

'A Few of My Favourite Things', Number Seventeen: My Boomerang Won't Come Back

Gary Watson FRPSV, FRPSL, ACCCF, FBSAP

If you are as old as me – I am 68 – you may remember an English comedian called Charlie Drake who entertained us in the 60s with this rather politically incorrect ditty:

*My boomerang won't come back
My boomerang won't come back
I've waved the thing all over the place
Practiced till I was black in the face
I'm a big disgrace t' the Aborigine race
My boomerang won't come back.*

Poor old Charlie could ride a kangaroo and make kinkajou stew but that confounded boomerang of his just refused to behave itself and do what a boomerang is supposed to do...complete an elliptical orbit back to the thrower.

Many years ago, when I acquired the postal article featured here, I immediately recalled the travails of Charlie Drake. And I wondered if here lay the cause of his tribal disgrace?

I was also amazed that such a piece had survived. It is rather knocked about, the stamp has trimmed perforations at the top, the Customs label is faded, and the various markings are well short of the desired standard. But, as dealers are wont to say: "Find another one!" And the fact is that, apart from post-war medal boxes, in the umpteen years since I bought this strange object from Torsten Weller [1], I have not come across anything even remotely like it.

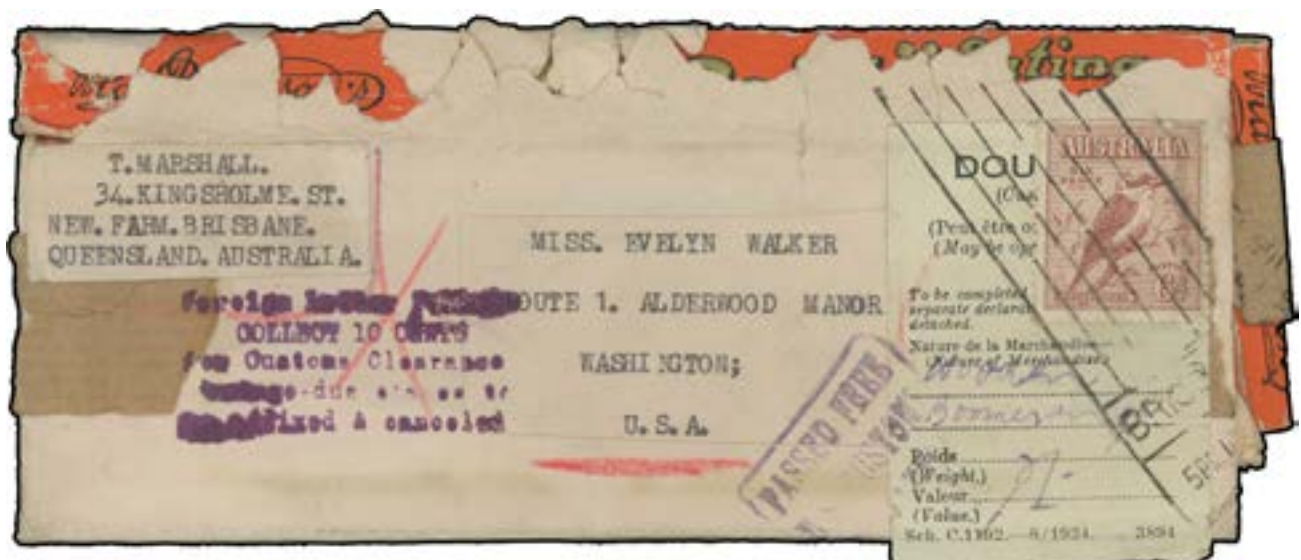
At that time, I did not even know that the Post Office had a separate rate for what they called "Small Packets". Of course, I used "Australian Commonwealth Postal Rates 1901-1966" by Richard Breckon [2] almost daily. However, Richard's reference to Small Packets [3] had not even registered with me.

Right under my nose, hiding in plain sight just before the extensive parcel rate tables, was Richard's advice that the Post Office had introduced a rate for 'Small Packets (to selected overseas countries only)' on 1 July 1930. Between then and 'about 1940', that rate was 2½d per two ounces, but with a minimum fee of 6d. The inference was that packets weighing as little as 2oz qualified (even less if you want to be more pedantic than me!). There was an upper weight limit of two pounds, which seems odd when you consider that parcel rates were for items from up to one pound in weight [4].

Presumably for lack of space, Richard did not delve into the postal regulations relevant to Small Packets that make for such interesting reading. Unfortunately, in our office library, annual editions of the 'Post Office Guide' from the early-1930s are limited to the exhaustive listing of Australia's thousands of post offices. Our first complete edition, incorporating the comprehensive regulations of the Post Office for this period, is of 1936. Here 'SMALL PACKETS (Up to 2lb)' will be found under 'British Empire & International Post', specifically on pages 67 and 68. It may be that the initial 1930 rules experienced some tweaking, but those of 1936 will be essentially the same as for six years earlier [5].

Firstly, there is a list of all countries to which the service was available. Here there are surprises galore, in both the exclusions, and the inclusions. India, Italy, Malaya and New Zealand are among the numerous omissions, whereas Guam, Solomon Islands, St Pierre et Miquelon and Yemen all get a guernsey. Canada does not make the cut but the yet unfederated colony of Newfoundland is on the list [6].

As one would expect, the United States is one of the favoured countries, with the qualification (applicable only to America)



that a Customs declaration (and, in the case of commercial goods, an invoice) must be included in the package. All Small Packets were required to have a completed green Customs label affixed.

The illustration above shows that the sender has complied. The 6d Large Kookaburra, paying the minimum fee, is affixed on the small 'DOUANE/(Customs)' label, both of which are tied by a Brisbane parcel roller of indeterminate date. The year of sending can be narrowed-down a little: the stamp was issued on 1 June 1932, and was effectively replaced on 2 August 1937 with the similar but smaller design from the KGVI Fauna series. [The Customs label printer's imprint indicates production in August 1934.]

The green label identifies the contents as "Wooden/Boomerang" of unspecified weight. Of course, from the minimum fee paid, we know it weighed less than six ounces. The value is given as "2/-" [7]. Paragraph 142 instructed that the sender's name was required to appear on the outside of the package.

As intimated earlier, if your 'small' packet could weigh up to two pounds (32oz), it would not necessarily be of modest dimensions. Regulation 143 specifies the maximum dimensions as "Length, breadth and depth combined three feet" (= 91cm), "the greatest dimension not to exceed three feet" but, "when in the form of a roll, length and twice the diameter 3ft4in, the greater dimension not to exceed 3ft8in". I bet you are glad you now know all that! [8]

In fact, our package, a MacRobertson's 'Old Gold Eating Chocolate' box, really was quite "small", measuring just over 6½in in length, 2¼in in width, and a mere five-eighths of an inch in height. (Does anybody else find Imperial measurements amusing? In case your brain is starting to hurt, this equates to about 165x57x16mm. For you young bucks out there, people of my generation, and all our American readers, actually had to learn all this stuff at school. Using Imperial today might be a good way to ward off the onset of dementia.)

It is clear from the next stipulation that the Small Packet service was not provided for sending items of value, even though the registration facility was available. The prohibition spelled out in Regulation 145 banned the sending of all manner of valuables, from cash and jewels to cheques and money orders. They were also not allowed to contain "any letter, note, or document having the character of actual or personal correspondence" [9].

As for compliance with these further regulations, our sender, the untitled "T. Marshall", of unspecified gender, dutifully typed-up an address label (including no fewer than ten superfluous stops, a confection largely and mercifully absent from Miss Walker's address) that was affixed at upper-left.



As for the contents, the much-anticipated boomerang is indeed present, having spent most of the next 100 years in the original packaging. And here it is. Yes, it is quite underwhelming. 'GREETINGS FROM BRISBANE' it boldly states, and I expect the recipient said "Yeah, whatever" (or whatever was equally dismissive in the 1930s). At least the tragically suspended 'Calendar' serves a purpose. It informs us that the impending year was 1938, which greatly narrows-down the mailing window to the last couple of months of 1937 (unless, as I have been known to do, it was sent some time in the New Year: "Darling! I can't believe the post office took so long to deliver it".)

Was the calendared boomerang the only item included in the package? Our sender typed-up another informative label that was affixed to the back. It stated, this time almost entirely without unnecessary punctuation, "This box contains one boomerang souvenir of Queensland". There is no evidence to suggest otherwise, so we can have absolute confidence that the packet did not include anything of value. Whether twelve tiny pages of dates might have offended against the proscription of "actual correspondence" is open to debate.

Although the American tail-end of the story seems to have little to offer, it is worth enquiring into the address "Alderwood Manor/ Washington". It might be expected that the intended destination was a stately home in the national capital, Washington DC. On the contrary, Alderwood Manor was a rural community near Spokane in Washington State.

The address is not of a well-known landmark in an important city that required minimal delivery details. Instead, it was fully addressed to a community of chicken farmers on the West Coast, where everybody was doubtless well-known to the otherwise anonymous Miss Evelyn Walker. To further underline the inconsequential nature of Alderwood Manor, about 60 years ago it was absorbed into the City of Lynwood which even today has only 33,000 residents. Only one building in the area of the former town, the masonic hall, is still where it was built. I expect mail to or, for that matter from, Alderwood Manor is very scarce.

Finally, there are two markings instantly identifiable from their characteristic purple ink as of American origin. Surprisingly clear despite having been struck on a pocket boomerang is the marking at left that reads – so far as I can decipher it – 'Foreign letter package/COLLECT 10 CENTS/for Customs Clearance/Postage due stamps[to]/[be] affixed & canceled'. But there are no postage due stamps affixed and, in fact, the red lines across the handstamp indicate that it had been applied in error and was cancelled.

To the right, and tying the Customs label, is a partly-struck boxed marking inscribed 'PASSED FREE/US CUSTOMS/[SEAT]TLE/...' that explains the crossing-out of the five-line cachet. There is at least one more line of text, but it is illegible.

As for Charlie Drake, if somebody had sent him an aerodynamically unsound 'Greetings from Brisbane' boomerang, it would be no wonder that he could not get it to soar majestically and make its way in defiance of the rules of Newtonian physics back to his hand...even if he had thought to first clip-off the ribbon and calendar adornments.

In conclusion, what we have here is a most unusual survivor from a little-known and probably little-used service. The fact that its contents remain present is quite marvellous. 'Reading' and understanding the postal elements has been an enjoyable exercise, while cobbling together the tale was a lot of fun. I

am sure all will agree that this well-intentioned but ridiculous gift and its packaging are well-qualified to rank among My Favourite Things.

References & notes

[1] I should acknowledge here – and it has nothing to do with the fact that he is now my principal – that Torsten was my primary dealer source for postal history gems. The standard comment from numerous others was that “He’s always so expensive!” I never subscribed to that view. Overall, I found his prices to be reasonable for the calibre of material he was offering. I winced occasionally, did challenge the odd price here and there, but I look back now with the benefit of another decade or more of experience and realise how many great buys, even bargains, I got from Torsten over the years. That is in spite of, and partly because of, the fact that he took the time to research his material and really knew what he was doing. I and his many other happy clients appreciated the information he provided and were happy to pay for it.

[2] “Australian Commonwealth Postal Rates 1901-1966” by Richard Breckon published in five parts in *The Australian Philatelist* between Nov-Dec 1987 and Winter 1989. This pioneering work remains the most comprehensive on the subject and a must-have for every serious collector and dealer. For decades, Richard has promised to expand his listings into a proper reference book. Regrettably, the long wait persists, and this is another of my none-too-subtle reminders that his book is still eagerly awaited.

[3] Ibid. Autumn 1989 edition at page 50.

[4] For the record, the Small Packets rate went from 1½d per 2oz in 1940 (plus an additional ½d War Tax from 10.12.1941); to ‘11d up to 10oz’ plus 2d for each additional 2oz from 1.7.1949; back to 3d per 2oz with a minimum fee of 1/3d from 9.7.1951; to 3½d per 2oz, still with a 1/3d minimum, from 1.10.1956; to 5d per 2oz and a minimum charge of 2/- from 1.10.1959 to the introduction of decimal rates on 14.2.1966. If any reader can provide me with articles from all, or any, of these rate periods, you will make your correspondent very happy.

[5] If I am wrong, about this or anything else, please correct me by email to gary@abacusauctions.com.au

[6] It would appear that there is a research project waiting to be undertaken.

[7] Many writers would here, and earlier in the article, ‘calculate’ a straight conversion to decimal currency: “2/- (20c)”. This is singularly unhelpful if you want to know the relative value today. According to the Reserve Bank of Australia, two shillings (one florin) in 1932, was worth \$10.94 in 2022. (Their calculator does not recognise 2023!) If you ever thought that pre-decimal postage rates were peanuts, think again. Weight conversions are more helpful because weight is near enough constant over time: e.g., 6oz in 1932 = 6oz today = 170g.

[8] For the record, the relevant regulations in the 1937 ‘Post Office Guide’ differ slightly from the 1936 edition. In respect of maximum size: “Length, breadth and depth combined three feet” (= 91cm), “the greatest dimension not to exceed two (previously three) feet” but, “when in the form of a roll, length and twice the diameter 3ft4in, the greater dimension not to exceed 2ft8in (previously 3ft8in)”.

[9] Can a lawyer out there explain the meaning of “actual correspondence”?

Up the “Starvo” (Starvation Creek, Warburton)

Kevin J. Burt FRPSV

In the first half of the twentieth century, Yarra Junction on the now long-closed Warburton railway loaded more timber in its yard than anywhere in the world. The timber came from mills in the Warburton and Powelltown forests. Timber was badly needed for Melbourne’s expansion following the gold rushes of the second half of the 19th century. In fact, to a certain extent, the timber industry replaced the search for gold in the Upper Yarra Valley.

In the Warburton district, there were 66 major mills and many smaller ones out in the forest. Some 320 km of tramways connected the mills to their markets on the main railway¹. The Victorian Railways line from Lilydale to Warburton opened in 1901.



The Warburton post office in the town as we know it today opened in 1843. This cover was posted on 28 September 1921, at the height of the timber industry.

In this article, I do not intend to cover the history of the timber mills in the district. Several important books have already detailed the complicated story of mill ownership; see in particular Reference 1 which is still available – a great read! Instead, my story concentrates on one family of many, the Richards. To emphasise the philatelic reason for the story, one of the family mills had a post office.

Two generations of the family were involved in the timber milling industry, William H., opening a mill near Mirboo North in South Gippsland in 1886. When the timber supplying a mill is cut out, the mill moves to a better site. So, in 1907 William’s son, William J., obtained the timber rights on the south slopes of Mt. Donna Buang and Mt. Victoria. He placed his mill close to the timber supply, necessitating a difficult tramway connection to Warburton station yard and had to build a high trestle bridge over the Yarra. The steam boiler to power the mill had to be dragged to the site by a 48-bullock team. The mill on that site lasted for six years.

After cutting out the available timber, the mill was moved to near Big Pat’s Creek. Richards had obtained access to a timber allotment of 1,000 acres in the headwaters of Starvation Creek, east of Warburton. He was not the first miller at Big Pat’s, the Mississippi Sawmilling Company arrived in 1905. Richards Mill there was temporary until a new tramway was built from the railhead to the new site. As time passed, Big Pat’s Creek