

Australia in Depth (Article #80)

By Simon Dunkerley © (28th Oct 2003;
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Aspects of Philatelic Expertising - Part III

Following parts I and II of this topic, 'Expertising Part III' concludes this series with comments on a number of facets that are important to grapple with. These include the issues of provenance, the so-called 'expertising markings' sometimes seen on stamps, and extensions as they apply to buying at auction in particular. As noted last month, these comments are based on the writer's experience and do not represent any expertising body. They are made in good faith, and you are encouraged to seek independent advice if you are unsure of any aspect.

Provenance

The provenance, or known history of an item *can* be one indicator as to its genuineness, although it is by no means conclusive. Whilst some of the perf 'OS' officials were catalogued at the same price or above normal stamps in the early days, it is a fact that many officials were also priced at discounts off the normal stamp. Even though there were some collectors of officials, many were actually very difficult to sell for an awful long time! Yet, it is important to recognise that at the same time, the supply of many items was also very thin. In difference to common perception, some of the early prices in the ACSC were also relatively high. For example, in the 1945 edition, whilst many were catalogued at the same as normal stamps, some of the first watermark high value Kangaroos were catalogued at premiums of up to 50% above the normal prices.

For those perf 'OS' items listed last month, and the high value perf 'OS' generally, pre 1980 evidence of a stamp's existence and its status does increase the odds of it being authentic, as more fakes have been manufactured since than before that date. However, this is not a valid method of determining the authenticity of such an item. It is often suggested that 'such and such' an item came from an 'old-time collection'. Unfortunately, that only suggests where it came from, and nothing more. It cannot be read as indicating anything about the genuineness or otherwise of the item.

To go even further, even though *any* item may be illustrated in an early 'Name sale', or any another recognised reference work, as much as that might be seen as being in its favor, it does not actually prove that it is genuine. There is never *any* substitute for a careful examination of the item itself.

Having said that, it must be noted that there are provenances, and then there are provenances that are worthy of carrying extra weight. For example, a Victorian item that is confirmed to have graced the pages of the legendary Purves and/or Perry collections should be taken seriously, as they were and are world class leaders in the issues of that Colony. It is a reality that the majority of provenances do not carry such weight.

Expertising markings

These are a rubber stamp marking that has generally been discreetly applied to the reverse of the item. In reality, they are often merely a dealer's 'signature' or identifying marking, making no reference to what the item is, or whether or not it has been expertised. Accordingly, they are often only an indication that a particular dealer has

handled the item at some time.

Be cautious about assuming that an Australasian item with such a marking has actually been expertised! Such markings are more widely used on European issues. In this context, with some of these markings, where they are positioned is important in interpreting the status of the item. It is also true that these markings can be forged, so be careful not to give them more importance than is warranted.

The writer's view is that wherever possible, a stamp without such a marking is preferable to one that has it. With mint unhinged items it is definitely a negative in valuing the item. It can no longer be classified as being in 'as-issued' or 'post office' condition, and in many, if not all cases would lose some value over an equivalent genuine unmounted mint example.

For mint hinged and fine used it is certainly less of a hindrance, and an item should not lose any value because of it. The only exception to this being where the application has been haphazard and is either smudged or shows through to the front of the item, as is seen from time to time. However, once again, for Australian items, the writer's preference would still generally be for an item with no such marking wherever possible.

It is important to retain the right not to offer an opinion where an item cannot be proven to be genuine

Most, if not all expertising bodies specify a range of items that they expertise, often with a list of exclusions, and these vary from body to body. In addition, as already mentioned, it must be accepted that some items present difficulties and cannot be proven to be genuine. Perfins are sometimes an example of this. Roulettes on stamps that were first issued imperforate are another example that can present genuine difficulties.

In addition, no one has a monopoly on all information and the knowledge base is still improving over time, so any expertising body should also have the right to change an opinion if new information comes to hand over time. With this in mind, if an item carries a certificate that is more than thirty or so years old, if you are not satisfied, it may be wise to have some items re expertised.

Extensions

Most auction firms include a clause in their conditions of sale that sets out their policy on the granting of extensions, whereby an item can be purchased on the condition that a certificate of genuineness is issued. If you intend to bid on an item that does not have a certificate and you believe it should have one, it is important to read the fine print carefully.

Many firms require written notice at least 24 hours before the auction; however, there are some that will allow you to notify them at the fall of the hammer or even after the auction. You will normally be required to pay for the lot at the time of being invoiced, as with any other purchases. In such cases, the vendor would not normally be paid until the lot is 'cleared' by an approved expertising body. This is a major reason why the auctioneer usually specifies a time limit on how long the extension might last for, and is one reason why the auctioneer may refuse an extension. However, experience has shown that most auctioneers are very reasonable in regard to this. This is also another reason why it is beneficial to have items appropriately expertised *before* selling them.

It is wise to agree with the auction house *before* the auction about which expertising

body the item should be sent to, and to agree on who is to send the item. If it is you, it should be done quickly. In this process, also confirm with the auction house that the item is insured, and what is required to protect you in this regard. If any delays occur, it is also wise to communicate with the auction house, as some expertising bodies are faster than others. It is unfortunate that many expertising bodies rarely get items back within the range of time frames that are specified by auctioneers. If there is one area where many expertising bodies can improve, it is the time taken to issue certificates on the majority of items which are straight forward. At the same time, it is important to recognise that an item may present difficulties and might need to be sent out to several consultants for opinions, and this process does take time, particularly if they are overseas.

Match the item to the certificate

It is important to ensure that the item on offer actually corresponds to that for which the certificate was issued. Although a rare occurrence, it certainly has been the case on occasions that the item on offer is not the one for which the certificate was issued. A careful examination of the perforations, margins, postmark or other visible features will usually provide a quick assurance of this matter without much difficulty.

This is one reason why a certificate should always have an identifiable photo of the item tied to it. A certificate without such a photo is not worth the paper that it is printed on.

Expertising resources

Finally, it is worth outlining the *resources* that make expertising possible and will set the *limits* on what is possible in that process. Expertisers are then dependant on how those resources are used. The following are seen as being essential ingredients in the expertising process:

- (1) People with expertise in *specific* areas, either as a single expertiser or a committee; and a 'pool' of consultants to draw on as appropriate.
- (2) Equipment from high powered magnifiers, microscopes, UV and other items.
- (3) Reference collection of items, or access to suitable stamps for comparison.
This is a crucial element in philately generally and in all expertising.
- (4) Library – a wide and relevant library is also a crucial element in expertising.
Don't under estimate the importance of investing in literature.
Experience
has shown that it is money well spent.

In addition, the qualities of knowledge, experience, willingness to learn, examining many items over an extended period of time, clear analytical thinking, impartial thinking, and acting without fear or favor are important aspects. As has been quoted a number of times 'Don't let ownership get in the way of science'.

Conclusion

As members of the philatelic community, expertising is a vital area for *all* of us to consider. As an introduction to some of the issues involved in expertising, it is true that this three part series has raised some questions that have not been fully answered; however, you are encouraged to take these comments into account in your

considerations on the issues involved.

Once again, the above comments are what the writer believes to be true, and are to be taken as personal views only, based on the writer's experience. They are not represented to be those of anyone else or any expertising bodies. If you are unsure of anything, it is wise to obtain independent advice.

The comments made in this series should not be taken as exhaustive. To the contrary, they are intended to raise some of the important issues as a precursor to further discussion that it is trusted will be undertaken in the time ahead. Any feedback or additional comments would be welcome.

