

Christmas reading We asked four of our contributors to

Glenn Morgan When it was suggested that I write about a philatelic work available through a public library it set me thinking that, unfortunately, the stamp collecting section is generally lacking in content.

However, *The Stamp Atlas*, by Stuart Rossiter and John Flower (MacDonald, 1986) should be available through the Inter-Library Loan Scheme – ask locally. It is also available for consultation at the library of the National Philatelic Society Library, 107 Charterhouse Street, London EC1, where the writer is librarian.

Incidentally, do consider regularly borrowing books on our hobby from your local library, for the more frequently that stamp collecting publications are taken out on loan, the more likely it is that the librarian will add other newly published works to holdings for the benefit of all.

An atlas is an essential ‘tool’ for any philatelist, so when written by postal historians who were a *Blue Guides* editor and a cartographer respectively, you know that it comes with a fine pedigree.

The book contains 144 maps, over 750 illustrations and a comprehensive index. The pictorial elements are held together by a text that records boundary changes, postal routes, postmarks, currencies, date of issue of first stamp and much more besides. This information is all broken down by continent and country in a logical sequence.

In the introduction, W Raife Wellsted claims that it is ‘almost impossible to assemble a collection of stamps without some knowledge of the political history of a country’, and for the postal historian ‘... a knowledge of geographical changes and history is an essential part of his study’. I agree totally and believe that there is a much deeper fascination and pleasure to be derived from our hobby when it includes research.

This book brings together otherwise scattered information and increases our knowledge of countries and the postal service therein. The images chosen add much to the pleasure of the reader and certainly inspired me to delve deeper into the workings of communication by letter, especially the boxes that they are posted in.



Glenn Morgan



Margaret Morris

The borders between nations and country names are forever evolving and a supplement to this book recording these changes would be of great value.

All postal history covers and stamps have a story to tell and *The Stamp Atlas* enables us to put our philatelic treasures into an historical context and to gain a greater understanding of what we possess. I have referred to the book many times when writing-up my own collections and exhibits and commend it to all readers ●

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Margaret Morris Sometimes a book is special not just for its content but also because of the circumstances of its acquisition, and the book I have chosen falls into this category.

Last year I discovered that a fellow member of the Captain Cook Study Unit would be visiting Scotland with his family just around Christmas. I felt sad that they would be spending Christmas away from their home, so I invited them to come to mine for Christmas Day.

Norman Wansbrough, his wife Toni and their student son and daughter, were from New Zealand and it was so interesting to hear about their life and travels. Keith had actually been in Scotland for some months studying Computing Science at Glasgow University and Heather was on her way to Germany to study there. Of course there was a lot of chat about philatelic matters in general and our hero Captain Cook in particular.

Afterwards, Norman sent me a copy of a delightful book, *Another Way of Looking – New Zea-*

recommend a good philatelic read for the holiday season



James Mackay



James Negus

land's *Birds on Stamps*, by Margaret Forde (David Bateman, 1989) and I feel sure that this would appeal to any collector who is thinking of starting a collection on the popular Bird theme. As any member of the Bird Stamp Society will tell you, this is a very wide theme and so there could be a case for limiting it in some way and this book could provide an example of such limitation.

The author is described on the dust jacket as 'a bit of a biologist with particular emphasis on birds, and a hobby of collecting stamps'. The result is an attractive book which is simply written and easy to find your way around. There is a glossary of terms used in ornithology and philately, a list of references and an index of species and stamp-issuing countries. It is well illustrated, although only the endpapers are in colour.

The book does not claim to be a complete catalogue nor a definitive bird guide, for that you would need a more advanced reference book. However, it is a really nice book for anyone starting a bird collection and one that anybody would enjoy dipping into. It could also provide useful background information for a traditional collector of the stamps of New Zealand. After all, it makes any collection more interesting when you know a bit about the stamp designs.

Although not a collector of the bird theme, I have very much enjoyed my little excursions through this book and hope that other collectors would also find pleasure in it. I commend the title to thematic collectors – for what else is our branch of philately but 'another way of looking'? ●

James Mackay Although *Scotland in Stamps*, by C W Hill (Impulse Books, Aberdeen 1972) was published more than a quarter of a century ago, it is timely with devolution imminent and distinctive Scottish stamps scheduled for 1999. A college lecturer in the Midlands, Hill retired to Banffshire where he continued to write books and articles on stamps, coins and other collectables, notably a regular philatelic column in *The Observer*.

His book arose out of a request at a public library in northeast Scotland for a book about Scottish stamps and postal history. After a prolonged search, however, the librarian confessed that there was no such book. 'The omission was all the more remarkable,' said Hill, 'because there is so much to be said on the subject'.

In the space of about 150 pages he set out to rectify this omission. Successive chapters deal with the establishment of the General Post in the 1690s and subsequent developments, and there is an entertainingly racy account of the exploits of Peter Williamson whose Edinburgh Penny Post lasted 20 years before it was taken over by the Post Office. The part played by Scots in the postal reforms of 1839-40 is well told, with due emphasis on the work of Robert Wallace, MP for Greenock, and a much more sober assessment of the contribution made by James Chalmers than most Scots could have written.

But the core of the book deals with Scotland's own stamps, beginning with the regional stamps, first mooted in 1956 and actually inaugurated two years later, and continuing with those British stamps that celebrated or commemorated aspects of Scotland. The weakest chapter is 'The Postmark on a Letter', over half taken up with an abridged list of the post office numbers (1844 system); space that might profitably have dealt with many other aspects of postmarks.

Later chapters summarised the postal services by rail, sea and air, with a lightning romp through Cinderella material up to the strike posts of 1971. An awful lot has happened since then – the prolific series of Scottish aerogrammes since 1974, the complexities of the Machin regionals, the

positive spate of 'local carriage labels' and the wealth of stamps of the world with a Scottish theme. A supplementary volume might be twice as big! As an introduction to Scottish philately this book is still required reading ●

James Negus With a welcome Christmas break in prospect, I suggest three titles. The first to delight the eyes; the second to exercise the mind; the third to warm the heart.

The joy of the first book is its stunning illustrations of beautiful stamps, though it comes from author David Scott with the forbidding title of *European Stamp Design: A Semiotic Approach to Designing Messages* (1995). This simply cloaks its theme of how ingenious designers are in projecting a national image within the confines of a postage stamp. Britain is treated and compared with our European partners France, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Ireland. Looking afresh at these images started me on a completely new collection of European definitives (with our own Machins at elementary level included). So, in spite of an off-putting title here was a book which had inspired one reader and it could well do the same for you.

To feed the mind, the most important recent book for GB collectors is James Mackay's masterwork *Under the Gum* (1997), with clarifying subtitle 'Background to British Stamps 1840-1940'. It contains wholly new research from official and long-neglected archives, showing just why successive issues appeared as they did. How valid are James Chalmers's claims? Why were white lines added to the Twopenny Blue? Why was the 2d Tyrian Plum prepared and never issued? These and a century of other conundrums are fully explained from a new, documented viewpoint in this remarkable book.

But if you are hoping merely to relax during your Christmas break, I point to a favourite 'golden oldie'. Order *Nassau Street* by Herman Herst (1960) from the library and enjoy a fund of entertaining tales about shrewd operators and daft eccentrics from his years in stamp dealing. Humorous and kindly, this autobiography from a veteran writer will be added cheer for the festive season ●

Decimal stamp books 43

HRH The Prince of Wales label pane book The sixth in the series of 4 × 1st commemorative label books was issued on 14 November. It celebrates the 50th birthday of HRH The Prince of Wales and was printed by Walsall from the same plates that were used for last year's offering, the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, viz: W56 W59 W69. It is unusual for lithographic plates to be kept so long, unlike gravure cylinders which last for many years. Royal Mail now has a definite preference for gravure but lithography is still used for short print runs. The use of the same plates for two such books may be an indication that fewer of them than normal were printed, unless, of course, other combinations have yet to appear. Sadly, Royal Mail no longer publishes the number of good books issued for retail books so we cannot be sure.

Cylinder numbers Stamp printers number their cylinders for a variety of purposes. (I use the term to include gravure cylinders and lithographic plates.) Originally, they were to identify the source of a printing in case of error of some kind, especially if more than one was prepared for a given value. Today, this is achieved for sheet printings by printing the warrant (purchase order) number and date of printing in the margins, although cylinder numbers are also present. Most decimal stamp books carry cylinder numbers.

However, some printers seem to allocate the same number to different cylinders. Questa have used the same numbers on phosphor cylinders for retail books of 1st-class two-band stamps and

HRH The Prince of Wales label pane book using plates W56 W59 W69. The Queen's 70th birthday was marked by a label book in April 1996, using two plate combinations: W37 W45 W48 and W38 W45 W49.

The first label book marked the tercentenary of the Bank of England in 1994.

