....\$6.00
- 415 (a) V4a 5d Surcharge Superb in mint block of four.....\$8.00
 (b) Fine mint single.....\$2.00
 (c) Superb used.....\$1.50