

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to write the Introduction to this, the next stage of this research project. This work has had a long and chequered career. Begun late in 1978 when Michael Nethersole, David Morrison and I discovered a common interest in the postal history of the Cape Colony, it rapidly developed a life of its own, and for a long time we despaired that it would ever be finished. David dropped out in 1981, while Michael and I developed an on-off-on arrangement as our respective careers took their unpredictable paths. Inevitably my wife Lesley was also “*press-ganged*” into service, and many a cold Highveld night was spent by the two of us reconciling hopelessly tangled Colonial records. Yes, we did have better things to do, but at that time our daughter was just settling down into her sleeping routine ... well, you know the rest.

Our first volume, “*The Postal Cancellers of the Cape of Good Hope*”, which has since become popularly known as “*the BONC Book*”, was published by Federation in 1991 and proved to be an instant success among all of its 123 readers world-wide. The fact that it read much like a telephone directory was probably the main reason why it was never nominated for a Pulitzer. We did have quite a nice pun on page 8, but no one has ever cottoned on to it. Undeterred we carried on. Along the way Michael lectured in electronics at Wits while setting up for Federation a credible judging system for international philatelic exhibitions. I completed my PhD and got on with the business of lecturing architectural students in Port Elizabeth. Life went on.

Then in 1994 I got a new job, moved to Pretoria, and made some philatelists very unhappy. I also brought with me the finished manuscript for my next book, “*The Post Offices of the Cape of Good Hope: 1792-1910*”. After a few disasters involving recalcitrant computers and an incompetent technician, this was eventually published in 2002. In the process it collected a national Gold medal, three international Vermeils in Washington, Dubai and Melbourne, and won a Large Gold Medal, the Exhibition Grand Award and the Jury’s Felicitations at the 10th New Zealand National Philatelic Literature Exhibition in New Zealand in June 2007. That was nice, but the lethal-looking Maori axe that came with it as a trophy was rapidly designated a weapon of mass deconstruction by my family and consigned to my office at University.

Then, in 2007, Michael suddenly passed away, leaving all sorts of puzzles unresolved and articles and books unwritten. Things went into abeyance until Christmas 2014 when I started doing a spring-clean through my electronic files and, upon re-reading, this research began to fall into a new perspective. To put it briefly, much of our initial effort had been spent in gathering basic data and collating it in a usable format. Much of this effort was aimed at inventing a typology which could be open ended enough to accommodate the findings of a broad range of researchers. As many people well know, when it comes to typologies philatelists have the unfortunate habit of reinventing the wheel, and I cannot account for the vast amounts of time Michael and I spent in an attempt to reconcile the works of Jurgens, Goldblatt, Putzel and Matthews, in an effort to include everyone under a common typological umbrella. Finally we abandoned any

attempt to adapt our work or use any system which was based upon an alpha, numeric, or alpha numeric code which, almost by definition, could never be open ended, and we settled for a more generic method which used an onomatopoeic descriptive code. Please believe me, nothing else has worked as well, and once I began to reduce my data to a series of graphs, I began to understand how the chaotic practices of the Cape's Colonial GPO had made a laughing stock from the onset of any attempts to explain its policies by means of a simple time line.

Volume Two was an encyclopedic work which gathered the data collected to date, while Volume Three sought to analyze this information and locate its conclusions within a historical narrative which made both common sense and explained the inner workings of the Cape Colonial Postal Establishment.

Fortunately academics recognize that, when it comes to research, we all stand on the shoulders of previous generations, and usually adopt or adapt the methodologies of those who went before us. It is just as well that we do so, otherwise the world would still be waiting for some fool in Louisiana to re-invent the wheel.

I am delighted that this project has now progressed to the next stage of development, one which goes beyond the constraints imposed upon previous work by the chronology and geography of colonialism, and now plans to cover the postal history of the Southern African subcontinent as a whole. The guidance and curatorship of this project has been taken over by Prof Alex Visser, a prominent academic and researcher in his own right who will be bringing the high standards of his profession to the work. Alex has previously worked on "*The Postmarks of South Africa*" (Putzel, 1992-99), taking over the last three volumes in 2001.

In keeping with the economics of philatelic publishing and the realities of a shrinking market, this listing is being published in an electronic format on the Internet, and follows its previous publication as a hard copy distributed in a limited number to a small list of fellow postal historians. Despite its open availability it is hopeful that the integrity and the publication rights of its authors will be respected. The listing is being made freely on line in the spirit of academic fellowship, and I am hopeful that, in time, it will gain status as a research project under the aegis of South African philately.

My best wishes are extended therefore to Alex and the new generation of researchers, whose work it will be not only to record a valuable segment of our social heritage, but also to use their skills as researchers to elevate further the discipline of postal history and find the recognition it is owed in the pantheon of human knowledge.

Franco Frescura

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