

Tattersalls and the Post Office

By RICHARD BRECKON

Tattersalls, Australia's most famous lottery, has a fascinating association with Australian philatelic and postal history. For almost three decades after Federation, the Postmaster-General's Department took the extreme step of banning the delivery of mail to Tattersalls. The story of this postal ban (and how Tattersalls largely managed to circumvent it) is an interesting part of Australian postal history. Enormous holdings of the mail that did get through to Tattersalls have survived to the present day and this material has been a rich source of information concerning Australian postal markings. Finally, the size and nature of the Tattersalls operation was the *real* reason why States' stamps were not replaced by a Commonwealth stamp issue immediately following Federation. Before expanding on these statements, it is useful to detail the background to Tattersalls' emergence as a major lottery.

The Rise of Tattersalls

Tattersalls was created by George Adams (1839-1904), a prominent figure in Sydney's horse racing scene. Adams was a manager of a hotel, called Tattersall's, in Sydney and he used his premises to conduct sweeps on races. His first sweep was for the 1881 Sydney Cup for which 2,000 tickets at £1 each were sold out. Actually, lotteries in New South Wales had been outlawed since 1844, but since a sweep was based on the outcome of a horse race, and not on sheer chance, Adams was able to carry out his schemes. He prospered, but in doing so he earned the ire of conservative elements in the community. Thrift and hard work were the attributes of Victorian era morality - the easy gaining of money through gambling was to be deplored. In 1892, the New South Wales government banned horse racing sweeps.



George Adams (1839-1904) was the man who started Tattersalls Sweeps and incurred the displeasure of anti-gambling sections of the community. The Federal Government's action in 1902 in placing a prohibition on delivering any mail to Tattersalls' office in Hobart did not cause the firm to close down.

The New South Wales ban led George Adams to transfer his sweep business to Brisbane, but shortly afterwards Queensland also banned his operations. Adams' response was to go to the Tasmanian government to negotiate an agreement to allow Tattersalls to operate in that State. Tasmania was somewhat impoverished and although it generally adhered to the anti-gambling sentiment of the time, it was thought more desirable to earn revenue out of a well-conducted gambling organisation like Tattersalls. Consequently, Tasmania passed legislation in 1896 to license Tattersalls as a legal lottery, but Tattersalls was only permitted to sell lottery tickets through the post (Tasmania would not allow betting shops with their unsavoury atmosphere to flourish). In those days, Tattersalls offered 5/-, 10/- and £1 sweep tickets in the more prestigious races with major prizes for the place-getters and other participating horses, as well as minor cash prizes for other ticket draws. In later years, draws for outright cash prizes took prominence over sweep stakes and Tattersalls' £10,000 first prize lottery became renowned as every Australian's dream windfall. Tattersalls remained in Hobart, conducting business throughout Australia and New Zealand until 1954, when disagreement with the Tasmanian government over taxes led to Tattersalls moving their headquarters to Melbourne. Today, Tattersalls continue to operate from Melbourne, but other States have long since had their own lotteries and Tattersalls mainly services Victoria and Tasmania.

Postal Bans

The first effort to suppress the operation of Tattersalls by means of a postal ban was made in New South Wales. The *Government Gazette* carried an announcement

by the Colony's Postmaster-General that from 14 August 1893 no mail addressed to "Tattersall, c/o G. Adams, Pitt-street" could be accepted or delivered. Following Adams' relocation to Brisbane, the Queensland Postmaster-General issued a gazettal announcement that delivery of mail to Tattersalls would be banned from 1 January 1895.

One example is known of a cover refused delivery under the New South Wales ban. It was mailed locally in Sydney on 19 August 1893, five days after the ban went into effect and carries on the reverse an 78mm x 18mm boxed cachet in purple reading "POSTAL COMMUNICATIONS &c./RELATING TO LOTTERIES &c. ARE/PROHIBITED IN NEW SOUTH WALES" (Christies Robson Lowe Australasia Sale, 22 February 1984, Lot 77). A second type of cachet, also boxed (67mm x 41mm) and in purple ink, has been reported as used in 1899 on mail to lottery promoters. It reads "LETTERS &c. TO THIS AD-/DRESS ARE RETURNED/ BY ORDER OF THE POST-/MASTER GENERAL OF N. S./WALES, UNDER THE 19th/SECTION OF THE POSTAL/ACT 56 VICTORIÆ No. 31/RELATING TO LOTTERIES". Illustrations of the two cachets appear on page 217 of *The Postal History of New South Wales 1788-1901*.

The type of cachet that Queensland would have used following the introduction of its ban in 1895 is a mystery - no example of a cover addressed to Tattersalls during the short period that it operated in Brisbane has been reported.

Although Tattersalls did not operate in Victoria at this stage, it is of interest to mention that as early as 1883 the Victorian Post Office amended its postal legislation to allow postal bans to be placed on lotteries,



Mail that Tattersalls did not receive! The "TRANSMISSION AND DELIVERY PROHIBITED" handstamp (in red ink) has been applied to the cover in the G.P.O. Hobart to prevent its delivery. It seems curious that the sender would have posted it in Hobart, but under Tattersalls' licence from the Tasmanian Government, all sales of tickets had to be by mail - there were no counter sales.

gambling activities and fortune-tellers. The Victorian *Government Gazette* regularly announced prohibitions of mail delivery to persons discovered to be engaged in these activities. However, examples of such mail must be very rare or perhaps non-existent as no published reference seems to have been made to the kind of prohibited marking the Victorian Post Office might have used.

Following Federation, Tattersalls' operation in Tasmania came under threat. The conduct of lotteries continued to be a matter for State law but, of course, postal services were now the responsibility of the Federal government. Anti-gambling groups were quick to pressure the Postmaster-General to institute a nation-wide ban on mail addressed to Tattersalls in Hobart. The Postmaster-General had the authority to ban the delivery of mail to "persons engaged in promoting lotteries or schemes of chance, or in conducting indecent business, &c" under Section 57 of the Post and Telegraph Act of 1901 – the new federal legislation passed to set up the Postmaster-General's Department. In a notice dated 31 January 1902 in the *Commonwealth Gazette*, the Postmaster-General announced that mail addressed to Tattersalls in Hobart would not be accepted or delivered. The ban took effect from 31 March 1902. Here was an extraordinary situation – the Federal government was trying to suppress an organisation that operated quite legally under State law so long as it used the Federal postal services!

The cachet used in the Commonwealth period was a two-line marking (68mm x 21mm) set between double bars above and below: "TRANSMISSION AND/DELIVERY PROHIBITED". It was struck in red (and sometimes in violet) at the Hobart G.P.O. on incoming mail addressed to Tattersalls. Mr Malcolm Groom of Hobart has shown me a cover which is presumably one of the earliest Tattersalls' covers to be prohibited from delivery. It is addressed to Tattersalls and postmarked in Adelaide on 26 March 1902, five days before the ban took effect. By the time it reached Hobart, the ban had come into operation and the cover received the "PROHIBITED" handstamp.

Other States apparently used cachets on Tattersalls mail intercepted in that State. A cover from Queensland has been reported stamped with a two-line cachet in violet (75mm x 11mm): "POSTED IN CONTRAVENTION OF SECTION 57 POST AND TELEGRAPH ACT 1901". The cachet was evidently applied in Brisbane as the Dead Letter Office, Brisbane c.d.s. of 10 April 1902 is struck in the same coloured ink (covers for Tattersalls that were stopped by the Post Office were returned to their senders). However, I have not been able to locate any published references to what postal markings might have been used in other States.

The postal ban on Tattersalls might have been expected to have had a crippling effect, but Tattersalls adopted measures which largely made nonsense of the Federal Government's efforts. After the postal ban, Tattersalls advertised that customers could buy tickets by sending mail addressed to themselves, care of No. 6 Stock Exchange, Collins Street, Hobart. This necessitated authority forms being signed by customers to allow Tattersalls to collect the mail from the Stock Exchange. Over the years, Tattersalls established a wide network of agents who would accept applications for Tattersalls tickets from the public. In suburbs and towns throughout Australia, publicans, newsagents, tobacconists, hairdressers, chemists and other small businesses acted as agents – "We correspond with Hobart" was the usual cryptic notice displayed in the business premises of agents which was understood by all

NOTICE.

Clients can at all times remit by Unregistered Letters to their own name, No. 6 Stock Exchange, Hobart. This course will simplify delivery; but when doing so please let amount be in the form of Postal Notes or Bank Drafts, and Cross same to ensure safety.

Should you desire to Register your Letter to yourself, 6 Stock Exchange, containing remittance please sign the authority below, and send same to your own name Unregistered,

No. 6 STOCK EXCHANGE,

Collins-street, Hobart,

so that we can produce your authority to the Post Office to obtain your Registered Letters.

AUTHORITY.

TO THE DEPUTY POSTMASTER-GENERAL,
Hobart.

I hereby authorise the Secretary of the Hobart Stock Exchange, or his Deputy, or any person appointed in writing for the purpose by either of them, to act as my Agent in Hobart to receive and sign for my registered letters until this authority is countermanded.

Name *John Evans*

Full address *of Block 14 S. M. Co.
Broken Hill N.S.W.*

An authority signed by a customer granting permission to Tattersalls to collect registered mail containing the customer's application for sweepstake tickets. As an early means of circumventing the postal ban, customers were advised to address mail to themselves, care of the Stock Exchange, where Tattersalls would arrange to have the mail collected.

except the most unworldly members of the community. Customers and agents of Tattersalls also used freight companies to deliver ticket applications to Hobart.

One company, the Tasmanian Parcels Express Delivery Co., advertised that "small parcels" could be shipped to Tasmania at a cost of 3d each. The company announced that they were "... in no way connected with George Adams or 'Tattersalls'" and that they were "... bona fide carriers and we undertake to forward parcels anywhere." However, there is no doubt that the company catered primarily to the need to transmit ticket applications to Tattersalls (of course, by shipping the applications as freight they were not in breach of the Post Office's letter monopoly). Also, the Tasmanian government offered its railway system to help Tattersalls beat the postal ban by establishing a railway parcels service in 1903.

If their activities were detected, the agents faced postal bans themselves and each year the Postmaster-General's Department introduced about 20 to 30 prohibitions on the delivery of mail to persons suspected of acting on behalf of lotteries or gambling organisations. (Not all these prohibitions involved Tattersalls. In October 1907, two of Australia's leading bookmakers, John Wren of Melbourne and Hugo Oxenham of Sydney had postal bans on themselves or any agents of theirs announced in the *Commonwealth Gazette*). In Hobart, other agents acted as collection points for mail to Tattersalls. Usually these

Oeta
Macdonald St
Paddington
Sydney
Feb 2nd 1902

Mr George Adams
Hobart

Dear Sir,

I am one of the great public of Federated Australia who resent the unjust and unjustifiable action of the Government in refusing to deliver letters addressed to you and though I've all hope that you will yet be able to find means of avoiding this great injustice and disappointment, I am taking the liberty of writing to suggest a means of communication that may or may not commend itself to you. Could you not establish a private post-office in all the great cities? The letters could still be registered as in the General Post Offices, or could it be worked automatically in the "penny in the slot" system - dropping the letter in and receiving a number in return, that same number to be printed in the letter as it falls in.

Pardon me if you think I have taken an undue liberty in venturing to make this suggestion, and believe me,

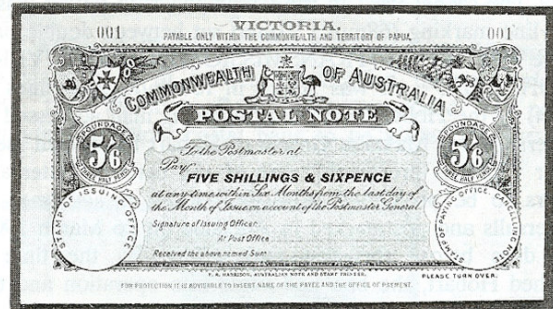
Yours Truly
Alice M Dale

A letter from a Sydney customer of Tattersalls written after the decision to prohibit Tattersalls' mail had been announced, outlines a somewhat impractical suggestion for overcoming the ban.

were employees of Tattersalls who had mail addressed to themselves, care of various institutions or businesses in Hobart. The Commercial Bank seems to be the predominant point for collecting mail for some years after the postal ban commenced, until it too found itself the subject of a postal ban in the lead-up to the 1911 Melbourne Cup. The Commercial Bank had its mail stopped for five days before it gave an undertaking to the Postmaster-General's Department that it would cease to act as a collecting point for Tattersalls' mail. Some indication of the size of Tattersalls' business can be seen from the fact that 100,000 letters to the Bank were prohibited for delivery in this single, pre-Cup week and returned to their senders. It is interesting to note from press reports of the affair that the prohibited mail was returned under the same arrangements as incorrectly-addressed mail, i.e., the mail was returned free of postage to the sender. Also, prohibited mail that contained 10/- or more in remittances for Tattersalls' tickets was returned under registered post, free of charge, by the Dead Letter Office.

The agents for Tattersalls also risked prosecution in States where the operation of lotteries was banned. In South Australia it was even illegal to be in possession of a lottery ticket! However, generally speaking, State police forces were not diligent about prosecuting lottery agents and Tattersalls suffered little in running their operations. It is a measure of how efficiently and honestly Tattersalls operated their business (and how keen Australians are to gamble) that Tattersalls did not suffer through the postal ban, notwithstanding that there was never a guarantee that mailed ticket applications would ever reach Hobart (they were not addressed to Tattersalls anyway). Clearly, the postal ban had little effect on Tattersalls' operations as the firm grew steadily over the years.

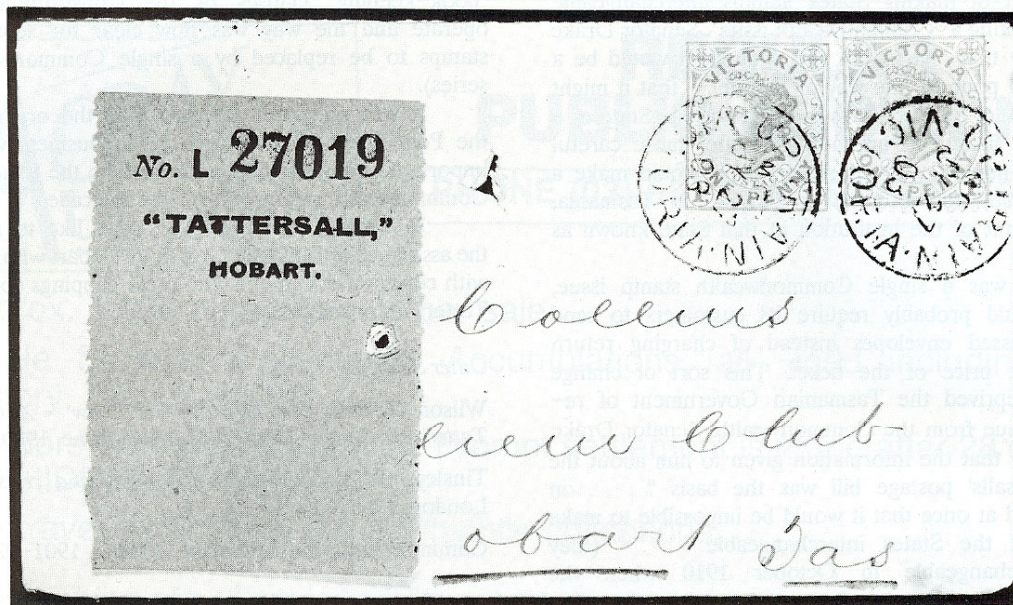
The Commonwealth postal ban on Tattersalls remained in force until 13 November 1930 when the Postmaster-General, J.A. Lyons rose in Parliament to announce that after 28 years the ban had been lifted (appropriately, Lyons was a former Premier of Tasmania in which role he would have encouraged Tattersalls as they were an important source of State government revenue). The Post Office's position regarding Tattersalls had become "invidious" in Lyons' description, as no action had been taken to prohibit mail deliveries to "Golden Casket" established in 1920 by the Queensland Government and which solicited mail order sales of tickets in New South Wales where lotteries were still banned. As well as the ban on Tattersalls, bans were lifted on 123 other addresses, mostly in Hobart and Launceston, which had been acting on behalf of Tattersalls and other lotteries. Some of these addresses had been on the prohibited list for up to 20 years. The Post Office had been embarrassed in 1924 when it introduced a 5/6d postal note; an unusual denomination, but an amount that was frequently requested by purchasers of Tattersalls' tickets. To reduce the workload of postal clerks, the Post Office had made it simpler for people to deal with Tattersalls! Another anomaly concerned the Post Office's willingness to transmit telegrams openly addressed to Tattersalls in Hobart from their agents around Australia. It seems bizarre that Hobart G.P.O. staff delivered telegrams to Tattersalls, but not letters.



The "Tattersalls" postal note introduced in 1924. The odd denomination of 5/6d was the amount commonly requested by people for purchasing lottery tickets. Consequently, the Post Office was making it easier for people to deal with an organisation they were trying to suppress.

The Tattersalls' Find

Probably the most significant discovery in Australian philately is the enormous accumulation of covers that forms the "Tattersalls' Find". No other material has provided such an important source of information on Australian postal history. The Tattersalls hoard turned up in Tasmania in 1958. It comprised a huge quantity of pieces torn from envelopes received by Tattersalls, mainly in the period 1897-1904. These had been stored in sacks under a house in Hobart for many years and were acquired by a Hobart stamp dealer, Mr T.E. Petterd. At a later stage further material, including large quantities of intact covers, spanning a wider time period, have surfaced onto the market. The material that was first discovered 30 years ago was examined by three Melbourne philatelists, Bill Purves, Hugh Campbell and Alan Brown. Covering all Australian States, but with the majority from New South Wales and Victoria,



Mail that Tattersalls did receive. This 1903 cover from Victoria is addressed to a Mr Collins, care of the Athenaeum Club in Hobart, and is an example of how Tattersalls continued to receive mail after the postal ban by having it addressed to agents (often their employees) care of institutions and businesses in Hobart. This cover is one of the numerous ones deriving from the Tattersalls find of 30 years ago, although the majority have had the Tattersalls file label removed. All covers from the Find have been spiked.

the material was generally large pieces showing both the numeral obliterator and the office datestamp, providing "ties" to a great many numerals. For example, of the 2,089 numbers known to exist in New South Wales the Tattersalls hoard provided certain or probable "ties" for well over 1,300 or about two-thirds of the total. The result was a publication, *New South Wales Numeral Cancellations* by Alan G. Brown and Hugh M. Campbell in 1963. The same year also saw the publication of *Victoria: The "Barred Numeral" Cancellations 1856-1912* by J.R.W. Purves, for which the Tattersalls hoard provided the author with a good deal of material needed to complete this work. Hugh Campbell's *Queensland Cancellations and Other Postal Markings 1860-1913*, published in 1977 "could not have been written if it had not been for the Tattersalls' Find", as the author states in the book's Preface.

Melbourne dealer Ray Kelly, who has handled a large proportion of the Tattersalls' find (he was still able to buy Tattersalls covers by the sackful from a Hobart source up to the early 1970s) estimates that the Tattersalls' find probably amounted to around one quarter of a million covers in total.

Tattersalls and Uniform Commonwealth Stamps

At the beginning of this article reference was made to the key role that Tattersalls activities in Tasmania played in causing the postal authorities not to issue Commonwealth stamps immediately following Federation. Tattersalls was the *real* reason why Commonwealth stamps did not appear. This statement probably comes as a surprise to most readers and in fact I was not aware of the link between Tattersalls and stamps until I read the remarks of the Postmaster-General, Senator J.G. Drake, to the Federal

Parliament in 1901. To begin with, some background to the effect of Federation on stamps needs to be explained.

It is well known that the "book-keeping" clause of the Australian Constitution led to separate stamp issues for each State being continued for a decade following Federation. The Constitution contained a clause specifying that the Commonwealth Government was to reimburse State governments with a proportion of the revenue earned by all government departments transferred from State to Commonwealth control. The revenue to be reimbursed was the surplus remaining after the departments' operating costs had been deducted from gross revenue. This reimbursement of revenue was to operate for at least five years after Federation (it was extended for a further five years until 1910). As far as postal services were concerned, the book-keeping clause of the constitution obliged the Commonwealth Government to operate postal services in each State as financially-separate entities. To facilitate the recording of each State's postal revenue, it was considered necessary to continue issuing separate stamps for each State and to restrict the postal validity of the stamps to the State concerned. Had a single Commonwealth stamp series been issued or had States' stamps been made valid for postage anywhere in Australia, stamp sales in each State would be only an approximate guide to the State's postal revenue. It was a common practice to forward unused stamps through the mail as a means of sending small remittances and the availability of a single Commonwealth stamp issue would have led to this practice being extended to interstate mail.

However, in a statement to Parliament on 4 July 1901, the Postmaster-General, Senator J.G. Drake, explained that he asked his Department to establish what would be the

monetary effect of making States' stamps interchangeable and thereby creating a "Commonwealth issue". Senator Drake went on to say that "At first it was thought it would be a matter of a few pounds, one way or another – that it might be an advantage of a few pounds in favour of one State or a few pounds in favour of another. But after more careful inquiries were made I was informed that it would make a difference of between £10,000 or £11,000 to Tasmania, solely on account of the institution in that State known as "Tattersall's."

If there was a single Commonwealth stamp issue, Tattersalls would probably require its customers to send stamped addressed envelopes instead of charging return postage in the price of the ticket. This sort of change would have deprived the Tasmanian Government of re-imbursed revenue from the Commonwealth. Senator Drake went on to say that the information given to him about the size of Tattersalls' postage bill was the basis " . . . on which I decided at once that it would be impossible to make the stamps of the States interchangeable . . . " (they became interchangeable in October 1910 when the

"book-keeping" clauses of the Constitution ceased to operate and the way was now clear for separate States' stamps to be replaced by a single Commonwealth stamp series).

It was an exquisite irony that the organisation that the Post Office did not wish to do business with, was an important enough customer to hold up the issue of uniform Commonwealth stamps for at least a decade.

In writing this article, I would like to acknowledge the assistance of Malcolm Groom of Hobart who provided me with copies of documents and press clippings concerning the Tattersalls postal ban.

Other Sources:

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