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Greg Howard's Philosophy – Finding a Lost Treasure is Best

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My first purchase in 1972 was a Jubilee Cigarettes a red and yellow non-pictorial, the next was a Hudson's Soap. In those days it was easy to buy at the right price, but the signs were not that good – in my world anyway. I've bought, sold, traded or swapped 100s and 100s of signs throughout the years. The difference today is that although signs are dearer, good signs are easier to find if you are willing to pay the price. Years ago most of my signs were non-pictorial, today almost all are pictorial and some are world-class classics which I chase when funds come to hand.

To me I get my satisfaction from the chase finding a lost treasure once I have owned a sign in most cases I am happy to sell it. I love chasing down sets, for instance the Sunlight Soap Washer Women; I have three in the set of our; still looking for the blue one. Coopers Sheep Dip Ram signs – there are six in the set I have owned two, seen a third one, am looking for the other three.

Throughout the years good signs have come and gone I have won and lost at many auctions but some of the classics I wish I had kept. Great pictorial signs are very bullish in price whereas run-of-the-mill non-pictorial signs are only rising slightly; maybe the down side of *eBay*.

In Australia there are three main events on the sign collectors calendar, which all serious collectors attend; Bendigo Swap, Ballarat Swap and Lancasters Sign Auction. A story worth telling from last Ballarat Swap, I had a space where I had roughly 100 general signs for sale, this guy was looking over my wares trying to knock my prices down when a truck drove by with this stunning agriculture sign, multi-coloured with farm scenes all over it... a real stunner.

He was off chasing this truck, running as fast as he could go, screaming 'Stop'. He grabbed the back, still

screaming 'Stop the truck!'. The driver took no notice and kept going a mile down the road, but eventually he did stop. The guy, still hanging exhausted on the back shouted, 'Why did you not stop?' the driver just said 'If you want a good sign you have to pay for it.. and I knew you would be less likely to beat me down having run a mile... my price \$2,000!'. The buyer said 'Done, I am too tired to argue'. He paid the money over, grabbed the sign, just as three other

sign collectors caught up screaming, 'How much for the sign?'; one offered \$3000 the other offered \$4000, but the deal had been done; the first guy's paid was not so bad now. When I saw the sign I offered him \$5000 – a *stunning sign*, but I was not quick enough.

As I become more educated about signs I am becoming more discerning; in other words I now realise volume and owning large numbers of signs is not the

answer – its *quality* that counts. A friend of mine owns around 2500 – 3000 signs only 5 or 6 of which I lust after. This 'vision from above' struck me one day after visiting a collector called David, who lives in a small one-room studio.

He has a fantastic world-class collection of about 20 signs, all the best of the best. In fact he has paid record prices for many of his signs, but they are a collection that would impress the experts.

David says price is a perception; cost does not equal value to him. Owning a piece of world class art is priceless. In the New Year I hope to have an auction to clear out a lot of signs I no longer have the space for and just concentrate on one-off specials. But who knows, the thrill of the chase and finding a hidden treasure could rage me back to sign collecting – its like a drug, you can never get enough

