

Ophir's Postal History

Background

In 1862 gold was discovered on the sheep station owned by Charles William Black and the area quickly became known as Blacks Diggings. Six years later in 1868 the population was approximately 600 as the miners came into the area and spread into the surrounding hills.

To service the growing population the Post Office was opened on 1 October 1863 under the name "**Black's Diggings**". It was in a general store and the storekeeper James Swanson was the first Postmaster on a salary of twenty pounds a year. The mail was delivered as part of the Palmerston to Alexandra mail service.

Following the discovery of readily won gold in substantial quantities at Gabriel's Gully, Tuapeka, in 1861 the rush of gold miners soon penetrated further inland finding gold in a growing number of other sites along the Clutha and other rivers. Manuherukia (which became Alexandra) was rushed in 1862 and miners from there either moved west up the Clutha or north up the Manuherikia where Black's was rushed followed by Dunstan Creek (St Bathans) soon afterwards.

Post Offices were opened on each goldfield within a few months and a regular mail service was introduced from Dunedin via Palmerston through Mount Ida (Naseby) to Dunstan Creek, thence south down the valley through Black's to Manuherikia. At first a packhorse mail coaches later took over.

Highway 85 only partially follows the old coach route today as the opening of the **Central Otago Railway** swung traffic and business centres away from the declining goldfields. This railway was open to the new settlement of Ranfurly by December 1898 and by December 1901 had been opened

to Ida Valley. From here the line twisted through the Poolburn Gorge into the Manuherikia Valley, and was opened to Omakau 1 September 1904, to Chatto Creek 30 July 1906, and to Alexandra 18 December 1906.

Mail which had previously been carried by coach now travelled by rail. In recent years with the cessation of railway passenger services mail was carried by motor coaches and now by NZ Post vehicles.

Postal Services

To service the growing population the Post Office was opened on 1 October 1863 under the name of "**Blacks Diggings**". The name was changed to "**Blacks**" on 21 November 1864. On 7 May 1875 the post office officially became "**Ophir**". A few months later on 1 October 1875 a Money Order Office was opened as well.

OPHIR

Ophir today is a scattering of houses around the old stone historic Post Office. It is on the Manuherikia River, at the north end of the Ophir Gorge, and on the eastern side of the valley flats, being backed by the steeply rising Raggedy Range.

By 1868, when the miners had spread into the hills in the west, the population was approximately 600 but as gold prospecting declined people turned to farming and later fruit growing the population dropped, and it was 142 in 1946 and 57 in 1976. The Ophir Post Office serves local households today as well as the many tourists who send post cards home and purchase postal items.

The present name Ophir was given by James Macandrew, Otago Province Superintendent, after the Biblical Ophir, from where King Solomon obtained the greatest part of his gold. Ophir or the Hebrew Otira, is derived from Arabic apher or afr meaning "to flow". The Biblical Ophir is near the present day Sharm el Sheik in the southern Sinai desert.

The name of the town was changed to Ophir on 7 May 1875 when a town was proclaimed here.

There was concern about the future of the Post Office in 1974, when the postmistress retired, but it continued on an agency basis open 9 am to noon daily. From 1 September 1976 the building which stands today, was erected in 1886 for the Post Office. It is of schist masonry with plaster quoins and window dressings. It was acquired by the New Zealand Historic Places Trust for preservation and is continuing to operate. Today it is an NZ Post Agency Office.

Postmarks

Postmarks, Postal markings or cancellations are used to confirm the mail has been accepted and to prevent the stamp being used again.



The first post mark was the 0.44 obliterator of the mid 1860's. Called the obliterator simply because it obliterated the stamps.



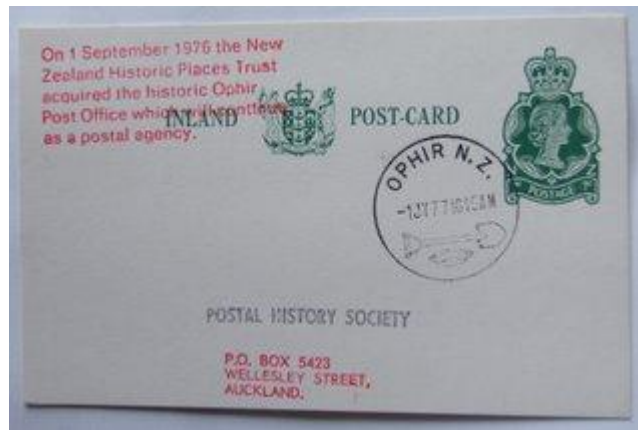
The first Coin date stamp was probably introduced in October 1875, followed by two other Coin date stamps until today's date stamp was introduced on 1 July 1977.

Stamps

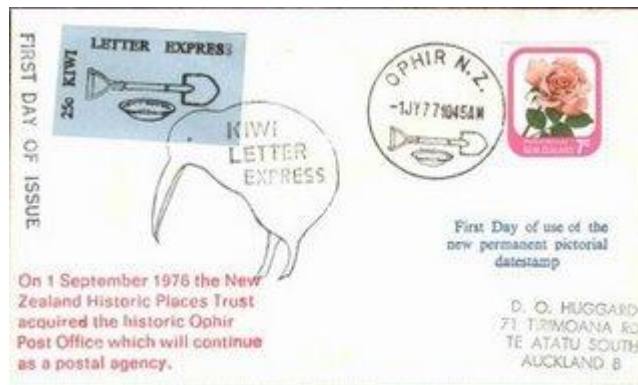
On 1 September 1976 The New Zealand Historic Places Trust acquired the Ophir Post Office and continued to operate it as a community Post Office. There is a postal delivery contract with New Zealand Post and a range of stamps and postal services are offered.



One of the 1040 souvenir covers produced that day



NEW Zealand Post Office Official Post Card 1 September 1976



First day of issue for the new pictorial date stamp.

Architectural Stamps

In 1982 the New Zealand Post Office released an Architectural issue of 4 stamps. The 35cent, and most expensive stamp, was of **Ophir Post Office**.



Plate Block 1A



Plate Block 1B



Block of 4 Ophir Post Office Stamps

First day cover



Ophir Post Office

Own Stamp 2007

Printed By Universal Mail New Zealand Limited

From Photograph by Alan Jolliffe





Ophir Post Office
The oldest working Post Office in
New Zealand Swindon Street,
Ophir, Central Otago

We have our own unique postmark
Visitors can place the postmark on
themselves

To service the growing population, the Post
Office was opened on 1st October 1864.
On 7th May 1875 the Post Office officially
became "Ophir". Ophir has the reputation of
also being the coldest place in New
Zealand with a recorded low of -21.6°C

Website: www.historic.org.nz
Email: Ophir@historic.org.nz

Postcards

Country	Weight	Size	\$ Cost
Worldwide	up to 10gms	Maximum 10gms x 200mm	\$1.50

**International Mail
Only**

**Post in the Universal
Mail Blue Mailboxes**

Universal Mail New Zealand Ltd
Private Bag 93222, Parnell, Auckland,
New Zealand.
Ph: +64 9 307 5858 Fax: +64 9 307 2300
Email: info@universalmail.co.nz
Website: www.universalmail.co.nz



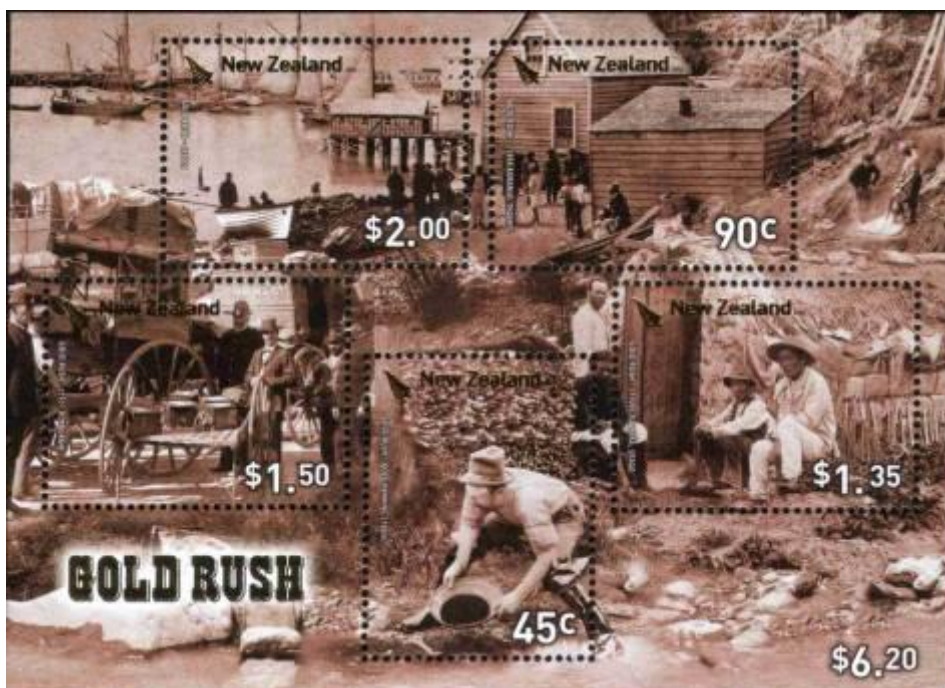
Other First Day Covers



Christmas Stamp 1971



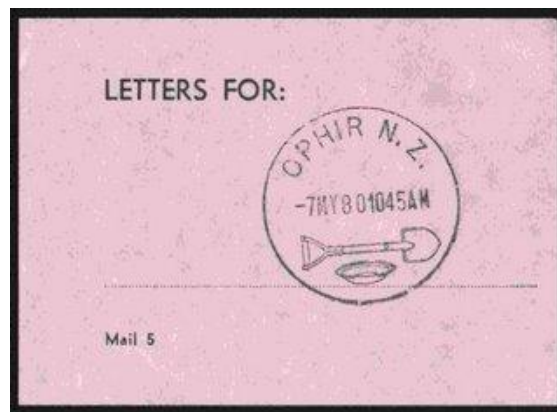
Commemorative Issue 5 April 1972



Gold Rush Miniature Sheet. Ophir was a famous Gold Rush town.

Issued 6 September 2006

Other Post Marks



This envelope shows the post mark on the back. Mail received at Ophir Post Office was stamped to show the date it was received at the Post Office.

Examples of Ophir Post Marks

The First Postmark

The 0.44 obliterator of the mid 1860's.



This stamp shows the O.44 postmark on a two pence stamp issued between 1874 and 1882

This stamp was postmarked near the end of the period when the Obliterator was used as it was replaced in 1875

The Second Postmark

Introduced in October 1875



Postmark is Ophir 26 October 1894

This is very rare in that the Ophir post mark is also on a flawed stamp. The flaw is called the Screwdriver Flaw.



Postmark 15 ?? 1886?

These stamps 'Second Sides' were issued in 1882 – 1900.



Postmark ?2 July 1908

The 1d Universal stamp was introduced on 1 January 1901.

It is also called Zealandia

The Third Postmark

The third post mark is similar to the second but with finer lettering



Postmark Ophir 31 July 1899

1d Lake Taupo stamp 1898 – 1907 Pictorial stamp issue.



Postmark 31 Jan? 1902

Postmark 22 Aug 1902

1d Universal

The 1d Universal stamp was introduced on 1 January 1901.

It is also called Zealandia

The Fourth Postmark

Ophir is curved around the top edge



Postmark Ophir

1d Universal July 1908. 1Penny Dominion OFFICIAL. This stamp was issued between 1909 and 1925 and used by Government Departments



1d Penny Field Marshall. This stamp was issued between 1926 and 1930



Postmark 19 or 9 September 1960



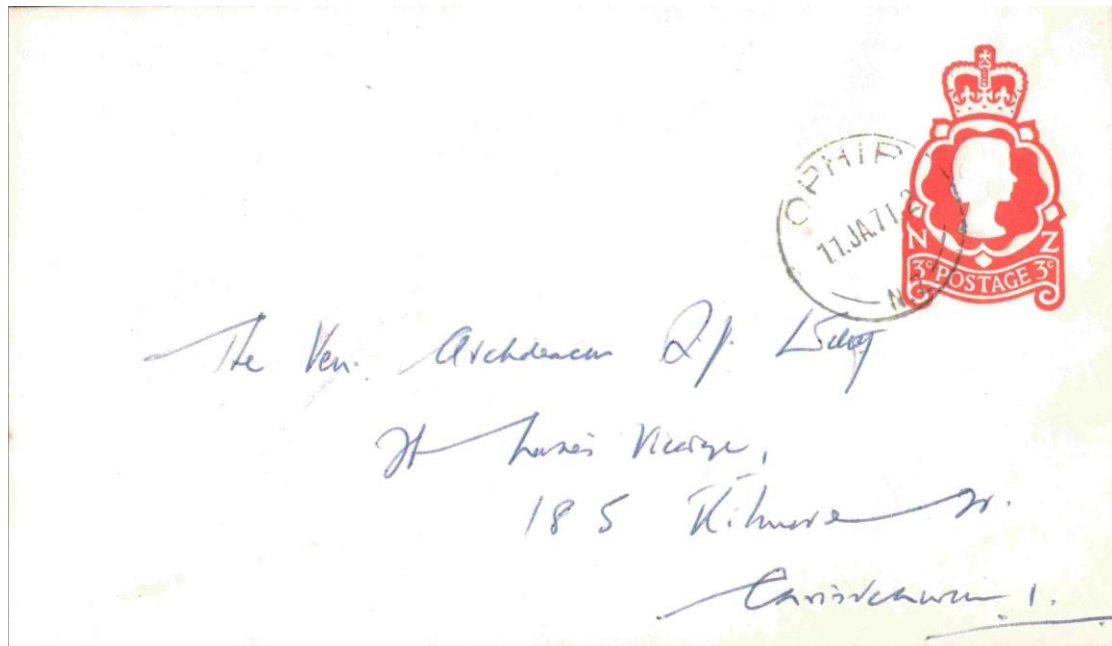
Ophir Postmark 14 Aug 19??

1967 Decimal Pictorials (issued 1967 – 1970)



Postmark 16 June 1972

1972 Alpine Flowers issued 7 June 1972



Unopened envelop prepaid Postmark 11 January 1971

The Fifth Postmark



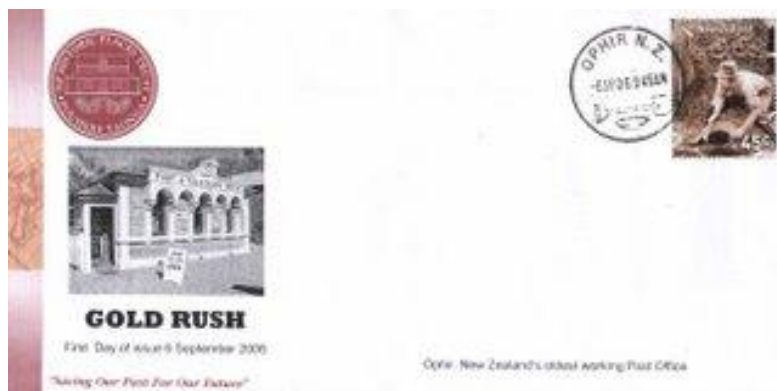
The new pictorial Postmark introduced on 1 July 1977

This postmark is 18 October 1959 at 9.45am



Postmark 28 September 2006 at 9.45am

This stamp is part of the Gold Rush Issued 6 September 2006



Gold Rush Stamp 6 November 2006. Limited number of these produced by Ophir Post Office.

Ophir Products



Ophir Greetings Card



The
Ophir
Post
&
Telegraph
Office



Ophir Bookmark

People

James Swanson was the first postmaster as he was the owner of the store. He was paid a salary of twenty pounds per annum.

Gustavicus Carlbasch became postmaster on 1 May 1864.

Succeeding post masters were

Samuel North 1 April 1868

Samuel Leask 1 July 1869.

James Alexander was appointed postmaster on 1 April 1875 and 5 weeks later the Name of the Post Office was changed to **Ophir** when a town was formally proclaimed here. Alexander's salary was thirty pound a year and remaining unchanged even though money order facilities were added to the office from 1 October 1875 and telegraph facilities, call sign OPI, in 1881.

In 1884 it was decided to upgrade the office to a full time position and Alexander accepted this, on a salary of 185 pounds a year.

J C Williamson was postmaster in 1889 on 150 pounds a year, and he was transferred to Wellington.

Tim Buckley 4 August 1890

Joseph Hay 16 August 1893.

Arthur G Williams was Acting Postmaster when the Post office was downgraded on 1 July 1898.

Miss E Blackmore 1898 was placed in charge as a local resident

J A Holt was appointed Postmaster and telephonist in October 1901 when it reverted to permanent status. A Eagle was the cadet.

Mrs a Murphy was appointed in 1906 and W J Stafford was messenger.

T E Connelly appointed 1 September 1913

Miss J M McKay 1914

Mrs M M Grahame 1915

Mc Carry 1922

Miss M E McRae 3 Jan 1923 when it again returned to non classified status.

Miss R J McKnight 1924

Mrs M E Drake 1942 to December 1969

Mrs M O Nelson December 1969 to 9 August 1974

Mrs S M MacDonald August 1974 to January 2002

Mrs V J Butcher January 2002 onwards.

Compiled by Alan Jolliffe from various sources

Stamp images from his own collection

Any further examples would be welcome to add to the collection or digital images copies

Contact Alan Jolliffe

jolliffe@slingshot.co.nz