

'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Ten: Tall Tales & True from the not so Legendary Past

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I have been asked what my criteria are for selecting the covers discussed in this series. It is pretty simple really: they are items that are so unusual, so attractive, so rare, of such historical significance, or a combination of these elements that they delight the senses. They are "favourite" items because they satisfy my personal criteria for inclusion. They engage the mind, stimulate my aesthetic receptors, and have a compelling story to tell.

This is the tenth article in the run. The first milestone. I have no conclusion point. I certainly want to outdo the 20-article series I penned in the 1980s and 1990s about Postal Stationery, 'The Auction Game' and 'Postmark Points'. Of course, I serve at the pleasure of the Editor and the RPSV Council so the decision might be made for me to hang up my keyboard.

For the time being, we press on optimistically. I do hope you, dear reader, are entertained by my scribbings. I do receive some feedback, and am pleased to say it has all been positive, but I would also welcome constructive commentary and definitely any corrections you would like to share with me.

On this occasion, I thought I might take my lead from my co-contributor, Kevin Burt, introduce you to a rare registration label, and see where it might lead us.



My featured cover was used in 1919 from the small settlement of Parap outside Darwin, capital of the Northern Territory. But the registration label is inscribed 'PARAPARAP, N.T.' I believe that Paraparap is Australia's longest palindromic placename: that is, it is spelled the same forwards and backwards. (Tumut in New South Wales and Glenelg in South Australia are also palindromes.)

The original settlement 4km due north of Darwin was established in 1912 and apparently named Paraparap by the Commonwealth Administrator, Dr John Gilruth after a rural property of the same name at Moriac, south-west of Geelong. The first post office

opened under that name on American Independence Day, 4 July 1918. Ed Williams stated that the Deputy Postmaster-General (where?) "objected to this duplication of post office names" [1] and, in an official announcement of 12.10.1918, changed the name to Parap (another palindrome). According to Martin Walker, the post office name was changed on 1.12.1918 [2].



The original datestamp & the recut

The economy-minded postal authorities were unimpressed. Engraving a new steel datestamp was a significant expense. On this occasion, they decided to order the datestamp to be re-cut, filling in the original upper inscription, then re-engraving the new name 'PARAP' in somewhat larger and broader letters.

Allow me to digress. This was an advance on the similar technique used during the Australian Occupation of the former German New Guinea. Datestamps inscribed 'QUEENSLAND' at the base had been erroneously delivered to the small outposts of Kokopo and Namatanai. On that occasion, soft metal was used to fill the offending inscriptions. Unfortunately, the so-called 'makeready' wore-away revealing the original 'QUEENSLAND' which, on the 'KOKOPO' implement, was then excised.

The 'PARAP' recut was more successful, the datestamp still being serviceable in 1925. As for the 'PARAPARAP' registration labels, it was decided to use them up, resulting here in two different names of the same post office on the cover. I expect this is a rare "tie".



Flap of cover

The sender added an interesting endorsement to the flap, firstly his name, J van der Hane, abbreviated in the Dutch fashion to “v.d. Hane”. He then gave his address as “Vestey Bros/Darwin NT”.

The name “Vestey” will be well-known to the many readers who are familiar with the formidable collections of Western Australia and elsewhere formed by Lord Samuel Vestey and his forebears in England. He was for 20 years Master of the Horse to the Sovereign and died in February 2021. And yes, that is the connection here.

How a modest “provisioner” from Liverpool, one William Vestey, came to control the largest meatworks in Australia is a tale of global influence, greed and intrigue. He was able to purchase a hereditary peerage from Britain’s Prime Minister of the day, David Lloyd George.

In 1914, Vestey Bros acquired the enormous Wave Hill Station near the NT/WA border. They constructed their meatworks at Paraparap in the same year. The Vesteyes were widely regarded as harsh and mean-spirited taskmasters. Their half-century exploitation of Aboriginal stockmen on their cattle stations is a national disgrace, little-known to current generations.



A contemporary photograph of the Employees' Quarters at Vestey's Meatworks. Reproduced from: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2018-06-08/vesteys-darwin-abattoir-mothballed-100-years-before-aaco/9832926> (Image supplied by Northern Territory Library). It says all you need to know about how they treated their workforce.

At Vestey's slaughterhouse in Darwin, there was a shortage of potable water which, coupled with generally unsanitary conditions and the extreme heat, made for a rather disgruntled workforce. After only three seasons of operations, Vesteyes summarily closed the facility and threw hundreds of locals out of work. The company blamed the poor quality of the local cattle, most from their own properties, and labour indiscipline.

The real reason was that the workers had dared to challenge their imperialist masters. On 17 December 1918, almost 1,000 demonstrators marched on Government House to demand the resignation of Administrator Gilruth, he who had named Paraparap. Let us pause to consider that number. At the time, the (white) population of Darwin was about 1,300. Of course, the event involved numerous indigenous workers, but they were not included in the National Census until 1971! That's right: in our lifetime. Still, an aggregation of 1,000 souls in 1918 Darwin was an extraordinary occurrence.

The grievances of the protesters were aimed at Chinese immigration, the Commonwealth Government, which had assumed control of the Territory in 1911, and Vestey Brothers

Meatworks. Again, the story is too large to be consolidated into a few paragraphs. In short, Gilruth made a run for it, being escorted aboard HMAS *Encounter* and out of harm's way. Vesteyes wound-down the meatworks. And the Labor government of Andrew Fisher formally implemented the disgraceful White Australia Policy.



A contemporary photograph of workers participating in the Darwin Rebellion. There are at least 25 men, including several aborigines, in the photograph. [3]

The so-called Darwin Rebellion is widely regarded as the closest thing to a civil uprising in Australia since the infamous events at Ballarat's Eureka Stockade in 1854. Again, even those interested in Australian History may not be aware of it.

The meatworks were eventually mothballed in 1920. The Parap post office was collateral damage, being closed on 8.10.1921. The meatworks saw a brief revival in 1925. A second post office of the same name, not a re-opening as suggested elsewhere [4], functioned between 23.4.1925 and 30.9.1925 only. The original recut 'PARAP/NORTHERN TERRITORY' datestamp was returned to duty. Not surprisingly, strikes from this brief opening are rare.

If I have held your interest to this point, perhaps I should divert your attention back to the subject cover.

The addressee is Visser & Co at Weltevreden, on Java in the Netherlands Indies. The Dutch word “Boekhandel” translates as “bookstore”. Mr van der Hane was probably sending payment for reading matter in his native tongue. Visser & Co is also well-known as an early publisher of picture postcards of Batavia and other towns in what is now Indonesia.

The postal rate paid is interesting. The attractive KGV 4d orange Registration Envelope was uprated with a pair of KGV Penny Reds, making a total of 6d. This represented the foreign letter rate of 2½d plus the ½d per article War Tax introduced on 28.10.1918 plus 3d registration.

The War Tax is another interesting subject that cannot be fully discussed here. It is, however, noteworthy that it was introduced a mere 14 days before the Armistice was signed in France on 11 November 1918. The war had cost the government a (British) king's ransom so they were not in a hurry to scrap the new impost. In fact, it was charged on most postal articles (there's another story) until 1.10.1920 when, instead of being repealed, it was incorporated into new higher postal rates.

I am actually putting aside material for a display of the War Tax as it applied to mail going to foreign destinations. I should be able to squeeze-in this cover.

The rare 'PARAPARAP' registration label was just my launching pad for this article. I hope I have adequately demonstrated that, if one takes an interest in looking into the story behind a cover and its historical context, there is much to be discovered.

Can there be any question about the appropriateness of this beautiful relic of a terrible time in Australia's past as one of My Favourite Things?

Notes

- [1] *The Postal History of the Northern Territory 1824-1988* by Edward A Williams (1992) at page 149.
- [2] *The Post, Telegraph & Telephone Offices of South Australia & the Northern Territory* by Martin Walker (2004) at page 241.
- [3] Source: Ron Ryan from Coo-ee Picture Library and Prestige Philately auction of 14.12.2015, Lot 315.
- [4] Martin Walker, as above [2]; and *The Hand-Held Postmarks of South Australia & the Northern Territory* by the Philatelic Society of South Australia (2014) at page P8.

Early Registration Labels in Australia: - Tasmania (Part 1)

Kevin J Burt FRPSV

Tasmania is probably the hardest state to try to obtain a copy of every issued label on cover. Fewer post offices meant smaller print runs for each type, even though there were similar type numbers and redesigns as for other states. Like other states, Tasmania went its own way with label designs¹. Most labels were printed by the State Government Printer.

Following the successful six-month trial of labels at Hobart and Launceston, the first statewide labels appeared. One would assume that they would have appeared in 1909, however the earliest label - classified **T2** - seen on cover is dated 3 June 1912.



9 October 1908: The earliest cover with an adhesive label - **T1** - in Australia, the official date for these experimental labels being 1 October 1908. Posted at Deloraine, it acquired its label in Launceston, the labels being issued in Hobart and Launceston only. It arrived in Winchester on 22 November 1908.



3 June 1912: Label **T2** on cover, Campbell Town to New Zealand where it arrived into the safe hands of Stamp Dealers, Wilcox and Smith.



29 January 1909: Example of the same label issued for Hobart - used on the smallest Post Office Registered Envelope issued in the British Empire of the times. The cover arrived in the UK on 6 March.

As registration label printing was not security printing, whatever materials and equipment were available were used. In this case, there were three different numbering machines used, examples of the other two are shown below.

