3. Organising a collection

As a person's sugar packet collection grows they will need to organise it in some way. Whilst there may be different reasons people do this, three come to mind. First, because it is what collectors do, it is probably in our genes, but generally we like to have such things organised and it gives us pleasure to see a well organised collection. Secondly, because it makes it all the more interesting when we show other people (though sadly not all the people we show see it this way). Thirdly, unless you have a photographic memory a collector needs to be able to check new acquisitions against the existing collection and this means having a system which allows us to know quickly where we would have filed a particular packet if we already had it. The problem, of course, is that no matter what system you adopt there are always going to be packets which don't quite fit or might legitimately be filed in more than one place.

As Robin Williams (No. 211) has indicated elsewhere in this edition the method you use to store your collection is entirely your choice. However, there do seem to be certain methods which people generally favour with a myriad of variations.

One obvious way to arrange packets is by packet type, the main divisions being lump wrappers, sachets, sticks and flat sticks. This primary division is determined for many because of the way they store the packets, using different methods for the different types and in another article in this issue Andreas Walter (No. 39) explains that he makes this distinction first.

Andreas then separates his packets into home (Germany in his case) and away which I suspect is common to most collectors. In effect packets are arranged by country but most of us probably collect more from our home country. The difficulty with this division is twofold. First there is the problem of identifying which country a packet comes from. The Club has issued a couple of lists in the past to help with this, one being a translation of "sugar" into various languages and I am hopeful that we can include an updated list in the next issue. The other was a list of the main suppliers for each country. The second problem is the growing number of packets which are produced for a multi-national market and where the choice of which country to file it under is not obvious.

Many people collect particular types of packet and arrange their collection accordingly often making this the primary distinction. Airlines appears to be particularly popular and a picture of part of Audrey Pickett's collection (No. 18) is shown. Recently my attention was drawn to a catalogue of McDonalds packets produced by Jan Torfs from Belgium. Jan does charge for the CD catalogue which includes packets from 64 different countries. A number of collectors also have websites which show packets for particular categories.

A page of airlines packets from Audrey Pickett's collection

A useful list of categories was produced by Pam Miller (No. 2) and has been used on the SUGARCAT database. This includes for example "(E) Transport" of which Airlines would be a sub-category. Likewise "(J) Restaurants and shops own wrappers" would include McDonalds as a sub-category and a whole host of others. A full list can be seen on SUGARCAT.

Another category type would be manufacturers and suppliers. Tate and Lyle is an obvious example of a manufacturer who have produced countless packets many of them for particular restaurants, airlines etc, however, if there is no other obvious category, filing by manufacturer is one way to do it when that is known.

Perhaps the simplest way of arranging packets is alphabetically which is how I arrange much of my collection and I think is also used by Robin Williams. The most obvious problem with many packets is knowing which word to use as the primary word which is especially difficult when the packet is in a language with which one

Part of Audrey Pickett's well organised collection of albums.

is not familiar and even more so when the script is unknown. However, the benefit of this method is that it is usually fairly simple to make a decision and therefore to both file and check packets.

Phillipe Mery's Ibis Hotels page

My impression is that people do change the system, particularly in the early stages of a collection but obviously the more it grows the more difficult a change becomes.

An example of how all this fits together was provided by Philippe Mery (No. 41) who states that he first organises by country, "then by hotels or coffee makers or sets or others" and thirdly by the name of the hotel or company. Where possible he adds a sheet of paper with the logo of the company as shown in the picture.

In closing I will mention another method of organising - electronically. This may seem a bit extreme but my long-term project of creating a database of UK sugar packets involves scanning all the packets I have, together with scans kindly sent by others, and creating a database to list all these. The packets are stored fairly simply but once each one has been given an unique name the database can be sorted or searched by using most of the above methods and others, such as colour of the packet or print.

David Phillips (No. 260)