



30.05.1972 Modbury North SA to England, presumably transmitted by air paying 50c registration fee and 35c airmail postage.



(...)06.1937 Railton Tas to Melbourne, Officially Registered being taxed at 6d (double registration fee) plus 4d (exceeding 1oz, so 2 x 2d) making a total of 10d deficiency.

“Common is not always common”, as will be obvious from a study of the tables. Short-lived registration fees after decimal currency, Listed Registered Post fees and Compensation

fees represent areas of challenge for the collector, in marked contrast to the easy availability of basic registration fees of earlier eras.

Sources:

Postmaster-General's Department, *Post Office Guide*, various editions up to 1972
 Australian Post Office / Australia Post, *Postal Charges* (booklets), various editions 1966–86

'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Sixteen: Patience is a Virtue

Gary Watson FRPSV, FRPSL, ACCCF, FBSAP

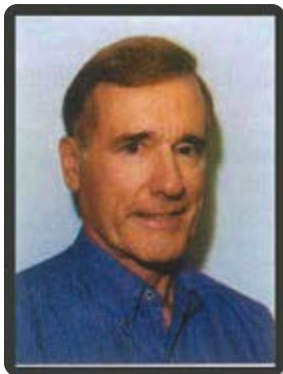
My collecting of Australian mail of all classes to overseas destinations was bobbing along nicely but became a serious pursuit in 2010.

My old friend, client and one-time Sydney agent, Kevin Nelson, had sold his exceptional Kangaroos collection through me in 2003. I knew he had held back all his covers to concentrate on developing a top-class postal history collection of Commonwealth-Period Routes and Rates, from Federation to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

The surprise was to learn that Kevin was already well-advanced in this 'new' pursuit. Only a year after parting with his Kangaroos, his eight-frame postal history exhibit was awarded International Gold at *Espana 2004*. Further Golds followed at St Petersburg (2007), in China (2009), and at the decennial London show in 2010.

Kevin had already indicated that Gold at London would be his crowning achievement, and his swansong. Soon after, I was invited to his home in Sydney to discuss the marketing of his postal history.

The auction was conducted at our new premises in Boronia, an eastern suburb of Melbourne. I had pulled-out all the stops



and produced a hardbound-only catalogue to showcase the collection and to stand as an important reference for an under-appreciated subject [1].

In the process of preparing Kevin's 292 lots, I realised that I had before me the best opportunity ever likely to present itself to turn my still modest collection of destination mail into one of some distinction. I pared back my other interests, sold off more than I really wanted

to, and created what I hoped would be an adequate war chest for the sale.

Often, I have encouraged clients to prepare for important sales by creating 'A' and 'B' Lists, the 'A' lots being their priorities, and the 'B' lots being desirable but less "necessary". I have not always followed my own sage advice, but I did on that occasion, and I still have the paperwork to prove it. For all the good it was! Lot after lot for which I had placed what I thought were hefty bids went for way over my figures. It was exhilarating calling such a successful sale but, at the same time, I was confronted with crushing blow after crushing blow.

Alright, I am laying it on a bit thick. I was able to secure some of the best destination material and, to this day, Kevin Nelson's sale remains the one at which I spent the most money. Oh, but the gems that eluded me. The remorse for not having bid higher. The grim knowledge that gaping holes remained unfilled in my own collection.

One result in particular was, on the one hand professionally gratifying but, on the other, personally galling. This was the 1913 parcel form to Switzerland franked with a Two Bob Brown Kangaroo and a Tasmanian 10d Tablet (see below). I had described it as "one of only two recorded articles bearing the First Watermark 2/-, and stated to be the only recorded parcel item with a State/CofA combination franking" (and I am still waiting to find another).



This delightful piece was one of the highlights of the auction.

Kevin had shared with me that, in his opinion, it was the best item in his exhibit. I concurred, and was determined that it would become the highlight of my collection. The estimate was \$6,000, which several helpful souls told me was wildly optimistic, as they usually do when they cannot get their head around what non-standard items might be worth. There were a couple of pre-sale bids, of which mine, at \$11,500 was by far the strongest. What I had not factored-in was a Battle Royal in the room.

The late Rod Perry, to whom I will be forever grateful for rescuing me from a legal career going nowhere, was seated towards the front. I knew Rod was keen on State/CofA combination covers, so my confidence in securing Lot 1246 had started to waver. Also in the room was Queenslander Peter O'Rourke who, unknown to me at the time, had decided to exhibit his impressive Kangaroos and been persuaded that he needed some "usage". Sure, Peter, that was sound advice, but did you need to buy "my" parcel card?

Of course, Rod and Peter sat right next to one another and might as well have been holding each other's paddles. The estimate was quickly surpassed and my bid was looking shaky. At \$10,000 there was a slight pause...and I thought the prize was mine. But then they were off again, silently slugging it out in \$500 increments until at \$17,000 Rod heaved a sigh of resignation and conceded to his nemesis.

I was more anguished than relieved that I had been trampled in the rush and had not stayed in the hunt. Keeping a calm demeanour on the podium under such circumstances is an act worthy of an Oscar. I rationalised the situation, telling myself that Rod and Peter had saved me twenty grand. I had already blown my budget, and that extra item on my invoice might have raised more than an eyebrow at home.

Over the following decade I had, and took, opportunities to acquire many more of Kevin Nelson's treasures. But the 2/- Roo plus 10d Tablet was not one of them. Then, in mid-2020 the catalogue for Peter O'Rourke's Kangaroos landed on my desk, and there it was! Of course, it was gracing the back cover, generating mixed emotions. Great to have a second chance

to acquire it, but concerned that the prominent advertising would cost me dearly. Offered as Lot 95, I was stunned to see the estimate was only \$8,000. And, that emphasis was on the modest catalogue value of \$4,000 for the 2/- on cover, with no mention of the net \$19,800 that Peter had outlaid at the Nelson sale. That seemed helpful!

With Peter selling, and Rod by now out of the market, I made it my quest to follow that lot, no matter how painful, no matter the cost. On the day of the sale, I had organised to be bidding by phone. The auctioneer (Mark Knothe?) announced, without emotion or commentary, "Lot 95; no bids; opening at the

reserve of \$6,000". Despite my surprise at the improbably low

starting price, I managed to issue the instruction to bid, which was acknowledged. Then nothing. I watched the bid-clock ticking down, hardly daring to believe that I was about to secure the bargain of the day. And, of course, I did not. “6½ in the room”. Here we go, I thought. “\$7,000 on the phone...7½ in the room...8 with the phone bidder”. Then, again, silence until, excruciating seconds later, “Sold for \$8,000 to the phone”.

Woohoo! It had certainly been worth the wait. For each year this little gem was off the market, I actually saved a thousand dollars! Well, that is the story of the hunt. But, what of the prize itself? Why is it such an outstanding item?

Firstly, both the stamps are like hen’s teeth on cover. I know of only one other item – a long envelope – franked with the First Watermark 2/-. The latest edition of the specialists catalogue still prices this stamp on cover at \$4,000. As for the Tasmanian 10d, I cannot recall having ever seen one on a postal article. Considering that 10d paid ten times the 1d Empire Letter Rate or four times the 2½d Foreign Letter Rate, that is probably not surprising.



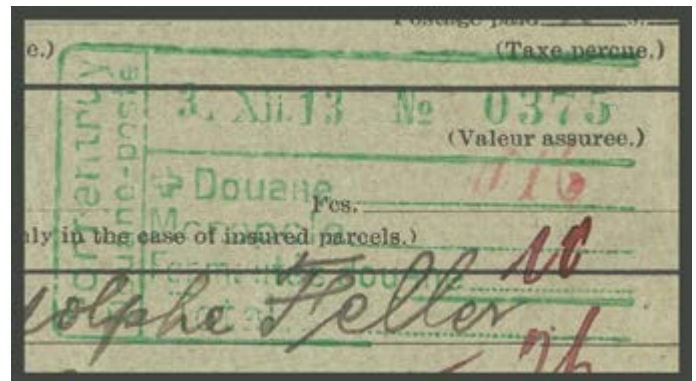
Secondly, the stamps are tied by a superlative strike of the enormous (81x49mm) ‘CHIEF PARCEL OFFICE/ HOBART’ datestamp, in violet ink for good measure. Other cities, notably Melbourne, employed similar devices. In all cases, because of the impressive dimensions, complete strikes are very rarely seen. The combination here of stamps and postmark creates a visual delight.

The third feature is usage on a Post Office form known variously as a Despatch Note or, in French – the official language of the Universal Postal Union – as a Bulletin d’Expedition, that was sent *with* a parcel, to be retained by the receiving postal administration. Such items are commonly seen from other countries, especially Germany, but if I have come across others from Australia, it must have been a very long time ago. The Despatch Note contains and/or confirms a lot of information.

We have the names and addresses of the sender and the recipient. At lower-right, we learn that the parcel was to be routed via “London”. The postage of “2s10d” is confirmed at upper-right. The form allowed for entering details for insurance to a specific value, and at centre-base there is space to insert ‘Exact weight of insured parcels’ (note, plural, suggesting the same form could be used for more than one parcel despatched at the same time to the same address) in ‘Poids’, i.e., Imperial pounds weight, or kilograms.

Insurance in this instance was not required, so no additional fee was paid. The weight was, however, entered in blue-pencil, as

“1kg 360g”. If that detail had been provided at Hobart, it almost certainly would have been expressed in pounds and ounces (just under, but almost exactly three pounds). Therefore, it seems certain that it was actually entered on arrival in Switzerland.



That conclusion is supported by the boxed cachet in green ink at centre-right. It is dated 31.XII.13, the last day of the year, proving a transit time of 46 days. The text reading upwards at left is ‘Porrentruy/Douane-poste’ (= Postal Customs). The Swiss town Porrentruy is very close to the French border. Horgen, the final destination, is some 120km to the East, or 160km by road, on the southern shore of Lake Zurich [2].

We have in our office library a 1909 *Post Office Guide New South Wales Edition* [3]. From 1 March 1901, the new Commonwealth Postmaster-General’s Department came into being and thereafter Postal Regulations, for the most part, were the same for the entire country, so the information found here is also pertinent to Tasmania. These official publications are exceptional works of reference, if you can find one. For 1909, and also certainly for some years thereafter, the Parcels Post Regulations ran to only five pages [4]. However, the rates tables to overseas destinations that follow are full of information about “Special Prohibitions &c” on a country-by-country basis [5].

For Switzerland, it is stated that a parcel may not contain *inter alia* “Letters, newspapers and postcards intended for distribution; Italian [and] Greek coins; alcohol (unless addressed to Federal authority [!]); grapes addressed to places in the Canton Valais; birds of many [unspecified] kinds; meat preserved with boracic acid [6];...” and so on.

The same entry [7] also details size limitations and a two-tier rate structure. 2/10d was the rate for a parcel weighing between two and three pounds sent “Via London, Belgium and Germany”. However, transiting Porrentruy suggests that the parcel was (inadvertently?) sent “Via London and France”, for which the rate was 2/7d.

Column 4 in the rates tables is headed “Customs/Declaration (See page 72.)” and contains the entry “C1”. Referring back to page 72, we learn that two different forms fulfilling the same purpose exist: an adhesive type for British Empire destinations, and a non-adhesive variant, as here, “for all other places abroad”. The “C” in column 4 references the non-adhesive form and the numeral following, in this case “1”, advises how many identical copies must be supplied.

Having absorbed all this data, it is clear our sender, “SB Harper/ St Johns Avenue/New Town”, and the postal clerk at the Chief Parcel Office in Hobart had scrupulously adhered to the parcel post regulations and paid the correct (slightly more expensive) rate of postage.

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Excerpt from 1909 Post Office Guide New South Wales Edition, Parcel Post Rates, pp. 94 - 95

Over the past 30+ years, I have often encouraged clients who are looking for new collecting interests to consider Parcel Post as a field ripe for study and discovery. Certainly, it is challenging; items are often over-sized; condition is a perennial issue. On the other hand, “challenging” can be construed as “satisfying” or even “ground-breaking”; larger-than-normal items can be visually spectacular; the odd crease or fault adds character, as they do for the various classes of disaster mail.

Parcel wrappings, labels and tags, entire packets, newspaper wrappers and other non-standard articles were usually

consigned to the receivers’ cylindrical filing systems. The stamps were often unceremoniously removed, with what remained being considered trash, unworthy of retention. Therefore, when such an item has survived for decades, even a century or more, its prolonged existence is, even of itself, quite remarkable. When said item also combines beauty and rarity, it is a joy to behold, and even more to possess.

Can there be any question as to why this particular parcel document is one of My Favourite Things?

References & notes

- [1] Prestige Philately Pty Ltd auction catalogue Number 160 ‘The Kevin Nelson Collection: Commonwealth of Australia Postal History 1901-1941’, the auction being conducted on 27 November 2010.
- [2] The green ‘RÉVISION’ handstamp would also have been applied at Porrentruy, as an audit marking.
- [3] The Postmaster-General’s Department produced an annual ‘Post Office Guide’. In this period, it seems that there was a separate edition for each State. Unfortunately, our 1909 volume was rebound, with the loss of the cover and publication details.
- [4] At pages 66-71.
- [5] At pages 72-97.
- [6] Boracic acid is also known as boric acid, orthoboric acid, acidium borcium, or hydrogen borate. One of its many uses was as a preservative.
- [7] The tables are in landscape format, across two pages, in this instance pages 94-95.

References & notes for “A Few of My Favourite Things No 15”

[These were inadvertently omitted from the end of Gary Watson’s June 2023 article. -Ed]

- [1] This is the briefest précis of events. It has been cobbled together from three sources, none of which agree on all the details! The various name changes are believed to be correct but there is conflicting date information.
- [2] Yes, “he”. At this time, staff at major post offices were almost exclusively men.
- [3] ‘Australian Commonwealth Postage Rates 1901-1966’ by Richard Breckon, serialised in five parts in *The Australian Philatelist* between Nov/Dec 1987 and Winter 1989. See Part 1 at page 8.
- [4] ‘Australia’s Letter & Postcard Surface Rates of Postage to Foreign (non-British Empire) Countries, 1901-1971’ by Richard Breckon, in *Philately from Australia*, Dec. 2022, pp. 95-97.
- [5] It was standard practice for a deficiency to be noted and endorsed in the country of origin but, as noted, when the cover left Australia, it was fully franked. It is unusual, although not unheard of, for a receiving administration to assess a deficiency and charge postage due.
- [6] Cabinda is an Angolan province of some 7,300 square kilometres, separated from the main landmass of Angola to the south by a narrow strip of land and the Congo River that provides the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Belgian Congo/Zaire) with its only outlet to the Atlantic Ocean.
- [7] This reference is to Frank Loesser’s 1948 classic “(I’d Like to Get You on a) Slow Boat to China”, popularised by the likes of Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, although my favourite rendition is by Ella Fitzgerald.