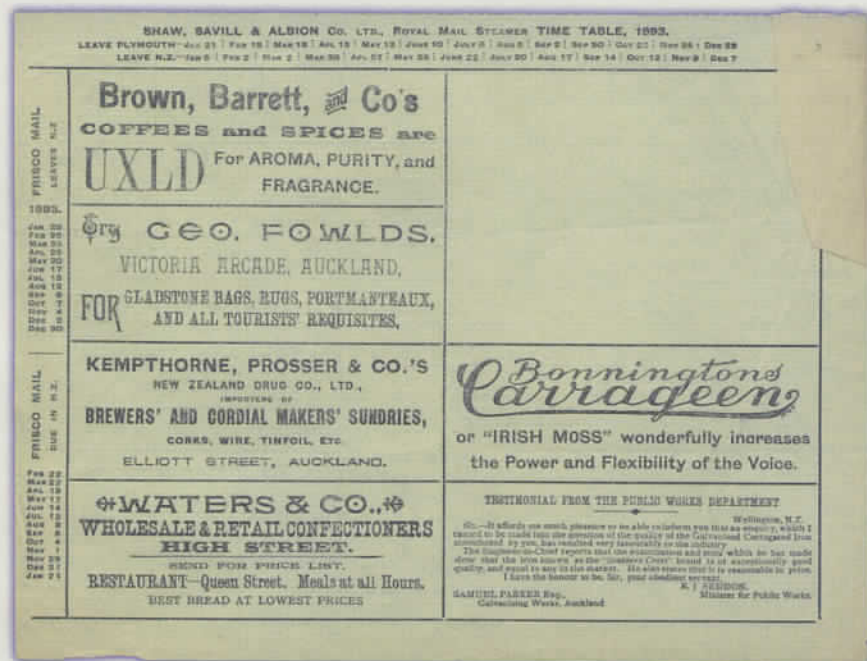


New Zealand Advertisement Stamps: Commercial Failure, Philatelists' Delight

Robin Gwynn

Continuing the series contributed by members of the New Zealand Society of Great Britain, Dr Robin Gwynn, FRPSL, FRPSNZ, explores the possibilities presented by these fascinating stamps



Advertisements on the back of an 1893 telegraph form (reduced)

We at the dawn of the twenty-first century know only too well the invasive nature of advertising, which confronts us in the street, bombards us in our magazines and disrupts our television viewing. For late Victorian New Zealanders, the complaint was more specific: advertisements which they had to lick, on the back of their stamps.

In the 1880s and early 1890s New Zealand was in the grip of an economic depression. Perhaps that was why, on 11 November 1891, the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department embarked on an unusual new venture. In any event, its notice appeared the following day in the *New Zealand Gazette*: 'Sealed tenders will be received until noon of Saturday, the 19th December, 1891, for the exclusive right of advertising on the back of postage-stamps and revenue-stamps and telegram-forms'.

Specifications for the tenders were displayed at ten major post offices in the North Island, 13 in the South Island, and at the Government Printing Office in Wellington. Tenders had to be accompanied by a cheque for £150. The conditions for the contract stipulated that all nine current postage stamps from 1d. to 1s. would receive advertisements; only the ½d. newspaper stamp, which was of a smaller size, was excluded.

For the purpose of distributing the stamps the Colony was to be divided into

four districts, so that local advertisements could appear which were relevant to one particular area. The contractors had to obtain the advertisements and provide electrotypes from which they would be printed, but the printing was to be carried out at the Government Printing Office.

The successful tender, accepted in July 1892, was a conjoint effort by Henry Truebridge, William Miller and George Johnston Reich. The contract payment was £800 p.a., and the contract was for a period of three years. However, this ingenious means of making money for the government

proved a flop, although not before it had provided a great deal of interest and many fascinating puzzles for philatelists.

The first stamps to appear with advertisements on the back were of the 1d. value, in February 1893. The earliest clearly dated copies seen by the present writer are postmarked 15 and 17 February 1893, at Wellington and Wanganui, respectively, so it seems that the southern part of the North Island was first to receive stamps with advertisements; if anyone can produce anything earlier, I would be most interested to hear of it. The earliest South Island cancel I have recorded is 21 February, at Blenheim.

'Why should the Government compel us to eat dirt?'

Complaints appeared almost immediately after the stamps went on sale. They were delightfully expressed in a leader in the Napier-based *Hawke's Bay Herald*, on 3 March, which laid into the authors 'of the dirty trick which is now being played upon an inoffensive and helpless public in the shape of stamps, upon the back of which is a mixture of dextrine and printing ink'. Previously, licking the gum on the back of stamps to affix them 'though possibly undignified if done in front of a mirror—at least—did not threaten the health'. But now, 'All this is altered—users of stamps have to lick these advertisements (to make them remember them, possibly), and the result is a sense of nastiness. In addition, the ink on the back of the stamps renders them less adhesive. The printing ink is put on before the gum, and as the ink is greasy, when the gum is spread on the sheet of stamps, it does not attach itself to the ink. The stamps are therefore only partially adhesive. We have been shown some in which the advertisement on the back is of the nature of a dark ground with "lights" in it, and the dark ground is ink. None of

Four of the New Zealand stamps to receive advertisements



As new collectors in the field start to look at the advertisements, the first thing likely to strike them is the messages themselves, so evocative of the life of a raw and developing colony ...

these stamps will adhere unless gummed on with a brush. But apart from that, the whole miserable business is filthy. The public are not allowed a choice of buying plain or printed stamps—Why should the Government compel us to literally eat dirt?

Later, the use of blue and green inks was the cause of further complaints, and the whole venture remained clearly unpopular. On 29 September 1893, just seven and a half months after the first stamps had gone on sale, the contractors served notice that they wished to terminate the contract, and the Postmaster General was only too pleased to give his assent.

Colours and settings

As new collectors in the field start to look at the advertisements, the first thing likely to strike them is the messages themselves, so evocative of the life of a raw and developing colony: 'ASK FOR PATENT ODOURLESS WATERPROOFS', 'SAL-SALINE THE GREAT FOOD Preservative', 'HAVE MERCY ON those clothes. HOW? USE Sunlight SOAP', 'S. MYERS & CO. DENTISTS, CHRISTCHURCH. NITROUS OXIDE GAS, PAINLESS EXTRACTION'.

Then they will note the range of colours in which the advertisements were printed: shades of red and pink, shades of violet and purple and mauve, shades of brown, black, blue, green and sepia.

Next, they will realise that some advertisements appear upside down in relation to the design of the stamp, while most are upright. This introduces the fact that although the advertisement stamps were printed over a comparatively short period, they appeared in three settings.

The first setting was confined to the 1d. and 2d., the most frequently-used values

and therefore the earliest to appear, the 1d. in February and the 2d. in April 1893. This setting is characterised by two features. The advertisements are inverted in relation to the stamp design, and where they are sideways they read downwards from the top of the stamp. And they include a number of stamps with 'blocked' advertisements, with a heavy mass of ink—these are the stamps particularly criticised by the writer in the *Hawke's Bay Herald*. First setting advertisements are found only in shades of red and brown.

The second setting has the advertisements upright in relation to the stamp design or (if sideways) reading upwards to the top of the stamp. The first second setting stamp, the 2d., appeared in April 1893, just days after the earliest first setting 2d. Most of the 'blocked' advertisements which in the first setting had appeared in white lettering on a coloured background were now presented in coloured lettering on a white background, using less ink in an effort to quiet the volume of criticism. The second setting comes in a wide range of colours, including red, purple and brown, and was used on all values except the 5d. and 8d. Any stamps with advertisements in blue (1d. only), green (1d., 2d., 2½d.), sepia (3d. only) or black (1s. only) must be from the second setting.

The third setting is similar to the second, except that the 20 electrotypes 'THIS SPACE IS RESERVED FOR CADBURY BROS.' were replaced by advertisements for Poneke beef extract (6), potted meats (6) and table jelly (8). This means that any single stamps or multiples including either Cadbury or Poneke advertisements are particularly useful in determining the setting. Others can usually be sorted by

colour. Third setting stamps appeared starting in August 1893, with advertisements in shades of lilac and mauve, red, and red-brown and purple-brown. All values can be found with the third setting. Any 5d. and 8d. stamps with advertisements can only be third setting, and these were also the latest values to be released for sale in post offices, the 5d. in late 1894 and the 8d. not until the middle of 1895.

Plating the advertisements

The 'Second Sideface' stamps on which the advertisements were printed were produced in sheets of 240 divided into four panes of 60. 28 of the advertisements were found only once in the sheet; 47 appeared twice; seven, three times; and four, four times. Macbean Stewart's asthma and S Myers dentists advertisements appeared six times in the sheet, and the Poneke advertisements six or eight times, as indicated above. The advertisements for Kaitangata Coal, Patent Odourless Waterproofs, and Lattey Livermore teas turned up 12 times, and that for the contractors for the venture Truebridge, Miller and Reich, 13 times. This was the combination of the total of 95 different advertisements that made up the 240 stamps of the third setting. For the first and second settings, there were no Poneke but 20 Cadbury advertisements.

The advertisement stamps held little interest for collectors in the first generation after their appearance, and it was only in the 1920s that serious philatelic research on them started. Since then, many collectors have found pleasure in reconstructing panes or whole sheets. It is appropriate that the present article should appear in *Gibbons Stamp Monthly*, because it was an article by Morris Watt in *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal* for 1925 that

Blocks showing, from left to right, first, second and third settings



The origins of the idea

Where had the idea for the advertisement stamps come from? New Zealand often took its lead from Great Britain, to which it exported so much of its produce. The ½d. newspaper stamp of 1873, for example, followed hot on the heels of the British equivalent which had been introduced in 1870. The advertisements may well also have had British ancestry.

In 1867 the firm of Perkins Bacon & Co had been authorised to print business firms' names under the gum on the backs of British stamps, although only four firms had this done. These, though, were protective underprints, rather than being intended for advertisement purposes. Some stamps printed by De La Rue & Co also received protective underprints from 1879. The use of such protective underprints ceased in 1882, and thereafter firms' initials were perforated through the stamps ('perforins') when a security measure was required.

More likely candidates as the inspiration for the New Zealand venture are the Pears' Soap advertisements that were printed on the back of British Queen Victoria stamps in the 1880s. These were fully intended to be for advertising purposes. However, these advertisements were not officially authorised, and the advertisement was printed on top of the gum.

Another possibility is that the idea was born in Australia. The postal authorities in Victoria conducted some trials in 1888 with advertisements in red on the 2d. value, but these were never issued.

Alternatively, of course, the whole concept may have been a native New Zealand inspiration. What is quite certain is that the New Zealand authorities developed the idea and the commercial possibilities to a stage never conceived of in either Britain or Australia.

Possible British inspirations for the New Zealand advertising venture



raised the question of the different settings and formed the basis for subsequent work.

The unchallenged master of the subject was the late Dr Ken McNaught, QSO, RDP, whose death in 1999 was a grievous loss to New Zealand philately. Most specialists would be happy to complete one or two reconstructions of the sheets of 240, probably one of the second and one of the third setting. In an amazing philatelic *tour de force*, he completed no fewer than 20 complete reconstructions: the 1d. and 2d. first settings (difficult!); the 1d. second and third settings entirely in pairs or multiples to provide plating evidence; the 1d. second setting in red/red-brown, green, lilac/violet dated before August 1893, and (amazingly) blue, a distinctly scarce colour; the 2d. second setting in sepia-brown, green and red/red-brown; the 1d. third setting in rose (dated after August 1893), a shade he called yellow-brown, purple/brown-purple, pink, and late prints in purple-red; the 2d. third setting in rose, yellow-brown, purple/violet; and the 4d. in sepia-brown. It is an achievement unlikely ever to be matched. He must have studied well over 100,000 stamps in putting the reconstructions together.

The challenge of collecting reconstructions becomes much greater if (like Ken) one tries not only to find the right advertisements but, when more than one appears in the sheet, to locate them in their correct position. Consider, for example, the Truebridge, Miller and Reich advertisements that turn up 13 times. How can one ascertain their proper position? Sometimes the advertisement electrotypes show distinctive characteristics. Sometimes there are flaws on the stamps themselves. Line watermarks or evidence of 'deep edging' indicate marginal copies. If all else fails, one can seek pairs or multiples.

Experiments and varieties

One early experiment was a trial printing made on gummed sheets. This proved unsatisfactory because the ink tended to come away with the gum when the stamp gum was moistened. No proven examples from this trial are known, though it is common enough to come across stamps with advertisements that show a tendency for the ink to wash off on oversoaking.

We have seen that, as a response to the criticisms that had been levelled, most of the first setting 'blocked' advertisements were replaced by others which used much less ink. Shortly after the second setting was introduced, other experiments were attempted. One was the introduction of blue ink for the 1d. value; the earliest example of a blue advertisement I have seen is postmarked 4 May.

Examples of flaws on advertisement electrotypes and on stamps themselves



Examples of misplacement showing portions of two or four advertisements



Another was the deliberate use of the wrong side of the paper, to see if the advertisements would be better if they were printed on the side intended for the impression of the stamp itself, with the stamp being on the side which would normally have been gummed. The 1d. and 2½d. appeared in this way in May and June 1893 respectively, and can readily be recognised because the watermark is reversed in this trial printing. Predictably, the experiment was not a success and was soon abandoned. The advertisements showed up well, but at the expense of the quality of the printing of the stamps themselves, the ink of which tended to rub off.

With any New Zealand issue of the period one is likely to come across the occasional inverted watermark or double perforation, and this is no exception. Of greater interest are varieties specifically related to the advertisements. Misplaced advertisements can be found, and may be useful in attributing an individual stamp to a particular position in the sheet. So-called 'doubled advertisements' are usually only kiss prints, but occasionally genuinely doubled examples are seen—these are rare.

'Sleeping' rarities

The stamps with advertisements on the back were, with few exceptions, perforated 10 all round. Occasionally one meets examples with compound perforations, where perf 12½ was used in conjunction with perf 10; or mixed perforations, when perf 10 stamps with defective perforations were officially patched by the Post Office and reperfected 12½. All of these are scarce, some are rarities.

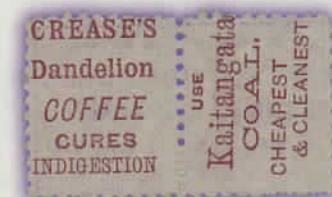
I have personally made, or tried to make, a special study of a group of stamps that appeared, from April and May 1893 onwards, perforated not 10 but 12½. Unlike the compound and mixed perf varieties, these were a normal, regular issue. When I first started looking for them, back in the 1960s, it was because they were listed in catalogues and I wanted a complete simplified set mint and used. The perf 12½ stamps were not highly priced, and with the confidence of youth I didn't think it would be a huge task. How wrong I was!—and how wrong the catalogues still are!

Start looking for advertisement stamps perf 12½. The first value you will come across will probably be the 1s., since perhaps a quarter or a third of the printing of this value with mauve or purple advertisements was issued with this perforation. Or you may find the 1d. or 2d., although even they are under-catalogued in terms of their scarcity. But the 2½d., 3d., 4d., 5d. and 6d., while all exist, are very difficult stamps indeed. None of them had been even noted when the first volume of *The Postage Stamps of New Zealand* appeared, 45 years after the advertisement stamps had been issued. I doubt that as many as 20 copies have survived and are now known of any of these values, and of some, fewer than 10 would be more probable. For example, after 40 years searching I have located four 5d., and Ken McNaught two more; all six stamps have Auckland

The stamp in question is catalogued £60 mint, £30 used. How many stamps of which only one sheet may exist have a catalogue value that low?



Examples of the different colours used;
black, blue, green, red, brown,
lilac/mauve and red-brown



registered cancels around October 1894, all are identically centred, and it looks very likely that just one sheet may have been issued.

The stamp in question is SG 200b, catalogued £60 mint, £30 used, and in the New Zealand specialised *Campbell Paterson* catalogue (DA7a) it is \$140 mint, \$75 used. How many stamps of which only one sheet may exist have a catalogue value that low? As a mint stamp, it is catalogued less than the perf 10 normal 5d. advertisement stamp by Gibbons, and the same price by CP; yet neither Ken nor I have ever seen a copy. CP rub salt into the wound by insisting their price is for unhinged mint! I would be only too delighted to find a copy either hinged or unused with no gum, as I continue to struggle to complete the simplified set on which I started so long ago. Similar comments could be made for most of the other perf 12x1½ stamps with advertisements.

Disgruntled exhibitors sometimes complain that 'rarity' and 'value' are the same thing, and that one would only need to be a good valuer to assess 'rarity'. Obviously, value and rarity are often linked, and one would be unwise to attempt a serious study of (say) the imperforate issues of Ceylon or Mauritius without a strong bank balance. But the perf 12x1½ advertisement stamps are a good example of why this is not always the case. As an international judge, if I was faced by a potential gold medal exhibit of the Second Sidefaces of New Zealand, one of the first things I would look for would be to see whether the collector had managed to put together at least a minimal representation of these unconsidered stamps which are, by any standard, 'sleeping rarities'.

Of particular interest are a small handful of perf 12x1½ stamps that have been found with inverted advertisements and inverted watermarks. It appears that these rarities result from an experiment whereby the advertisements were printed first, before the stamp designs themselves, so that the advertisement is correctly aligned with the watermark. It follows that these are really cases of the stamp itself, not the advertisement, being printed inverted. How can you tell them, you may well ask, since first setting stamps had inverted

advertisements? Well, there is no problem with values above 2d., since none ever appeared with first setting advertisements; otherwise ink colour, and the odd proving copy with an advertisement that can only come from one particular setting, tell the story.

A new found appeal

These 1893 stamps are an endless source of philatelic challenge and delight. Recent developments in the philatelic world, especially the refinement of thematic collecting and now the emergence of new 'Social' and 'Open' classes in exhibitions, suggest that there may be an increasing focus on the advertisement stamps in the future. Consider for instance these associations with the printed advertisements:

- Chemistry - 'Chemical Apparatus Geo. W. Wilton, Chemist'
 - Clothes - 'Go or send to Strange & Co. for Dress and Silks'
 - 'Dodgshun's are well up to date in Tweeds'
 - Dogs - 'Sunlight Soap is unequalled for Hounds'
 - Medicine - 'Beecham's Pills Worth a Guinea a Box'
 - 'For Complaints of Throats and Lungs, use Bonnington's Irish Moss'
 - Mining - 'Gold Miners use only Sunlight Soap' (and similar for Silver miners)
 - Women - 'Beecham's Pills for Female Complaints'
 - 'Ladies use Sunlight Soap for Washing the Hair'
- Truly, this is an issue with something in it to appeal to everyone.

Note on author: Dr Robin Gwynn, FRPSL, FRPSNZ, is a former President of the Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand and Vice-President of the FIP Traditional Bureau, and present chairman of the RPSNZ Expert Committee. His writings include *Collecting New Zealand Stamps* (Heinemann Reed, 1988). He is currently co-authoring with Norman Hoggarth, *Maritime Disaster Mail*, to be published later this year by the Rossiter Trust.

This article is one of a series written specially for GSM by members of the New Zealand Society of Great Britain in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Society this year.

The Society caters for all levels of collecting and holds a main meeting in London every other month as well as regional meetings in Scotland, the North and the Midlands. Member benefits include a circulating packet, annual auction, competitions and a comprehensive library, not to mention the Society's award-winning bi-monthly journal, *The Kiwi*.

For further information please contact the Honorary Secretary, Keith C Collins, 13 Briton Crescent, Sanderstead, Surrey, CR2 0JN; telephone 0208 657 4566 or through the Society's website: www.cs.stir.ac.uk/~rgc/nzsgb/