

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POSTAGE STAMPS OF TASMANIA

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THE PERIOD BEFORE 1853

The British Colony of Van Diemen's Land (VDL) was settled in 1803, the second Australian Colony to be established after New South Wales in 1788. VDL was established to forestall the French who were also seeking a colony in the southern oceans. The loss of the American Colonies during the War of Independence, the population influx to English cities during the Industrial Revolution and a harsh criminal sentencing system designed to protect personal property saw a dramatic rise in the numbers of British prisoners. From 1812, VDL became a dumping ground for British convicts. The island Colony became a 'prison without walls'. Many convicts were not permitted to return to their homeland with British military regiments sent to the Colony to maintain order.



"Hobart Town" marking on 1820's letter to Edinburgh

The principal settlements in the early decades were Hobart Town in the south and Launceston and George Town in the north. Communications between the north and the south were tenuous. In 1816 Robert Taylor was appointed Government Messenger and made the 126-mile overland journey on foot in three days. Taylor was armed with a musket against attacks by bushrangers and Aborigines. Mail to England was carried by passing whaling ships and took 18 months to arrive during this early period with an equal amount of time for a reply to be received.

The principal towns received datestamps in 1822 to mark letters although the implements were expensive to engrave thus distribution of them was limited. The Post Office was operated as a private concern with the postmaster retaining the revenue. Governor Arthur put the Post Office on a legislative footing in 1832 with the Colony retaining the revenue raised. From the 1830s the postal rates were marked on

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letters sent. Mail could be sent paid (marked in black) or unpaid (marked in red). The collecting of the various markings is popular and has been the subject of a number of philatelic books.

The prepayment of letters by means of postage stamps became compulsory in England in 1840. The Colonies slowly followed with New South Wales and Victoria introducing locally-made stamps in 1850. Concerns about the abuse of postal privileges led Van Diemen's Land to introduce postage stamps in 1853.

THE 'COURIERS' 1853

On 1 November 1853 it became compulsory to pre-pay letters with means of stamps. Two stamps were produced at the offices of the *Hobart Town Courier* newspaper, owned by the Best brothers, and thus the stamps became known to later collectors as "Couriers". The 1d Blue was intended for use on town letters and the 4d Orange for use on letters to inland towns or overseas letters.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 24 from copper plates that were engraved by Charles Coard of Hobart. The engraving is well executed for the times although due to the primitive nature of the production, each stamp can be individually 'plated' or assigned to a position on the sheet of 24. Two plates of the 4d were produced as it was thought that the 4d stamp would be in greater demand than the 1d.

10,745 sheets (257,880 stamps) of the one penny and 33,854 sheets (812,496 stamps) of the four pence were printed and sold between 1853 and 1855. The ability to plate the stamps saw the Couriers become very popular with collectors, along with the New South Wales 'Sydney View' stamps, during the 1880's when advanced philately took root.



The 1853 1d and 4d Courier stamps

The Couriers were printed in a range of shades and on papers of varying thicknesses. The 4d was unusually, printed in an octagonal shape – probably influenced by an earlier 10d stamp from Great Britain, and examples can be found on original letters with the corners 'clipped'. Proofs of the 4d on laid paper are known although examples are rare.

Due to the primitive engraving methods available in the Colony it was always intended to procure the first stamps from England. However as the postal legislation progressed through the Legislative Council it became clear that the deadline of 1 November 1853 would not be met. Thus the Best brothers were called upon to produce the stamps locally. The order for stamps from England was still pursued however and in August 1855 new stamps – the ‘Chalons’ arrived from England. The Couriers were now no longer required and the final printing took place in July 1855.

THE CHALON HEADS 1855 – 1880

Three stamps were ordered from England – a 1d Red, 2d Green and a 4d Blue. The stamps were printed by Perkins Bacon of London using advanced die-making and recess-printing techniques. Perkins Bacon overlooked the requirement from the Colony and the stamps should be perforated and they were issued imperforate. The stamps depicted a young Queen Victoria with the design based upon a portrait painted by Alfred Edward Chalon in 1838. The stamps are of a superior quality and printed on ‘star watermark’ paper. In error, Perkins Bacon shipped the printing press along with the stamps which encouraged VDL to again print future stamps in the Colony.



The 1855 1d, 2d and 4d Chalons

Supplies of the ‘star watermark’ stamps began to run out during 1856 and 1857 and recourse was again made to Henry Best. The ‘Chalon’ printing plates were loaned to him by the Treasury and small supplies were printed by him:

1d Cinnamon shade – thick unwatermarked paper – 282 sheets (67,680 stamps)

1d Deep Red Brown – thin pelure unwatermarked paper – 324 sheets (77,760 stamps)

2d Dull Emerald Green – unwatermarked paper – 155 sheets (37,200 stamps)

4d Pale Blue – unwatermarked paper – 715 sheets (171,600 stamps).

The ‘pelure’ paper is very thin, and transparent upon holding the stamp up to the light, and has very seldom been used in stamp production. Although the English plates were used, the quality of production has much poorer with the stamps generally having a ‘fuzzy’ or ‘washed’



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appearance. The printings on unwatermarked paper are considered to be Tasmania's rarest issues.

In 1857 watermarked paper arrived from England. The use of watermarked paper would help protect against fraud. From this time all Chalon stamps were printed on 'numeral' watermarked paper. As the ownership of local newspapers changed so too did the stamp printers. These changes saw many different printings and shades of the 1d, 2d and 4d produced.

The name of the Colony was changed to 'Tasmania' in 1856 and this change was reflected in the postage stamps in 1858 when the 6d and 1/- values arrived from England. The 6d was necessary to meet the increase in the ship letter rate from 4d to 6d and the legislature was eager to attempt to eradicate the 'convict stain' associated with the name 'Van Diemen's Land'. The 1d, 2d and 4d chalon stamps still continued in use however (due to the vast expense of replacing the printing plates) and thus from 1858 until 1870 stamps bearing the 'Van Diemen's Land' and 'Tasmania' motifs can be found on the one letter.



1869 cover from New Norfolk to England bearing a combination of Van Diemen's Land and Tasmania stamps (ex. Viney)

Despite being the third Colony to introduce stamps, Tasmania was the last to find a means to perforating them. From 1864 various local stamp vendors began perforating stamps for the convenience of their customers and to attempt to win a government contract to perforate all stamps in the Colony. The overtures to the government were rebuffed. J Walch and Sons of Hobart commenced perforating stamps with a machine gauging 10 and Robert Harris of Launceston began perforating stamps with a machine gauging 12½. Walch brought a new machine gauging 11.8 (catalogued as '12') and used this machine to officially perforate stamps for the Government from 1869. During the 1860s some postmasters in country towns, frustrated by the use of imperforate stamps, began perforating stamps using rouletting wheels. These stamps, known as 'private perforations', are now very rare and expensive. As many examples have unfortunately been faked over many years, it is strongly advised that a certificate of authenticity from a recognised expert body be obtained before finalizing any purchase.

The accession of Thomas Chapman to the positions of Treasurer and Postmaster-General of Tasmania would set in train a series of events that would see the eventual end of the use of the Chalon stamps.

THE SIDEFACE STAMPS 1870

In 1869 Chapman, determined to impose uniformity and eliminate the vestiges of convictism, sought to replace the Van Diemen's Land issues with new Tasmanian stamps. Adhesives in the values of 1d, 2d, 4d and 10d were ordered from De La Rue of London. The stamps, called 'Sidefaces' by collectors, were based on similar designs produced for the colony of Nova Scotia. The stamps arrived in Tasmania and were issued on 1 November 1870. The 10d stamp was required to meet the 10d per ½ ounce letter rate to England via Marseilles in France. In an ironic turn of events the 10d postage rate was abolished due to the closure of the route through France resulting from the Franco-Prussian War. Thus the 10d saw little postal use although the stamp remained on sale until the early 1900's. A similar fate befell the 4d Blue. The inland letter rate was reduced from 4d to 2d effective 1 November 1870, rendering the 4d Blue obsolete upon issue. Very few of the 4d were sold and the stamp is considered the rarest basic Tasmanian postage stamp.

Different watermarks, shades and perforations abound in the Sideface series making them popular amongst collectors.

A 3d Brown stamp was issued in 1871 to meet the 3d inter-colonial ship letter rate together with a 5/- mauve which was mainly used for stamp duty purposes. Later in 1871 a 9d Blue was issued to meet the 9d per ½ ounce ship letter rate via Brindisi in Italy, which became with new "fast" route to England. The decrease in this rate in 1876 to 8d saw use of the 4d stamp revived, this time printed in shades of Yellow. In 1878 further stamps were ordered from De La Rue in England, namely an 8d Brown and new plates to print the 1d and 2d.



The 1d and 2d were supplied from England from 1878 until the late 1890s however the failure of supplies to arrive saw occasional printings of the 1d undertaken at the Hobart *Mercury*. These local printings of the 1d are in vibrant shades and are popular with collectors.

The establishment of a ½d newspaper rate in 1889 saw the 1d overprinted 'Halfpenny'. The overprinting forme contained an error with the "al" in halfpenny placed sideways. A few sheets were printed with this error until it was corrected. The overprint stamp was however only an interim measure until a ½d plate and supply of stamps could be obtained from Melbourne.

Tasmania was admitted to the Universal Postal Union (the "U.P.U") in 1891. The UPU sought to regularize mail regulations amongst member countries and established a standard 2½d postage rate between member countries. As a result Tasmania required a 2½d stamp which was produced by overprinting the 9d Sideface which had long fallen into disuse. There are a number of overprint types and shades to interest the collector. The stamp contains a notable error – the double overprint, one of which is inverted.

The Sideface stamps were supplemented by the Keyplate series in 1892 with both series doing service through the 1890s. The 8d and 9d values continued to be used after Federation and were printed in Melbourne due to the transfer of postal operations to the Commonwealth after 1901.



THE KEYPLATE STAMPS 1892



By the early 1890's the stamp issues of Tasmania were something of a jumbled mess. The Sideface stamps were in use along with temporary overprints, revenue stamps were pressed into postal service and even the old 6d Chalon from 1858 was printed in 1891. A new series – comprising ½d, 2½d, 5d, 6d, 1/-, 2/6d, and 10/- - were ordered from De La Rue in London and placed on sale in 1892. Shortly after 10d (1899), 5/- and £1 (1897) values were also ordered. These stamps became known as “keyplates” or “tablets” due to the method of production. Each printing plate (from the 5d value upwards) was made in two sections – the master design and the value tablet – which enabled the stamps to be printed in two colours. By this time stamp production had become so sophisticated that there are not any platable varieties or errors on the London-printed stamps of this series. The 1/- and 10/- were later printed in Melbourne after Federation and watermark and perforation varieties are available. This series is however rich in proof and colour trial material and examples of the higher values on cover are scarce. The 5d was overprinted 1½d in 1904 to meet the foreign postcard rate and many overprint varieties exist on this stamp.

THE PICTORIALS 1899 – 1912

In 1899 new stamps were ordered from De la Rue in London. The stamps, comprising ½d, 1d, 2d, 2½d, 3d, 4d, 5d and 6d values, featured wilderness scenes and represented the first use of stamps for tourism purposes. Photography had made rapid advances over the previous two decades which allowed photographers to escape the studio and venture deep to the bush to capture iconic scenes. Most of the series was based on the work of famous Tasmanian photographer John Watt Beattie. The 2½d stamp featuring Tasman's Arch was a late inclusion. The stamp was originally intended to feature St Columba Falls. During the planning stages an essay was produced in London which in error titled the scene 'St Columbia Falls'. The pictorial stamps were progressively released over 1899 and 1900. Until this time 'barred numerals' were used by post offices to cancel stamps. It was considered however that the numerals were too effective in cancelling the new stamps by obliterating the designs. As a result the numerals were withdrawn and replaced by 'circular date stamps' which did not have such a defacing effect on the stamps. This decision produced what would become in later decades one of the most popular philatelic collectables – 'postmarks on



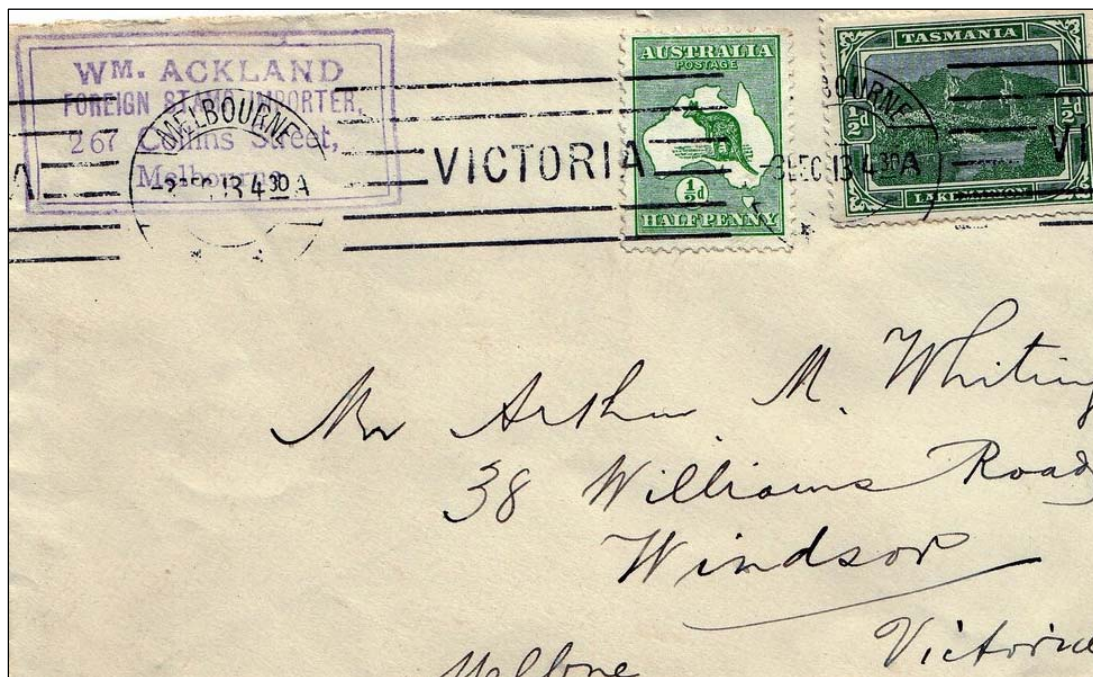
Prepared for publication on the Internet by the Tasmanian Philatelic Society <http://www.tps.org.au> pictorials'. Some of the tiny villages in Tasmania were open for a short period of time due to population shifts and the opening and closing of mines, producing rare postmarks such as Teepookana, Glazier's Bay, Verona and Honeywood.

The original printings of the pictorials were produced by recess printing. Later printings undertaken in Melbourne were produced by Lithography and Typography which has resulted in a multiplicity of plate varieties, shades, watermark and perforations variants making the pictorial series one of the most philatelically interesting.



Although the Commonwealth took control of postal affairs after federation in 1901 a uniform Australian stamp was not issued until 1913 – the famous 'Kangaroo and Map' series. Due to a delay in producing the 1d Kangaroo, the 2d pictorial was overprinted 'One Penny' in late 1912. Whilst the Kangaroo stamps were sold in Tasmania from early 1913, the pictorial series continued to be used until supplies were exhausted. Thus pictorial stamps can be found with 1913 postmarks or occasionally on cover or postcard alongside the Kangaroo stamps. In late 1914 all 'State' stamps were withdrawn from sale from Australian post offices.

Left: John Watt Beattie with his camera equipment on horseback, 1894 (Courtesy: State Library of Tasmania).



1913 cover with combination of Pictorial (1/2d Lake Marion) and Kangaroo stamps

REVENUES

At various times during Tasmania's history postage and revenue stamps became interchangeable. Thus revenue stamps can be found with postal cancellations and many philatelists include them in their collections. The St George & Dragon stamps are occasionally found with postal cancellations. The Platypus stamps of 1880 were heavily used for postal purposes although examples on cover are now scarce and highly valued.

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