

## MSG AUCTION HELD AT SPINK'S SALE ROOM, 5 JULY 2008 by Rob Holley

Sitting in Spink's auction room on the 5<sup>th</sup> was a curious sensation – here we were having a sale in their room while they were holding an auction at the same time in Singapore. Actually theirs was well and truly over before we assembled for what was originally intended to be the sale of the remnants of Bill Reeves' collection after Spink had disposed of the major part of it last January. In fact, what was left of the Reeves material turned out to form only about 120 lots of the sale leaving us with the opportunity of making inroads into the backlog of material waiting to be sold by the Group. It was disappointing, therefore, to be left with 67 unsold lots at the end of the afternoon, and I think we need to ask the question why.

To some extent we are the victims of our own success. We break material down into small lots, give full descriptions and charge a humble 10% with no add-ons, so we are a popular auction house, but I cannot help wondering how long this can go on. It is getting increasingly difficult to get members to volunteer for the work involved and for this reason we have been reduced to two auctions a year instead of three for the last several years. This has led, I know, to some members feeling that they are being elbowed out of a chance to sell their duplicates which is what our auctions and the Packet were originally designed to be, rather than members selling their whole collections. Can we do something to streamline ourselves a little? For example, how about raising the minimum reserve which might encourage members to combine material a bit more and sell groups of covers or pages of stamps rather than individual items. It might also be a way of members disposing of defective material or doubtful postmarks as these appear to be at the root of no-sale problem. Looking at the unsold lots in this auction one has the impression that price was rarely a factor involved, it was more a reluctance to bid on stamps which were suspect in some way. For the scarce and the attractive there never seems the lack of a buyer and at good prices too, and this tallies with the results in the major auction houses today.

It has been said that descriptions in our sales can be often too picky and that mention of a defect or to cast a doubt on a post mark is to invite a no-sale, but surely, in fairness to postal bidders, this has to be? In these cases does the fault not lay with the vendor rather than the describer? It also has to be borne in mind that if the describer has been over-severe then room bidders will reap the benefit and the lot will sell. I know this puts postal bidders at a disadvantage but this has always been so with room-auctions. One of the difficulties that has emerged in recent years is the increase in knowledge and interest in postmarks. Describers now have to be more critical despite vendors' resentment. For example, Johore has always been bedevilled by fiscal cancels and Kedah by forged postmarks and attention needs to be drawn to such things or the auctioneer's time is going to be much taken up by returned lots. But, maybe things have gone too far and a member has put the following to me: When referring to a cancel he claimed it was only necessary to refer to the fact it was postal and not particularise too much by saying the mark was 'out of state' or 'out of period' as a lot of members don't worry about such things. But as soon as such a reservation is mentioned a potential buyer may be put off and a sale missed. He may have a point. But what is the best way to dispose of material that has a defect of some sort? Perhaps a minimum reserve of £25 might encourage more cunning lotting - a page of less attractive material with a tempting item in the middle. This would at least reduce the volume of lots, enable us to sell more and perhaps even give dealer-members a chance to bid. Or generate more material for the Packet?

May I emphasise this is an individual opinion and members might like to voice their disagreement – perhaps on our website. I gather the webmaster would welcome a spot of

controversy and a spirited debate on the Forum. As those who have visited our new website will testify, it is both attractive and bang up to date.

Now to the auction. As it happens, it contained a number of chunkier lots priced at well over the minimum reserve and these generated considerable interest. Bill, to everyone's apparent surprise, had invested more heavily in covers than he had ever let on and these were generously lotted and priced to sell as it would have been in no-one's interest to have had too much of Bill's collection left on our hands. Spectacular excesses of reserves were expected especially amongst the covers and postal history and we were not disappointed. No doubt the auctioneer will give us the figures eventually but my impression was that overseas bidders did particularly well.

We'll start with Lot 8, the shortage period material, reserved at £80, which fetched £500 as was expected. Would it have fetched more individually lotted? A little perhaps, but think of the work involved and the other lots pushed aside. The big accumulation of stamps in Lot 13 fetched £410 (Res. £150). The individual stamps from Johore to Trengganu almost uniformly failed to rise much above reserve, even the lots of FMS stamps used in Kedah and Kelantan did not go mad although Lots 86 & 116 (the \$2 values used in Kedah & Kelantan) both went up to £225, while the truly delightful piece used in Kelantan (Lot 115) fetched £255. Proof of the earlier point about pretty and rare items! On the other hand the MBEs in both states were wash-outs, with a number unsold. Why should that be when such material has sold so well recently? A mystery for which I can find no explanation. The FMS stamps used in Perlis (Lot 190, reserved at £200) fetched a higher proportion of cat value than either Kedah or Kelantan (£450) but that was only to be expected, Perlis being Perlis.

The postal history, always difficult for a describer to estimate without a catalogue, brought forth some good tussles with the TRDs (Lot 272, reserved at £80) fetching £310, while the rare airmail flown from Perth to Adelaide (Lot 290, reserved at £60) went for £215, not overpriced I thought. In fact I expected something higher but from the bidding it seems it did not impress anyone from overseas. Little was unsold from this section with some items reaching unexpected heights – Lot 313 the used FMS 2c green reply card zoomed out from £20 to £170, and Lot 319 the used Selangor 1901 1c reply half with FMS franking did much the same – to £130 from £10. What it was that appealed about those lots rather escaped me.

The ppc bearing an FMS 3c used in Kota Bharu (Lot 354) rather predictably hit the highest PR of the day – £600 from a reserve of £200, while the Negri Sembilan provisional use cover (Lot 370) performed somewhat similarly – up to £540 from £200, as did Lot 383, the Perak cover showing the provisional use of several stamps - £560 from £200. All these were expected as they were nice items and, no doubt, when they come to be sold again they will prove the point that rarity and quality will always sell and sell well.

The Reeves collection has now been well and truly dispersed. Commiserations with those who didn't see it in its entirety. I doubt we shall see its like again.