



Tasmania's Embossed Platypus used as Postage: Stamp Duty? or Curiosity? or Postal Stationery?

David McNamee

Some of the most intriguing items ever to pass through the Tasmanian mails are the handful of newspaper wrappers carrying the impressed/embossed Platypus Stamp Duty. During 1892-1895, ten wrappers have now been recorded that went through the mails.

The Post Office Regulations that came into effect 1 January 1882 implemented the 1881 Postal Act [45 VIC 13] and clearly states in section 49 that postage stamps must be used exclusively for postal purposes and revenue stamps whether *impressed or adhesive* [emphasis added] for paying stamp duties.¹

This separation was a burden compared to previous practices, which were reported in *The Mercury* (Hobart) 20 September 1882 during a discussion by the Colonial Treasurer about proposed changes to postal operations, including "reversion to the old practice of using revenue and postal stamps indiscriminately."

The Postal-Fiscal Era

The *Hobart Gazette* on 27 October 1882 printed the announcement of change from Treasury that "Postage Stamps may be used for the purposes for which Revenue Stamps have heretofore been required to be used, and Revenue Stamps may be used for postal purposes."²

From 1 November 1882, the postal-fiscal era (dual-purpose stamps) in Tasmania began, and it lasted until the Federation of Australian Colonies transferred the Colonial Posts to the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 December 1900. The postal-fiscal scheme was an efficient use of resources, because the Tasmanian Government did not have to print separate issues for postage and revenue duties. This was a practice in other colonies as well.



Figure 1: 7 August 1893 Launceston, Tasmania wrapper to London, UK
3d Embossed Platypus Stamp Duty PTPO paying the printed matter rate
Endorsed "Printed Matter. / WF Petterd" at lower left

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For subscription information, please contact the Editor of the journal, David McNamee via email dmcnamee@aol.com. Current rates are US\$17 (North America post paid) or US\$22 (elsewhere).



Figure 2: Partial 6d front posted in Hobart 12 April 1892

Although Postal Regulations did not explicitly permit it, the language of the Treasury Regulations appeared to permit the use of impressed revenue stamps for postage. Treasury Regulations implemented 1 November 1882 cited the Stamp Duties Amendment Act of 1880 [43 VIC 14] Section 3 which defined “stamp” as either adhesive or impressed.

Printed to Private Order Wrappers

Before 1897, Tasmania did not issue wrappers with postal indicia; however, from 1882 customers could have postal indicia applied to their own wrappers (printed-to-private-order, or PTPO), or they could use adhesives. During the early 1890s, at least one enterprising philatelist took advantage of the ambiguity in the regulations to have a small number of wrappers made up with the impressed Platypus Stamp Duty in denominations of 2d, 3d and 6d. Contemporaries like Basset Hull did not believe that the embossed Platypus Stamp Duties on wrappers surfacing at that time were valid for postage, and he frowned on these “curiosities.”³

PTPO wrappers embossed with a postal indicia by the Government Printer required minimum orders of 480 at one time⁴; however, impressed revenue duty stamps were applied to legal documents one at a time at the Stamping Office at the Post Office in Hobart or Launceston.⁵ That may explain why so few of these Embossed Platypus wrappers exist versus hundreds of postal indicia wrappers.

In addition to the ten wrappers that went through the mail, SAS/O Member **Wayne Menuz** illustrates one of each of the values 2d, 3d and 6d unused in his 1993 article in *Postal Stationery*.⁶ Another set of these three mint values were sold by Status International in 2006 (2d, 6d) and Prestige Philatelic Auctions in 2007 (3d). A census of collectors accounts for four more, which could mean that there are less than 12 known used and a similar number mint.

That these items are philatelically inspired we have no doubt. The newspaper wrapper illustrated in Fig. 1 (page 1) was sent by William Frederick Petterd (13 July 1849 - 15

Table 1: Census of postally used Platypus Stamp Duty wrappers

2d	12 MAR 1892	Launceston	London
2d	18 OCT 1895	Launceston	Hobart
2d	28 FEB 1894	Launceston	Adelaide
2d	ca. 1893-96?	Launceston	America?
3d	7 AUG 1893	Launceston	London
3d	22 MAR 1894	Launceston	Adelaide
6d	12 APR 1892	Hobart	???
6d	26 MAR 1894	Launceston	Adelaide
6d	18 APR 1894	Launceston	Adelaide
6d	18 OCT 1895	Launceston	Hobart

April 1910), a Launceston amateur geologist and zoologist as well as a philatelist, to James Reynolds Gregory (29 December 1832 - 15 December 1899), a London dealer in mineral specimens and also a philatelist. The two men shared an interest in meteorites as well as stamps.

Petterd was a member of the Committee that put on the Tasmanian International Exhibition at Launceston 1891-1892, and his name can be found on Exhibition envelopes franked with the Launceston Corporation frank stamp.⁷

(August 16, 1877) calv

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Figure 3: Advertisement for James R. Gregory, Mineralogist



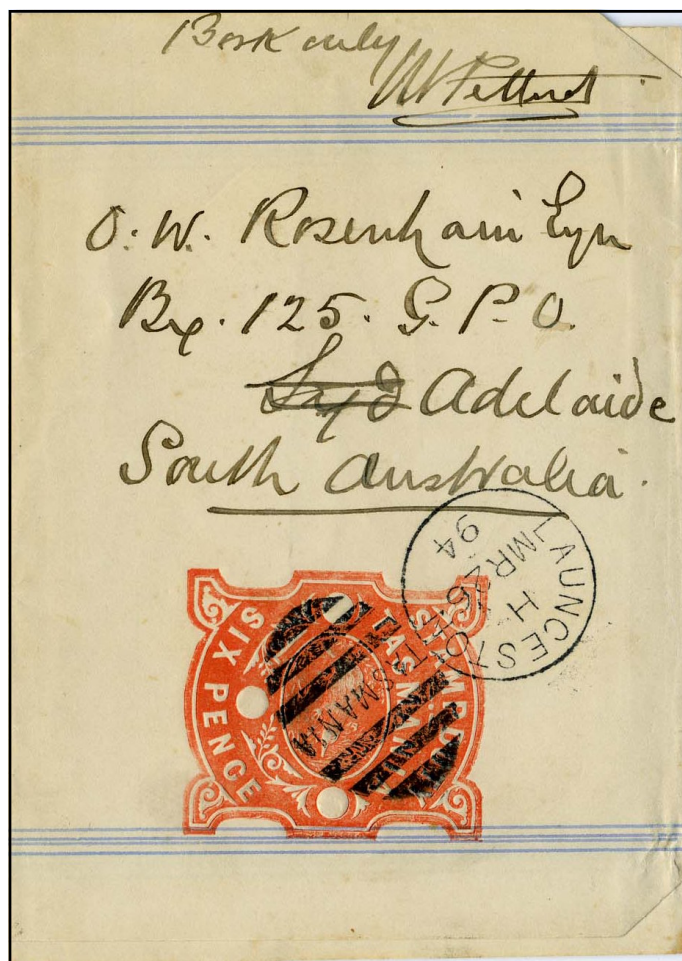
Figure 4: Petterd's 2d to London 12 March 1892

Gregory had collected mineral specimens since he was eight years old. By the time of his mail from Petterd, he was the leading dealer in mineral specimens and fossils in London, focusing on serving collectors and museums. The advertisement from the British magazine *Nature* 16 August 1877 (Fig. 3) provides a glimpse into his operations at 88 Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square. A successor company still operates in London under the name of Gregory, Bottley and Lloyd, "London's Oldest Mineral Shop – Since 1858."

Petterd is credited with the discovery and naming of several minerals in Tasmania not found in Australia, and he wrote a number of articles on his finds published in the *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Tasmania*. He bequeathed his collection of 2500 mineral specimens to the Society.



Figure 5: Petterd's 2d to Adelaide 28 February 1894



Figures 6 and 7: 6d wrappers from Petterd to Oscar W. Rosenhain in Adelaide during March and April 1894

It is not known whether the two rockhound-philatelists ever met in person. Gregory traveled extensively seeking minerals and gems, and he was a major buyer and builder of mineral collections. He brought back the first specimens of crocidolite from Griqualand on a trip to Cape Colony seeking diamonds. Gregory exhibited at the International Exposition in Sydney in 1879, and it is possible the two men met there, or perhaps through the mails.

Petterd's signature also appears on the 2d mailed to Stanley Gibbons in London sold by Robson Lowe as Lot



Figures 8 and 9: The 2d and 6d Platypus on different types of wrappers (ex-Cress) posted the same day to Ulph in Hobart

#551 in his 24 July 1979 sale (Fig. 4). Petterd's signature appears on seven of the ten known used examples – all but the two posted to Hobart and the one posted in Hobart.

The four wrappers to Adelaide are all addressed to Oscar William Rosenhain (1860-1917), an amateur naturalist and a member of the Philatelic Society of South Australia (Figs. 5, 6 and 7, previous page). Fig. 6 was sold in the Feldman auction in 1987, and the 2d is in a private collection. SAS/O Member **Malcolm Groom** once owned a 3d (ex-Tinsley, not illustrated, also now in a private collection) that was mailed to Rosenhain in Adelaide 22 March 1894.

The 2d and 6d used to Hobart (Figs. 8 and 9) both are addressed to Harold John Ulph (3 December 1859 - 30 May 1922) at Heathorn's Hotel and posted on the same day, 18 October 1895. The address is mostly printed rather than script, so we cannot be certain it is Petterd's hand. Ulph was a traveling salesman representing top British hardware manufacturers, based at offices in 56 Market Street, Sydney. He had a regular schedule of visits to clients in the major port cities of Australia and New Zealand, so his receiving mail at Heathorn's Hotel is consistent with his travel patterns. His obituary⁸ stated that he was a nature lover and a consummate philatelist (like Petterd), with one of the most valuable collections of early Australia and New Zealand stamps at the time of his death in 1922. Ulph died on the steamer *Omar* crossing the Red Sea on the way to visit his mother in Britain.

SAS/O Member **John Cress** once owned the 3d to London (Fig. 1) and both wrappers to Ulph in Hobart, all sold at auction in 2003. The 6d Ulph wrapper changed hands again 18 February 2004 at the Millennium Philatelic Auctions Sale #10 as Lot #401, which is the last auction sale of these postally used items recorded to date.

Some Preliminary Conclusions

All the impressed duties are on wrappers, and all but one were posted from Launceston, so Petterd may have been the source of all of the wrappers, even if his name is

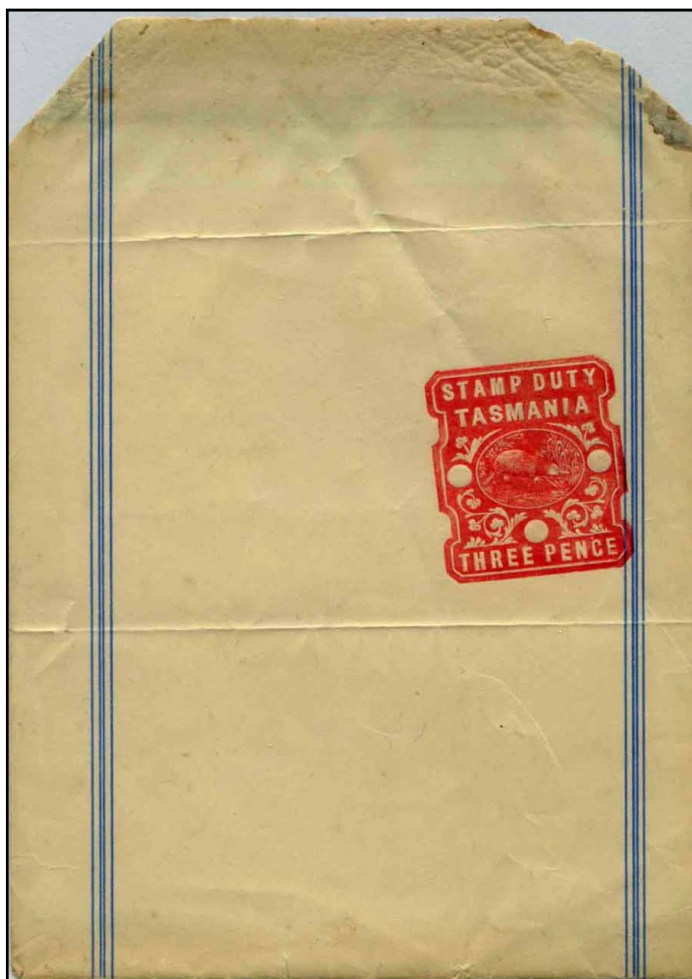


Fig. 10: A mint example of the 3d wrapper poorly aligned and printed in a deeper red than the 3d vermillion in Fig. 1

not on the Ulph copies and the one posted in Hobart. That he was the only Tasmanian philatelist involved in posting these wrappers, it is not possible to tell for certain.

There are several sets of these embossed Platypus wrappers unused still extant. SAS/O Member **Dave Elsmore** has identified at least two shades of ink: vermillion

(examples Fig. 1, 5 and 6) and a deep red or carmine (examples Fig. 4 and 10). Basset Hull states that the original ink ordered was bright red, which may equate to the vermilion color.⁹ The two inks, carmine (or deep red) and vermilion, implies that these wrappers were created at different times, perhaps over a span of years. They are definitely different ink colors.

There are also two different types of wrapper papers: one with all blue lines, and one with blue-and-red lines. Note for example, the Ulph wrappers Figs. 8 and 9, both posted 18 October 1895. This may mean that they were impressed at different times. The dates of posting do not necessarily equate to the dates impressed.

The 2d dies on Fig. 5 (posted 1894) and Fig. 11 (unreadable date) show a break in the bottom frame that Fig. 4 (posted 1892) does not. Only one die of each value was ordered from De La Rue in London,¹⁰ so this implies also that the wrappers may have been produced at different times.



Figure 11: Cut out of 2d wrapper to America?
Dated >1892 by damage to the bottom frame

Acknowledgements

This article has been the first attempt to bring all of the knowledge together that we have about the usage of these interesting curiosities, as Basset Hull called them.

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References and End Notes

1. Orchard, A. E., *Tasmanian Postal Acts and Regulations, Part 5: 1880-1882*; Weston Creek: Magpie Pub., 2000, p. 89.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 142. Dave Elsmore was particularly helpful in pointing out *The Mercury* article in the preceding paragraph and providing Treasury Regulations.

3. Hull, A. F. Basset, "Tasmania," *Vindin's Philatelic Monthly*, Vol. VI No. 4, November 22, 1892, p. 47. Basset Hull reports that the Post Office stated that the embossed platypus on wrapper was not valid for postage. In a subsequent article "Australian Postal Fiscals," *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal*, March 31, 1896, Vol. VI No. 69, pp. 164-165, he labeled impressed revenue stamps used postally without official sanction as "curiosities." Tinsley, *Stamps and Postal History*, London: RPSL, 1986, p. 97 said the embossed wrappers were "in theory valid for postage."
4. Lloyd-Smith, Bill, "The Status of Tasmania's Postal Fiscals," *Philately from Australia*, Vol. 50 No. 1, March 1998, pp. 15-21. Lloyd-Smith has written several earlier articles on the same subject for *Philately from Australia*.
5. Dave Elsmore, by email 27 October 2009, and A. F. Basset Hull, *The Stamps of Tasmania*, Chapter XVIII "Impressed Revenue Stamps and Postal Notes," pp. 117-120.
6. Menuz, Wayne, "Revenues and Postal Stationery," *Postal Stationery*, Vol. 35 No. 3, May-June 1993, pp. 85-88.
7. Mishkel, Maurice, web site: *Australian Postal History & Social Philately*, www.auspostalhistory.com.
8. "The Late Harold J. Ulph," *The Australasian Traveller's Gazette*, 6 July 1922, furnished by Colin Ulph (UK) by email 9 November 2009. Information separately confirmed by John Mathews review of records in contemporary publications.
9. Basset Hull, *The Stamps of Tasmania*, p. 120. The original order in 1881 was for enough ink for 36,000 stamps.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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