

The Philatelic Works of Melville

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Frederick John Melville was not just the founder of the Junior (now National) Philatelic Society, but was a writer who 'specialised' in most aspects of our hobby. He is perhaps best known for his philatelic writing career which started in 1897 when he wrote and privately published a rather modest eight page pamphlet called *Stamp Collecting*.

When Michael Furnell invited me to do a piece on the writing of Melville for this centenary handbook, he directed my attention to an article in the January 1941 issue of *The Stamp Lover* entitled 'A "Melville" Bibliography'. I admit to drawing heavily on this article, which had been compiled by the writing partnership of LN & M Williams and proved to be invaluable. Maurice passed away many years ago, but his brother Norman, a Life Member of the NPS, sadly died only this year, at the start of our centenary celebrations. Melville and the Williams's shared more than just the J.P.S. in common, for both parties were among the most prolific writers about our hobby and have left behind a tremendous legacy for future generations.

Melville had a journalistic training the envy of many, having been under the instruction of Lord Northcliffe and his enthusiasm for the hobby could be recorded in a clear and concise manner as a consequence. He is credited by the Williams's with recruiting newcomers to the hobby in a way that nobody before him had attempted, contributing to the interest in the hobby from the general public of the time.

I think that it is the sheer variety of subjects covered by Melville that has impressed me the most whilst compiling this article. To write deeply about one country is an achievement in itself, but to cover so many areas of the world takes a special kind of understanding and love of the subject. The list of topics and countries covered seems almost endless – indeed, the bibliography shows dozens of subjects and countries that received his special treatment.

Postage Stamps in the Making is generally regarded as Melville's *magnum-opus*. Unfortunately, Fred was never destined to complete this book, unlike Norman Williams, whose *Fundamentals of Philately*, which also covered the production of the postage stamp, is my favourite philatelic work. Stamp production was a subject that both writers understood and shared a love of, possibly more than any other collector is ever destined to.

Books such as Melville's *Postage Stamps Worth Fortunes* was translated into Swedish and Dutch versions; whilst *The World's Stamp Errors* was shown as being by Miss Fitte, indicating a humorous side to Fred's character. Subjects such as *The Higlett Booklets*, *Origins of the Penny Post*, *Hints on Arranging a Collection* and *The Grammar of Philately* all go towards proving the scope of his writing. Countries covered ranged from *Abyssinia* to the *Virgin Islands* and everywhere in between.

Melville also produced series of books in addition to his 'one-offs'. These included *JPS War Books*, *The Melville Stamp Books*, *Philatelic Institute Papers*, *Stamp Lover*

Booklets, The Stamp Classics and “*The Postage Stamp*” *Handbooks*. These series alone amount to an impressive sixty-six publications.

There was clearly a ready market for his work, some going to several editions. If only authors today could sell so readily – few collectors seem willing to invest in philatelic literature, which is a great shame. Incidentally, why does a collector not buy a book when freely available to them at the new-issue price, but will wait until it is out of print and pay a premium on the secondary market? This has always puzzled me! But I digress.

Aside from writing books and pamphlets, it must never be forgotten that Melville also wrote many columns in the national lay press. He also edited philatelic publications such as *British Philatelist*, *Stamp Collector's Fortnightly*, *Postage Stamp* and *Stamp Collecting*. Even a single issue of the American journal *Mekeel's Weekly Stamp News* was down to him. Let us also recall that our own *Stamp Lover* came under his editorship, specifically between 1908 and 1940 with only a few months break in 1915. For the record, there is another comparison between Melville and the Williams's, for they also edited our society journal.

So, this brief review shows Melville to be a writer of some stature and one whose writing I heartily commend to you. May I please end with a plea? The library possesses some of the works of FJM, but nowhere near the volume that we would like in order to fully recognise the contribution made by our founder to the literature of our hobby. We would therefore be most grateful to any reader who would like to donate any of Fred's literature to the NPS library.