

The Postal History of Van Diemen's Land to 1825

Objective: Van Diemen's Land was under New South Wales jurisdiction from first British settlement until it became a separate colony in December 1825. This exhibit studies mail representing all the major postal history events.

Treatment, Structure & Scope: The exhibit is arranged in mainly chronological order following the dates that the various proclamations and Postal Acts which were enacted. The twenty-one letters in this exhibit represent a significant proportion of the fifty to sixty surviving letters in private hands.

- The abbreviation 'VDL' is often used in place of 'Van Diemen's Land' in item descriptions in this exhibit.

All the major items are present in this exhibit.

Background: Van Diemen's Land was not known to be an island until Bass and Flinders circumnavigated it in 1798. In order to prevent a possible occupation by the French, it was decided to claim possession of the island by the establishment of a British settlement. In September 1803, Lieut. John Bowen established a settlement at Risdon Cove. In February 1804, Lieut. Governor David Collins moved the settlement to Sullivan's Cove.

A Government and General Order dated 23 June 1810 (*Sydney Gazette*) established the Post Office in New South Wales and appointed Isaac Nichols as the Postmaster. On 16 October 1813 Nichols appointed James Mitchell as Deputy Postmaster at the Derwent. In 1816 a messenger was appointed to carry mail between Hobart Town and Port Dalrymple. John Collicott was appointed Post Master at Hobart Town upon Mitchell's retirement in 1822.

On 21 September 1822 a Government Order was published to regulate the conveyance of mail in the Colony, and the issue of handstamps.



- PLAN:** page 1 - Title Page.
pages 2-3 - Mail Prior to the Establishment of the Post Office
pages 4-5 - Early Mail and the Establishment of the Post Office in New South Wales and VDL.
Outward Mail via Sydney; First Official Mail.
pages 6-12 - The First Handstamps 1822-1825.
Internal Mail; Outwards Mail; Replacement Handstamp (Second Issue for Hobart).
pages 13-16 - Establishment of the Post Office.
Mail via Macquarie Island; Inwards Mail from Sydney; Inwards Mail from the UK.

REFERENCES

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MAIL PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

Earliest letter from Van Diemen's Land in private hands.

Prior to the setting up of the Post Office in New South Wales under Isaac Nichols, mail was despatched by the sender taking it aboard an appropriate vessel or handing it to the ship's captain.



Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land 17 October 1805 to London, England

Entire headed "*Hobart Town River Derwent / Van Diemens Land*", written by Matthew Bowden, Assistant Surgeon.

Rate: On arrival in the UK rated "11" due, denoting 4d inwards ship letter rate plus 7d mileage from Deal to London.

Route: Carried per the "*Sydney*", sailing on 28.12.1805 and arriving at Sydney on 23.1.1806 via Port Dalrymple and Norfolk Island. She departed Sydney on 12.4.1806 for Calcutta and was totally wrecked on a reef off the coast of New Guinea on 20 May 1806 without loss of life. Captain Austin Forrest carried the mail from Penang per the "*Varuna*" departing 4.10.1806 and arriving at Calcutta on 9.10.1806. From Calcutta, the mail was forwarded per the "*Union Packet*", via Cape of Good Hope.

Markings: "Ship Letter / DEAL" in black. On reverse: - London date-stamp (11.5.1807).

The transit time of 571 days points to the letter being on the "*Sydney*", and being the earliest recorded surviving Australian wreck mail.

Illustrated in '*Australian Wreck Mail*', 2nd Edition, B.R. Peace, p. 2-3

Ex Rigo de Righi (1982), Peace (2009), McNamee (2016)

MAIL PRIOR TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

The third earliest recorded letter from Van Diemen's Land, with mention of Governor Bligh's arrival.

The Matthew Bowden Correspondence: Matthew Bowden (1779-1814) was commissioned as a civil assistant surgeon on 14 January 1803 to accompany Lieutenant Governor David Collins's expedition to found a settlement at Port Phillip. He sailed in the *Ocean*, accompanied Collins when the settlement was transferred to Hobart Town, and was one of the first ashore, landing at Frederick Henry Bay on 12 February 1804 and walking to Risdon on the River Derwent. In the starving years of the new colony, Bowden played a prominent role attending the sick, condemning imported stores as unfit for human consumption and joining the celebrations when each store ship arrived.



Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land 18 October 1806 to London, England

Entire headed "*Hobart Town, Derwent, Van Diemen's Land*", written by Matthew Bowden.

Rate: On arrival rated "1/10" due, denoting double 4d inwards ship letter rate plus 7d mileage from Portsmouth to London (over 70 miles).

Route: Carried per the whaler "King George", sailing on 19.10.1806 for Sydney, where she arrived on 2.12.1806. The letter was forwarded from Sydney per "H.M.S. Buffalo", sailing on 10.2.1807 via Rio de Janeiro, and arriving at Portsmouth on 8.11.1807.

Markings: "SHIP LETTER / PORTSMOUTH" in black.

On reverse: - London date-stamp (11.11.1807).

Ex Rigo de Righi (1971), Ward (2016)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

Mail from Van Diemen's Land showing the First Sydney Handstamp

Isaac Nichols considered it desirable to mark all outgoing overseas mail to indicate its place of origin, and obtained a handstamp for this purpose. It is known to have been used between 1813 and 1819.

The earliest of only six recorded examples in private hands.

One of the most important items of all Australian philately.

It bears the earliest recorded strike - by three years - of Australia's first postal marking.



Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land 10 February 1813 to London, England

Entire letter headed "*Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land*", written by Ann McCarty.

There was no official Postmaster at Hobart until 16 October 1813, when James Mitchell was appointed by Isaac Nichols as his Deputy. This letter was possibly handled by John Beamont, unofficial Postmaster from late 1812 until Mitchell took over. All mail from VDL was sent via Sydney at this time.

Rate: No NSW rate marking, however charged 3d by Nichols. On arrival in the UK rated "1/-" inwards postage due, consisting of 4d ship letter and 8d inland letter.

Route: Per private vessel to Sydney, arriving late March or early April 1813, thence by ship to England.

Markings: "SYDNEY.NEW.SOUTH.WALES" (type S1).

In arrival: London "SHIP / LETTER" and, on reverse, a London date-stamp (28.2.1814).

This is the only example, in private hands, of the undated handstamp of Sydney being used as a transit marking.

Ex Robson Lowe PHA (1973), Baetgen (2004), Peace (2009)

THE FIRST OFFICIAL POST OFFICE IN VDL

Van Diemen's Land was under New South Wales jurisdiction from first settlement until separation on 19 December 1825. Isaac Nichols appointed a Deputy Post Master at Hobart in 1813, the *Sydney Gazette* announcing that: -

POST OFFICE SYDNEY

"Notice is hereby given that, I, the undersigned, have appointed Mr James Mitchell of the Derwent, my Deputy (by the approbation of His Excellency the Governor). Mr Mitchell will in future act accordingly and receive all letters and parcels etc., which may arrive at the Derwent, charging the established fees agreeably to His Excellency the Governor's General Orders on that Head bearing date of the 23rd Day of June 1810.

Sydney, 16th October 1813

First Outwards Mail organised by the Post Office in VDL

James Mitchell's duties included the handling of the mail arriving in the Colony, but there appears to have been no arrangements for mail leaving Van Diemen's Land at this time. Outwards ship letters were organised for the first time when Mitchell arranged for a mail to be sent to London direct by the whaler "Jefferson" in October 1815.

One of the most important items of Van Diemen's Land philately. It documents the despatch of the first mail by the first official Postmaster from VDL, and it supports Viney's thesis that Beamont was not officially recognised as Postmaster.



Rate: Allowed free as official mail, both in Van Diemen's Land and Great Britain.

Route: Sent per American whaler "Jefferson", sailing on 5.10.1815 direct for England, arriving at Gravesend on 6.5.1816.

Markings: Unpaid "SHIP LETTER / LONDON" (6.5.1816) in black.

Illustrated in 'Stamps and Postal History of Tasmania', Tinsley, p. 3-4; and 'Tasmanian Postal Acts and Regulations Part 1', Orchard, p. 2-

11

Ex Tinsley (1990), Druce (1998), Forster (2002)

Hobart Town, VDL 23 September 1815 to London, England

Letter headed "Hobart Town, Island of Van Diemen, South Pacific Ocean, Sept. 23rd 1815", written by James Mitchell to Francis Freeling, Secretary of the General Post Office in London.

Mitchell writes "that being appointed Deputy Post Master of this Island ... as this is the first Mail or Public conveyance from this Island ... to have the Packets or Mails, separately made up for Port Jackson and this Island". "... Considering Sir the various inconveniences attending Letters Packets etc being sent from Hence to England "Via Port Jackson", ... as well as those coming for this Island by the Same Channel, which often remain at Port Jackson for Months to the great detriment of Trade ... if the Regular Appointment of Post Master at this Island independent of Port Jackson under the Post Master General of England, would not be more advantageous for the Publick, especially as this is the first land made by Vessels bound to New South Wales ...".

Reverse endorsed "A separate bag shall in future be made up for Hobart Town. J. Newbury."

THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

INTERNAL MAIL

LAUNCESTON

Rates were promulgated on 20 September 1822 requiring that "postage on all letters and Packets to be paid at the Office where they are recorded for Transmission, and they will be stamped with the Mark of the Town from which they go".

Handstamps were issued at Hobart, Launceston and George Town.

LAUNCESTON

Size: 34mm diameter

Recorded Use: 9.11.1822 - 17.2.1826

Examples recorded in private hands: 17 (12 on internal mail, 5 on outwards mail)



Launceston 30 December 1822 to Hobart Town

Rate:

One shilling up to one ounce;
signified by handstamp.

Route:

Across country to Hobart. The mail left Launceston every Monday via the "High Road" through South Esk, Wanstead, Sorrell Springs and Green Ponds, arriving the following Friday.

Markings:

The first "LAUNCESTON"
handstamp

Illustrated in 'Stamps and Postal History of Tasmania', Tinsley, p. 9

Ex Robson Lowe PH (1959), Tinsley (1990), Blake (2001), Cress (2003)

Rate: One shilling up to one ounce; signified by handstamp.

Route: Across country to Hobart.

Markings: First "LAUNCESTON" handstamp.

Ex Robson Lowe PH (1959, 1979), Fraser (2023)



Launceston 17 February 1823 to Hobart Town

THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

INTERNAL MAIL

GEORGE TOWN

GEORGE TOWN

Size: 32 mm diameter

Recorded Use: 12.9.1823- 29.1.1825

Examples recorded in private hands: 2 (both on internal mail)



George Town, VDL 29 January 1825 to Rouge Mont on the Tamar

Entire letter endorsed "O.H.M.S" in manuscript from George Town to Charles Barnard, Rouge Mont, on the Tamar, further endorsed by sender "Commandant P.D." (Penal Department).

The letter is signed by Charles Cameron, Lt. Col. Commandant (1779-1827). He was appointed commandant of Port Dalrymple on 14 December 1822, and arrived in Hobart on 1 February 1823. He had sailed from Deptford in November 1821 in the 'Phoenix' with three officers and 50 soldiers, escorting 182 convicts.

Rate: Free as official mail.

Route: Per messenger from George Town by the route to Launceston.

Markings: "GEORGE TOWN" handstamp.

The finest strike in private hands.

* A third example dated 1824 (c.) was discovered in 2006, however it believed to have been subsequently destroyed.

Ex Robson Lowe PH (1959), Rigo de Righi (1982), Groom (1987), Peace (2009), "Dubois" (2023)

THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

OUTWARDS MAIL

HOBART

HOBART TOWN

Size: 31mm diameter

Recorded Use: 17.12.1822 - 6.3.1824

Examples recorded in private hands: 12 (2 on inwards mail, 10 on outwards mail)



Hobart Town, VDL 2 June 1823 to London, England

Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. "2/8" denotes UK inwards double rate postage due (consisting of 8d x 2 ship letter plus 8d x 2 mileage).

Route: Per ship "Deveron", sailing on 2.6.1823 for England direct via Straits of Magellan and Rio de Janeiro, arriving on 6.11.1824.

Markings: "HOBART TOWN" handstamp, "PORTSMOUTH / SHIP LETTER" and ms. "T.P./P.P" (Twopenny Post / Post Paid).

On reverse: London date-stamp (6.11.1824) and London Twopenny Post marking "10 F-NOON 10 / NO 7 / 1823".

The finest strike in private hands.

Illustrated on Frontispiece of *Tasmania: The Postal History and Postal Markings*, 1962.

Ex Slade Slade (1979), Groom (1987), Cress (2003), "Dubois" (2023)

THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

OUTWARDS MAIL

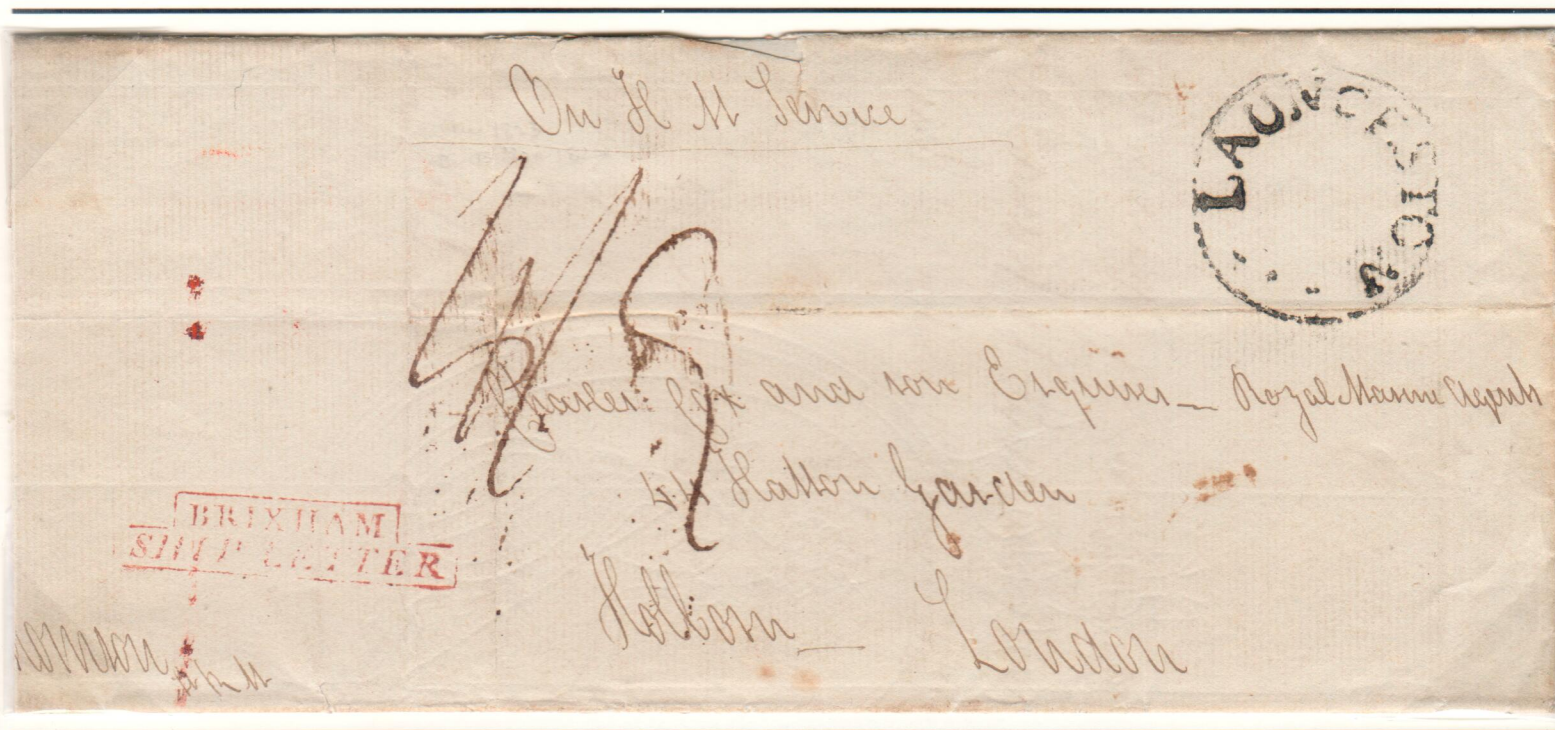
LAUNCESTON

LAUNCESTON

Size: 34mm diameter

Recorded Use: 9.11.1822 - 17.2.1826

Examples recorded in private hands: 17 (12 on internal mail, 5 on outwards mail)



Launceston, VDL 22 August 1823 to London, England

Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. "4/9" denotes UK inwards postage due, being for the triple rate (three times 8d ship letter plus 11d mileage). Total 2/- ship letter plus 2/9 inland mileage.

Route: Per ship "Regalia", sailing on 8.10.1823 for England direct via Rio de Janeiro, arriving on 14.3.1824.

Markings: First "LAUNCESTON" handstamp, "BRIXHAM / SHIP LETTER" and on reverse London date-stamp (15.3.1824).

Ex Viney (1980), Land (1996)

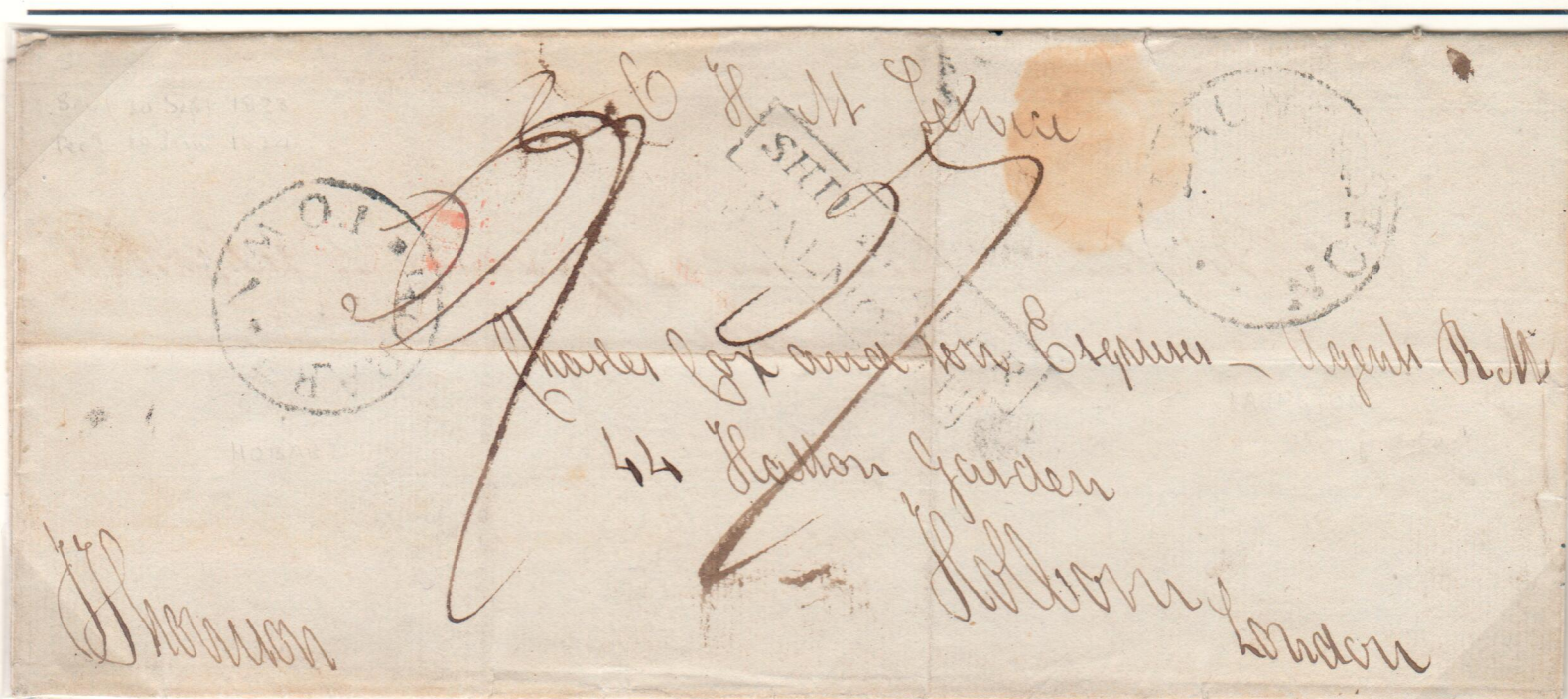
THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

OUTWARDS MAIL

LAUNCESTON & HOBART TOWN

The only recorded cover in private hands bearing two of the three primitive handstamps.

Showing both the Launceston and Hobart Town markings (with the Hobart Town used as a transit mark).



Launceston, VDL 30 September 1823 to London, England

Rate: Charged 8d outwards ship letter. Ms. "5/-" denotes UK inwards postage at the triple rate (three times 8d ship letter plus 12d mileage).

Route: Per ship to London, via Hobart, arriving 17.6.1824.

Markings: "LAUNCESTON" and "HOBART TOWN" handstamps, and "SHIP LETTER / FALMOUTH" in black.

On reverse: London date-stamp (17.6.1824).

Ex Viney (1980), Peace (2009)

THE FIRST HANDSTAMPS 1822-1825

HOBART TOWN

Worn or Under-inked Strikes



London, England 11 November 1822 to Launceston, VDL

Rate: Charged "1/9" prepaid for an outwards ship letter to NSW, as per a London G.P.O. Notice dated 25 April 1816.

Route: Transit time of 248 days, addressed to Van Diemen's Land, New South Wales.

Markings: The first undated "HOBART TOWN" handstamp in black. Ms endorsement "Received 18th July 1823".

"POST PAID / SHIP LR / LONDON" date-stamp (12.11.1822).

Only two recorded inwards cover in private hands bearing one of the primitive handstamps.

Ex Ward (2016)



Hobart Town,
VDL 10
August 1823
to London,

Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. "1/4" denotes UK inwards postage due (8d ship letter plus 8d mileage).

Route: Per ship "Skelton", sailing on 5.9.1823 for England direct via Rio de Janeiro, arriving on 13.2.1824.

Markings: "HOBART TOWN" handstamp. "PORTSMOUTH / SHIP LETTER", and London date-stamp (13.2.1824).

Ex Robson Lowe PH (1979), Molnar (1990)

THE SECOND ISSUE HANDSTAMP 1824

Replacement for Hobart

HOBART TOWN / V.D.L

Size: 20mm x 30mm single oval

Recorded Use: 22.9.1824 - 9.8.1832

The second type Hobart Town handstamp was introduced in September 1824 as the original was wearing out and producing indistinct strikes. **Six examples are recorded used during the N.S.W. period.**

Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. "1/4" denotes UK inwards postage due consisting of 8d ship letter plus 8d mileage.

Route : Per ship sailing for England direct.

Markings:

The second type "HOBART TOWN / V.D.L." handstamp.

On reverse: "SHIP LETTER / BRIGHTON" and London date-stamp (27.4.1825).

Ex Cress (2003)



Hobart Town, VDL 26 October 1824 to London, England



Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. "1/4" (deleted), finally rated "1/10" denoting UK inwards postage due consisting of 8d ship letter plus 14d mileage, with additional 1/2d Scottish turnpike charge.

Route: Per ship sailing for England direct, arriving at Deal.

Markings: "HOBART TOWN / V.D.L." handstamp, and UK boxed "1/2".

On reverse: "SHIP LETTER / DEAL", and date-stamps for London (11.3.1826) and Edinburgh (13.3.1826)

Ex Evans (2002)

Hobart Town, VDL 7 September 1825 to Edinburgh, Scotland

OUTWARD MAIL SENT VIA MACQUARIE ISLAND

Frederick Hasselborough, an Australian, discovered the uninhabited island on 11 July 1810 when looking for new sealing grounds. He claimed Macquarie Island for Britain and annexed it to the colony of New South Wales in 1810. The island was named for Governor Lachlan Macquarie,

Missionary Letter sent by whaler via Macquarie Island and St. Helena



Hobart Town, VDL 29 August 1820 to London, England

Entire headed “Hobart Town”, written by a Methodist missionary. He writes that “The ship Robert Quayle being about to sail...for England, I think it advisable to send a letter by her, although...she will be about eight months on her passage, as she is going first to Macquarie Island to whale...”

Rate: Charged 8d for an outwards ship letter. Ms. “1/7” denotes UK inwards postage due, consisting of 8d ship and 11d mileage.

Route: Per whaler “Robert Quayle”, sailing on 8.9.1820, going via Macquarie Island, with a sealing gang. She had topped up with 150 tons of elephant oil and departed Macquarie Island on 13.11.1820, going via St. Helena (20.1.1821). She arrived at Liverpool on 24.3.1821, where she put into Queen’s Dock.

Markings: “LIVERPOOL / SHIP LETTER” and London date-stamp (26.3.1821).

Ex London Missionary Society (1990)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

Inwards Mail to VDL from Sydney

Arndell Correspondence

The carriage of letters "by private hand" was the normal practice prior to the establishment of the Inland Post.

Earliest Recorded Inwards Letter to Van Diemen's Land, written by a First Fleeter.

Rate:

None as carried privately. James Gordon was Naval Officer at Hobart Town from April 1814 until August 1815, and would have personally received the mail off arriving vessels.

Route:

Carried by river boat from Cattai, Hawkesbury River, to Sydney, and then per H.M. Armed Brig "Kangaroo" which departed Sydney on 19.8.1814 bound for Hobart Town.

Historical:

Elizabeth Arndell (nee Dalton, alias Burley or Burleigh, 1767-1843) was a First Fleeter, a convict on the "Lady Penrhyn", having been convicted of stealing handkerchiefs worth 14/- and sentenced to 7 years at Botany Bay.

She writes that *"Two ships are arrived from England with Prisoners one has a malignant fever on board. The Capt., 1st Mate & about 30 or 40 people have died of it. They are landed on the North Shore none but the Medical people are suffered to go to them"*.

This refers to two ships that arrived on 27.7.1814, the "Broxbornebury" and the "Surry".



Cattai, Sydney 3 August 1814 to Hobart Town, VDL



Cattai, Sydney c. May 1818 to Hobart Town, VDL

Entire written by Dr. Thomas Arndell (1753-1821). He was assistant surgeon on the ship "Friendship" in the First Fleet.

Rate:

No rate or postal markings as carried privately.

Route:

Carried by river boat from Cattai, Hawkesbury River, to Sydney, and then per ship to Hobart Town.

Letter written by a First Fleeter.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

Early Inwards Mail from the UK

Drummond Correspondence



London, England **23 June 1818** to Hobart Town, VDL

Entire letter from Lieut. Colonel William Drummond in London, dated 23 June 1818, to John Drummond, Naval Officer.

Rate: Charged "1/9" prepaid for an outwards ship letter to NSW, as per London G.P.O. Notice dated 25 April 1816.

This prescribed that the rate to NSW was to be half the prevailing Packet Rate to the East Indies, which was "3/6".

Route: Per ship "General Stewart", sailing on 19.7.1818 from Portsmouth for Sydney, arriving on 31.12.1818. Forwarded to Hobart Town per schooner "Derwent" from Sydney on 11.1.1819, arriving 19.1.1819.

Markings: "PAID SHIP LETTER / LONDON" date-stamp (4.7.1818).

Ex Ward (2016)



London, England **10 February 1823** to Launceston, VDL

Rate: Charged "1/9" prepaid for an outwards ship letter to NSW, as per London G.P.O. Notice dated 25 April 1816.

Route: Ship from London unknown. Per ship "Nereus", sailing from Sydney on 10.7.1823 and arrived at Port Dalrymple on 28.7.1823.

Markings: "POST PAID /SHIP LR / LONDON" date-stamp (12.2.1823).

Ex Argyll Stamp Co (1959), Ward (2016)

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE POST OFFICE

Inwards Mail from the UK

Barnard Correspondence



London, England 1 September
1822 to Launceston, VDL.

Entire letter from Charles Heberd in London, dated 1 September 1822.

Rate: Charged "1/9" prepaid for an outwards ship letter to NSW, as per a London G.P.O. Notice dated 25 April 1816.

This prescribed that the rate to NSW was to be half the prevailing Packet Rate to the East Indies, which was "3/6".

Route: Per ship "Andromeda", sailing on 31.10.1822 from Portsmouth for Hobart Town via Rio de Janeiro, arriving on 7.5.1823.

Markings: Boxed "Charles / Street" receiving office handstamp, "POST PAID /SHIP LR / LONDON" date-stamp (18.9.1822).

Ex Argyll Stamp Co (1959), Ward (2016)



London, England 10 December 1823 to Port Dalrymple, VDL

Rate: Charged "1/9" prepaid for an outwards ship letter to NSW, as per a London G.P.O. Notice dated 25 April 1816.

This prescribed that the rate to NSW was to be half the prevailing Packet Rate to the East Indies, which was "3/6".

Route: Per ship not known. Ms. "Answered by letter dated 25th Dec'r 24".

Markings: Boxed "BOND/ St." receiving office handstamp, "POST PAID /SHIP LR / LONDON" date-stamp (19.12.1823).

Ex Argyll Stamp Co (1959), Ward (2016)