

# Transportation of Australian Colonial Mail - The Return to Steam 1857 - 1891

## Objective

This exhibit explains the development of early foreign maritime mail via steamships from the Australian Colonies with a purpose to illustrate how:

- The improvements in maritime transportation changed the Colonies outgoing mail routes;
- The speeds, routes and schedules of mails were altered by economic events and wars;
- The changes in rates and postal treaties influenced a correspondent's mailing options;
- The inter-connection of the smaller populated colonies with mailing contracts of the larger populated colonies

## Historical overview

Economic influences played an early role in the absence of a steamship service to Australia. It was not until the discovery of gold in Victoria and New South Wales in 1851 that prompted the British government to establish a faster mail steamer service to the antipodes. However, the declaration of the Crimean War in 1853 forced the British to recall the steamers. In the mean time, mail was transported by the fast clipper sailing ships via Cape Horn until hostilities ended in 1856.

With the end of the Crimean War in March 1856, the British Admiralty turned their attention to mail steamer contracts to the Australian Colonies. The return of the steamer service in 1857 provided regularly scheduled mail transportation until the entry of the Australian Colonies to the Universal Postal Union in 1891. Improvements in steamship technology and the building of new railroads to transverse continents opened up new mailing routes across Europe and the Americas.

Finally, throughout this period, the smaller colonies relied almost exclusively on the mailing contracts of Victoria and New South Wales, although Queensland subsidised her own mail service via Torres Strait from 1873 onward.

## Scope and Organisation

The covers are arranged by transportation passage and the progression of these routes demonstrates the evolution of mail transportation of contract steamships plying a number of different courses. The time spans of each route were influenced by geopolitical factors outside of each Colony's control.

It is important to recognise that rates and passages can span the boundaries between different routes. The date brackets for the transportation eras shown are approximate, and overlap:

1. Inter-colonial mail	1857-1891
2. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Southampton	1857-1891
3. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Marseilles	1857-1891
4. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Brindisi	1868-1891
5. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Trieste	1857-1891
6. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Naples	1877-1891
7. Via the Indian Ocean - Overland via Torres Strait	1866-1891
8. Via the Indian Ocean - Other routes on the Service	1857-1891
9. Via the Pacific Ocean - Via Cape Horn	1857-1859
10. Via the Pacific Ocean - Via Panama	1865-1874
11. Via the Pacific Ocean - Via San Francisco	1870-1891
12. Via the Pacific Ocean	1883-1891

Each of these major categories represents the packet steam contracts available to the colonists for sending their mail. Many of these contracts overlap, providing an interesting range of rates and passages

## Relative rarity of the material

Although there are common routes and destinations throughout the periods, there are a number of scarce and rare items of which only a few examples have been recorded. These items are highlighted in the bold red frames.

## Principal references

- "Australia New Zealand UK Mails Volume 1 - to 1880"* by Colin Taberant (2011). *Volume 2 - 1881-1900*" (2011)
- "Understanding Transatlantic Mail - Volume 1"* by Richard Winter (2006); *Volume 2* (2009).
- "North Atlantic Mail Sailings 1840-75"* by Walter Hubbard and Richard Winter (1988).
- "British Maritime Postal History - The P&O Lines to the Far East"* by R. Kirk (1982).
- "The Pre-UPU Destination Mail of Victoria"* by Ben Palmer (2009).
- "The Postal History of New South Wales 1788-1901"* edited by John White (1988).
- "www.trove.nla.gov.au"* - Newspapers of the National Library of Australia



## 1. Intercolonial Mail

### Historical overview

From the late 1850's, smaller class steamers of around 300 tons started to arrive in the Australian Colonies and ply their trade between the capital cities. In nearly all cases, they only steamed between two ports. For example, the "Wonga Wonga" sailed between Sydney and Melbourne carrying the mails for many years. The "Havilah" did the same between Adelaide and Melbourne. These steamers continued to run until the late 1880's and 1890's when the rail links between the cities were completed.

#### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 8d including 2d inland postage and 6d registration for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to New South Wales.



Maryborough, **Morton Bay District** 1.9.1858 to Sydney, New South Wales

**Route - Non contract steamship:** Departed Brisbane 4.9.1858 per "Waratah" to Sydney, arriving 6.9.1858. (5 days).

Ex Besancon

**Registered inter-colonial mail from the Moreton Bay District is rare**



Deep Lead, Victoria 22.1.1859 to Hobart, Tasmania

**Route - Private steamship:** Departed Melbourne 4.2.1859 per "Harriet Nathan", arriving Hobart 5.2.1859. (14 days).

**Note:** The Deep Lead post office opened in October 1859, nine months after this entire was posted. The postal markings on the reverse are in manuscript.

#### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to Tasmania.

#### Postal markings:

"**Detained for 2d Postage**" manuscript in red applied at Deep Lead.

**Note:** The entire was initially prepaid with 4d postage on the 22.1.1859. It was held by the Deep Lead post office until the additional 2d postage was prepaid for the 6d ship letter rate to Tasmania on the 2.2.1859.

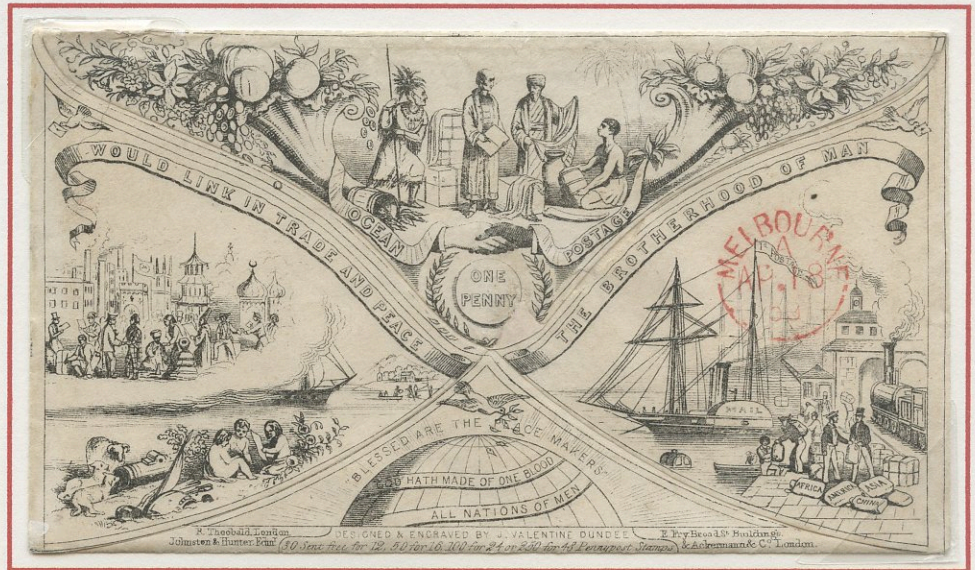
**A rare Detained Postage manuscript for an inter-colonial ship letter**



## 1. Intercolonial Mail

### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to Victoria.



Hobart, Tasmania 14.4.1859 to Melbourne, Victoria

**Route - Contract steamship:** Departed Hobart 14.4.1859 overland to Launceston. Departed Launceston 16.4 per "Black Swan" to Melbourne arriving 18.4.1859. (4 days).

Two examples of Valentine's Ocean Penny Post second design propaganda envelope from the Australian Colonies are recorded, this being the only one from Tasmania.



### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to New South Wales.

Gladstone, Moreton Bay District 3.2.1860 to Sydney, New South Wales

**Route - Private sailing ship:** Departed Gladstone 3.2.1860 to Brisbane.. **Private steamship:** Departed Brisbane per "Telegraph" 8.2 to Sydney, arriving 11.2.1860. (8 days).

Strips of six are the largest multiple of this stamp recorded on cover



## 1. Intercolonial Mail

### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to Queensland.



Perth, Western Australia 22.11.1862 to Brisbane, Queensland

**Route - P&O Line:** Departed King Georges Sound 8.12.1862 per "Bombay", to Sydney 15.12. Departed Sydney 18.12 per steamer "Urara", arriving Brisbane 23.12.1862. (31 days).

Less than five covers of the rough perforation 6d on blued paper are recorded

### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter to Melbourne.

### Postal markings:

The stamp has been cancelled by the Melbourne killer 1 numeral which was used as a Loose ship Letter on arrival.



Tasmania 7.1864 to Beechworth, Victoria

**Route - Private steamship:** Departed Tasmania 7.1864, to Melbourne 30.7; overland to Beechworth, arriving 9.8.1864.



## 1. Intercolonial Mail



### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz inter colonial letter to Tasmania.

**Note:** The stamp has been punctured for official use.

Fremantle, Western Australia 26.11.1864 to Hobart, Tasmania

**Route - P&O Line:** Departed King Georges Sound 6.12.1864 per "Bombay" to Melbourne 11.12. **Private steamship:** Departed Melbourne 12.12 per "Midas" to Launceston; overland to Hobart, arriving 13.12.1864. (17 days).

**The third earliest official puncture cover from Western Australia recorded**



Dalby, Queensland 21.11.1865 to Sydney, New South Wales

**Route:** Overland from Dalby 21.11.1865 to Brisbane. **Private steamship:** Departed Brisbane 25.11 per "Telegraph" to Sydney, arriving 28.11.1878. (7 days).



## 1. Intercolonial Mail

### A rare quadruple rate inter colonial ship letter

#### Quadruple Rate:

Prepayment of 3/- for a 3 oz inter colonial ship letter to Victoria.



Sydney, New South Wales 21.8.1866 to Melbourne, Victoria

**Route - Contract steamship:** Departed Sydney 21.8.1866 per "Alexandra" to Melbourne, arriving 24.8.1866. (3 days).

#### Single Rate - Underpaid:

Prepayment of 2d and underpaid 4d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter of 6d to Victoria.

#### Postal markings:

"INSUFFICIENTLY/ PRE-PAID" in black applied at Brisbane;

"DEFICIENT POSTAGE (4)/ FINE (6) in black representing the 4d deficient postage with an additional fine of 6d;

"MORE TO PAY" (10) in blue applied at Melbourne for the 10d fine to be paid by the recipient.



Nebo, Queensland 9.1866 to Bendigo, Victoria

**Route - Private steamship:** Departed Nebo 9.1866 to Brisbane. Departed Brisbane 26.9 per "Florence Irving" to Sydney. Departed Sydney 2.10 per "City of Adelaide" to Melbourne; overland to Bendigo.



## 1. Intercolonial Mail

### Double Rate:

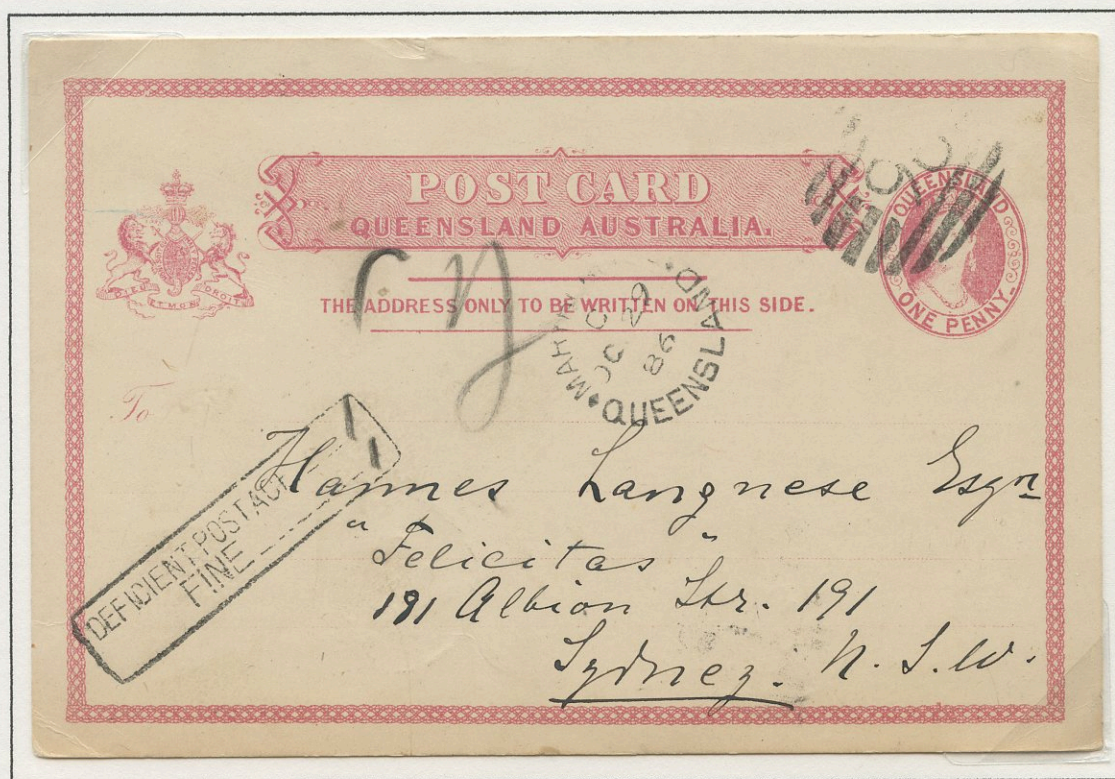
Prepayment of 4d for a 1 oz inter colonial ship letter to Victoria.

**Note:** Only ten covers are recorded with the 15 bar numeral 24 of Cossack.



Cossack, Western Australia 26.6.1884 to Melbourne, Victoria

**Route - P&O Line:** Departed Albany 30.6.1884 per "Sutlej" via Adelaide 4.7 to Melbourne, arriving 6.7.1884. (7 days).



Maryborough, Queensland 29.10.1886 to Sydney, New South Wales

**Route - Australian United Steam Navigation Co:** Departed Brisbane 2.11.1889 per "Eurimbla" to Sydney, arriving 3.11.1889. (1 day).

**Note:** The 1d postal stationery card was the local town letter rate. The card should have been uprated by 1d for the intercolonial 2d letter rate.

### Single Rate - Underpaid:

Prepayment of 1d and underpaid 1d for a ½ oz inter colonial ship letter of 2d.

### Postal Markings:

"DEFICIENT POSTAGE/(1)/FINE (1)" handstamp in black applied at Brisbane.

"2" manuscript in black for postal deficiency to be paid by the recipient.



## 1. Intercolonial Mail



### Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d comprising 2d for a ½ oz inter colonial letter plus 4d registration.

### Postal Markings:

"**CROWN/ REGISTERED**" unusually in red.

A reduced scan of the front of the envelope.

York, Western Australia 15.7.1889 to Melbourne, Victoria

**Route - P&O Line:** Departed King Georges Sound 18.7.1889 per "Britannia" to Adelaide 21.7; by rail to Melbourne, arriving 22.7.1889. (7 days).



The reverse of the envelope unusually showing the prepayment of 6d comprising only 1d postage stamps.

*Ex Walkley*