

The Clipper Ship Sailings of Victoria 1852-57

Historical overview

The British Admiralty's removal of contract mail steamers to convey troops and materials for the Crimean War from 1853-56 meant that all the mail contracts were void. So reversion to sail was the only option. It was unclear how long this situation would last and there were initially single voyage contracts. As the situation became more permanent, longer contracts were entered into.

In the few years since the end of the Toulmin contract in 1849, long distance sail had improved dramatically by two factors. Perhaps the most important being the work of Lt. M.F. Maury of the United States Navy who had recently published his detailed studies on wind patterns around the globe at various times of year. This allowed the clipper captains to determine the optimum route for winds at whatever time of year the ship was sailing. He deduced that there were stronger winds further south than the usual route along the 40th parallel. He was proved correct for world records that these clippers produced for sailing around the world. Secondly, strongly built and heavily sparred ships were needed to take advantage of these winds. New clipper ships were designed and built, initially by American ship builders such as the great Boston builder Donald McKay.

This era of sailing ship and clipper voyages lasted beyond the return to steamer contracts in 1857 after the Crimean War ended. Sailing ships still plied their trade for intercolonial mail. Small steamers were introduced in the early 1850's, and finally took over most of the trade by the early 1860's. Conversely, new routes were being opened up across the Pacific Ocean which were initially operated by the clipper ships.

The Clipper Sailings section is represented by the following categories:

1. Pre-contract Clipper Sailings
2. Contract Clipper Sailings Via Cape Horn
3. Post-contract Clipper Sailings

1. Pre-contract Clipper Sailings 1852-55

Prior to the Crimean War, the new clipper sailing ships were plying their trade between England and the Australian Colonies in the early 1850's. Although the majority of mail was carried by the steam mail contracts between 1852-54, mail was also carried on some clipper ships, with covers being particularly scarce from this period.

England



Double Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a 1oz ship letter to England.

"8"(d) manuscript in black for the incoming ship letter fee to be paid by the recipient.

Melbourne, Victoria 9.10.1852 to London, England (E)

Route - Private clipper ship - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne per clipper "Marco Polo" 9.10.1852 to Liverpool; by rail to London, arriving 27.12.1852. (79 days).

Ex Knapp, Rizvold; Forster

Note: The "Marco Polo" was one of the new clipper ships which accounts for the extremely quick sailing time of 79 days.

2. Via Cape Horn

England

Historical overview

With the British Admiralty commandeering all steamships to fulfill troop transportation for the Crimean War from 1854-56, the steam contracts to and from Australia by the General Screw and P&O Lines could not be fulfilled. The Post Office approved single voyage clipper contracts which were expanded to longer term contracts across multiple shipping lines to fulfil the mailing obligations until the end of the Crimean War in 1856 and the return to steam contracts in January 1857.

Forwarding of mails from the Cook Islands using the Australian ship mail service



A scan of the inside of the entire headed "Oneroa, Mangaia, South Pacific, Feb 10 1855"



Oneroa, Mangaia, Cook Islands 10.2.1855 to London, England

Single Rate: Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Postal markings: "3" manuscript in red credit to Great Britain for a non-contract incoming ship letter.

Route - Private sailing ship: Departed Cook Islands 2.1855 to Melbourne; **Non-contract clipper - White Star Line:** Departed Melbourne 30.8.1855 per "White Star" to Liverpool 27.11; by rail to London, arriving 28.11.1855. (200 days to Melbourne; 89 days to London).

Note: Oneroa is a small village on the island of Mangaia, the most southerly of the Cook Islands and the second largest after Rarotonga. The entire was written by Reverend George Gill of the London Missionary Society who was a missionary in the Cook Islands from 1845-60.

Ex Ward

The only recorded stamped entire from the Cook Islands using the Australian mail service

2. Via Cape Horn

England; Grand Duchy of Hesse

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 2/- comprising 1/- for a ½ oz ship letter plus 1/- registration to England.

"1/6" manuscript in black comprising 1/- for the inwards ship letter fee and 6d registration to be paid by the recipient.



Ballarat, Victoria 5.4.1855 to Brighouse, England

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne 11.4.1855 per "Lightening" to Liverpool 29.6; by rail to Brighouse 2.7; redirected to Dewsbury, arriving 4.7.1855. (90 days).

Ex Dewavrin

Registered retaliatory rate covers from Victoria are very scarce



Melbourne, Victoria 30.5.1855 to Rudesheim, Grand Duchy of Hesse

Route - Black Ball Line - British contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 22.7.1855 per "Marco Polo", to Liverpool 20.10; by rail to London 21.10; by steamer to Ostende; by rail via Aachen 23.10 to Ringen 24.10; overland to Rudesheim, arriving 24.10.1855. (147 days).

Note: The postal system of the Grand Duchy of Hesse was privately operated by the Thurn & Taxis Post.

The earliest recorded cover from the Australian Colonies to the Grand Duchy of Hesse

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the Grand Duchy of Hesse.

"23" (kreuzer) manuscript in blue credit to Thurn & Taxis Post for forwarding from England to Rudesheim through the closed mail service to be paid by the recipient.

2. Via Cape Horn

Kingdom of Sardinia; United States of America

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the Kingdom of Sardinia.

Postal markings:

“P.D.” circular handstamp in red applied at London signifying paid to destination.

Note: The paid to destination handstamp indicates that the postage from London to Intra was pre-paid in cash in London, probably through a shipping agent.



Hepburn, Victoria 3.7.1855 to Intra, Kingdom of Sardinia (E)

Route - Black Ball Line - British contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 22.7.1855 per “Marco Polo”, to Liverpool 20.10; by rail to London 21.10; by steamer to Calais; by rail and overland to Intra, arriving 25.10.1855. (114 days).

The earliest recorded cover from the Australian Colonies to the Italian States

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 1/- for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the United States of America.

“8”(d) manuscript in black for the incoming ship letter fee scored through;
“16”(cents) manuscript in black for transatlantic postage by an American packet;
“37”(cents) handstamp and manuscript in black comprising the 16 cents incoming ship letter fee; 16 cents transatlantic postage by an American packet ship; and 5 cents inland postage to be paid by the recipient.



Ballarat, Victoria 25.6.1855 to Concord, United States of America

Route - Non contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 29.6.1855 per “Frances Henty” via Pernambuco 23.8 to Plymouth 21.9; by rail via London 24.9 to Southampton 25.9. **Havre Line:** Departed Southampton 26.9 per “Union” to New York 11.10; by rail to Concord, arriving 13.10.1855. (110 days).

Seven covers recorded from Victoria at the 1/- retaliatory rate addressed to the United States of America

2. Via Cape Horn

England; City State of Bremen

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.



Melbourne, Victoria 11.7.1855 to London, England

Route - non-contract clipper - White Star Line: Departed Melbourne 15.7.1855 per "Mermaid" to Liverpool 20.10; by rail to London, arriving 22.10.1855. (99 days).



Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the City State of Bremen.

Postal markings:

"5d" manuscript in black debit to Great Britain for an English contract clipper scored through:

"10"(d) manuscript in black debit to Great Britain comprising 6d incoming letter fee plus 4d for forwarding;

"28"(schillings)manuscript in red for the unpaid transit from England to the City State of Bremen to be paid by the recipient.

Melbourne, Victoria 29.9.1855 to Bremen, City State of Bremen

Route - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne 2.10.1855 per "Donald McKay" to Liverpool 28.12; by rail to London 29.12; by steamer to Hamburg; overland to Bremen, arriving January, 1856. (over 93 days).

The earliest recorded cover from Victoria to the City State of Bremen

2. Via Cape Horn

Colony of Canada; Bermuda



Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to Canada West.

Postal markings:

“d5” handstamp in black debit to Great Britain for the share of a contract clipper;

“1/4”(d) manuscript in black for carriage by British packet plus internal postage to be paid by the recipient.

Melbourne, Victoria 8.10.1855 to Perth, **Colony of Canada**

Route - White Star Line - British contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 19.10.1855 per “Ben Nevis” to Liverpool 17.1.1856. **Cunard Line:** Departed Liverpool 19.1 per “Arabia” to Boston 2.2; by rail via Montreal 3.2 to Perth, arriving 5.2.1856. (109 days).

Ex Hackney

Four clipper covers recorded from Victoria to the Colony of Canada

An extraordinary registered usage to Bermuda

Single Rate - Unpaid:

Unpaid from Victoria to England plus prepayment of 1/- Registration for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid from England to Bermuda.

“d6” handstamp in black for the English contract clipper fee incorrectly charged and scored through;

“11”(d) manuscript in black comprising the unpaid 6d from Victoria to England plus 6d postage for forwarding to Bermuda, less 1d internal delivery to be paid by the recipient.



Raglan, Victoria 18.12.1855 to St. Georges, **Bermuda**

Route - contract clipper - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne 27.12.1855 per “Lightning” to Liverpool 24.3.1856. **Cunard Line:** Departed Liverpool 29.3 per S.S. “Cambria” to Halifax 14.4; S.S. “Merlin” 14.4 to St Georges, Bermuda, arriving 18.4.1856. (121 days).

Two covers recorded from the Australian Colonies to Bermuda

2. Via Cape Horn

Colony of Canada; France



Castlemaine, Victoria 5.1.1856 to Sandwich, **Colony of Canada**

Route - White Star Line: Departed Melbourne 10.1.1856 per "Red Jacket" to Liverpool 8.4; by rail via London 9.4 to Liverpool. **Cunard Line:** Departed Liverpool 12.4 per "Arabia" to Boston 24.4; by rail to Sandwich, arriving 27.4.1856. (112 days).

Ex Purves

Four clipper covers recorded from Victoria to the Colony of Canada



Melbourne, Victoria 9.1.1856 to Bordeaux, France

Route - White Star Line: Departed Melbourne 10.1.1856 per "Red Jacket" to Liverpool 8.4; by rail via London 9.4, Calais 9.4 and Paris 10.4 to Bordeaux, arriving 11.4.1856. (92 days).

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the Colony of Canada.

Postal markings:

"PAID AT/CASTLEMAINE" handstamp in black on reverse
"1/5"(d) manuscript in black for transportation by British packet and internal postage to be paid by the recipient.

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to France.

Postal markings:

"COLONIES/&cART.18" applied at London for unpaid mail to France.
"15"(centimes) handstamp in black for forwarding to be paid by the recipient.

2. Via Cape Horn

City State of Hamburg; England



Melbourne, Victoria 30.1.1856 to the City State of Hamburg

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Black Ball Line : Departed Melbourne 1.2.1856 per "Beemah", to Liverpool 26.4; by rail to London 28.4; by steamer to Hamburg, arriving 30.4.1856. (91 days).

Ex Davis

Note: The postal system of the City State of Hamburg was privately operated by the Thurn & Taxis Post until 1858.

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the City State of Hamburg.

"10"(d) manuscript in black debit to Great Britain comprising 6d incoming letter fee plus 4d for forwarding through the closed Prussian mail service; "16"(schillings)manuscript in red for the unpaid transit from England to the City State of Hamburg to be paid by the recipient.



Geelong, Victoria 8.3.1856 to the London, England

Route - Victorian contract clipper - White Star Line : Departed Melbourne 13.3.1856 per "Mermaid" to Liverpool 9.6; by rail to London, arriving 10.6.1856. (94 days).

Ex Perry, Besancon

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

"1/-" manuscript in black for the incoming ship letter fee to be paid by the recipient.

The earliest stamped cover recorded from Victoria to Denmark



Melbourne, Victoria 18.3.1856 to Copenhagen, **Denmark**

Double Rate: Prepayment of 1/- for a 1 oz ship letter to England. Unpaid from England to Denmark.

“1/8” manuscript in black debited to England for double the 10d rate to Denmark; “24” (silbergroschen) manuscript in blue credit to the City State of Hamburg for forwarding to Denmark; “32” manuscript in red applied at Hamburg for credit to the Royal Danish post office;

"102/17" (119 skilling) manuscript in black on the reverse comprising 102 Danish skilling (representing 24 silbergroschen) and 17 skilling for the transit fee to Denmark to be paid by the recipient.

A scanned image of the reverse of this cover showing the accountancy postage to collect by the Royal Danish post office in Hamburg, together with the oval datestamp of the Hamburg stadtpost for the 12.6.1856.



Route - Victorian contract clipper - White Star Line:

Departed Melbourne 13.3.1856 per "Mermaid" to Liverpool 9.6; by rail to London 10.6; by steamer to Ostende; by rail in the closed mail bag to Hamburg 12.6.1856; overland to Copenhagen. (*over 86 days*).

2. Via Cape Horn

England; Kingdom of Prussia

Double Rate:

Prepayment of 1/- for a 1oz ship letter to England.

"10"(d) manuscript in red credit to Great Britain for transportation by a contract clipper.

Double rate clipper covers are scarce



Geelong, Victoria 23.2.1856 to London, England (E)

Route - Contract clipper - Black Ball Line : Departed Melbourne 25.2.1856 per "Ocean Chief" to Liverpool 13.5; by rail to London, arriving 13.5.1856. (80 days).

Ex Geitenbeek

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid from England to the Kingdom of Prussia.

"6" manuscript in black for the 6d ship letter prepayment to England;
"10"(decimes) manuscript in black credit to Belgium for forwarding through the closed Prussian mail service;

"12"(silbergroschen) manuscript in blue comprising the Belgian fees and internal postage to be paid by the recipient.

Postal Markings:

"PAID AT MALDON" in red to indicate the prepayment.



Maldon, Victoria 8.5.1856 to Lubben, Kingdom of Prussia

Route - Victorian contract steamship - Liverpool & Australian Steam Navigation Co: Departed Melbourne 25.5.1856 per "Royal Charter" via Cape Town 16.6 to Liverpool 12.8; by rail to London 14.8; by steamer to Ostend; by rail via Aachen to Lubben, arriving 17.8.1856. (101 days).

One of the earliest recorded covers from Victoria to the Kingdom of Prussia

2. Via Cape Horn

England

The rare Half Length usage of the S. T. Gill lettersheet



Samuel Thomas Gill was born in England in 1818 and emigrated to the new colony of South Australia in 1839 where he soon established an artists studio in Gawler Place, Adelaide. In 1852 he moved to Victoria where he found widespread fame for his sketches of life on the goldfields, streetscapes and prominent buildings in the rapidly developing city of Melbourne.

Note: Usage of Gill lettersheets are rare. All other used examples have the stamps removed. This is the only recorded complete example with the stamps attached.



Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Postal markings:

“1d” handstamp in red credit to Great Britain for an incoming contract ship letter.

Beechworth, Victoria 17.6.1856 to London, England (E)

Route - Contract clipper - White Star Line: Departed Melbourne 27.6.1856 per “Sardinian” to Kinsale, Ireland 11.9; by steamer to Liverpool 11.9; by rail to London, arriving 11.9.1856. (86 days).

Ex Purves, Perry, Forster

2. Via Cape Horn

Switzerland; England



Creswick Creek, Victoria 19.5.1856 to Locarno, Switzerland

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Liverpool & Australian Steam Navigation Co: Departed Melbourne 25.5.1856 per "Royal Charter" to Liverpool 12.8; by rail to London 14.8; by steamer to Calais; by rail in the closed bag via France to Locarno, arriving 18.8.1856. (91 days).

Single Rate: Prepayment of 1/6d comprising 6d for a ½ oz ship letter plus 1/- registration to England.

Unpaid from England to Switzerland.

"46" in black credit to the United Kingdom incorrectly charged for an unpaid ship letter;

"9"(decimes) manuscript in black credit to France for forwarding;

"130"(rappen) manuscript in red for foreign charges plus Swiss inland postage to be paid by the recipient.

Postal Markings:

"Crown/ REGISTERED" in red applied at London;

"COLONIES/&cART.13" applied at London for unpaid mail to France.

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 1/6d comprising 6d for a ½ oz ship letter plus 1/- registration to England.

Postal markings:

"1"(d) manuscript in red credit to Great Britain for the incoming ship letter fee for a Victorian contract ship letter.

"6"(d) manuscript in black for the inwards registration fee to be paid by the recipient.

Note: The 1/- Registered stamp is Die II and very scarce used on cover.



Castlemaine, Victoria 5.7.1856 to London, England

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne 16.7.1856 per "Champion of the Seas" to Liverpool 13.12; by rail to London, arriving 14.10.1856. (90 days).

Ex Molnar, Winchester

A Rare Non-Concessional Soldier's Letter

A rare letter from a soldier in the 1st Somerset Regiment in charge of the six gun battery overlooking the Yarra River and sent to the United States at the non concessional postage rate.

The letter is written by Sergeant Major John Gould of the 1st Somerset Regiment who writes:

"Since I wrote last I have been a great sufferer. I broke my thigh and dislocated my hip but I am almost recovered. I expect in six or eight weeks to be once more as proud man and upright soldier. You must know, my dear sister, I am a favoured one in this Regiment. I belong to the 1st Somerset. Of course, a Staff Sergeant.

I am in command of a Six Gun Battery at the mouth of the Yarra River leading to Melbourne. I am my own commanding officer. I go when I like and return when I please. My pay is seven shillings and four pence per diem."



Melbourne, Victoria 23.6.1856 to Wisconsin, United States of America

Single Rate: Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England. Unpaid from England to the United States of America.

Reason for Non Concessional Postage:

The 1d concessionary rate was only applicable to soldiers letters addressed within the British Empire. Since this cover was addressed to the United States, the concessionary rate did not apply.

Postal markings: '19 cents' handstamp in black at Liverpool for credit to Great Britain (comprising 3c British inland letter plus 16c Trans Atlantic postage by British Packet); 'BR. PACKET/26/Sep/24/BOSTON' handstamp in black comprising British 19c plus 5c United States inland postage to be paid by the recipient.

Route - non contract clipper - White Star Line: Departed Melbourne 27.6.1856 per "Sardinian". Adverse winds prevented the "Sardinian" from docking at Liverpool, and the mails were offloaded at Kinsdale in Ireland on the 11.9 and forwarded by steamer to Liverpool 11.9. **Cunard Line:** Departed Liverpool 13.9 per "Canada" to Boston 26.9; by rail via New York to Beloit, Wisconsin.

2. Via Cape Horn

Cape of Good Hope; City State of Hamburg



Double Rate:

Prepayment of 1/- for a 1oz ship letter to England.

"2d" handstamp in red applied at London for credit to England for a Victorian contract ship letter.

"8"(d) manuscript in black applied at Cape Town for the incoming ship letter fee to be paid by the recipient.

Melbourne, Victoria 5.11.1856 to Table Bay, Cape of Good Hope

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Black Ball Line: Departed Melbourne 14.11.1856 per "Morning Light" to Liverpool 8.2.1857; by rail via London 9.2 to Dartmouth. **Lindsay Line:** Departed Dartmouth 6.3 per S.S. "Clarendon" to Cape Town, arriving 25.4.1857. (162 days).

Ex Tabcart

The earliest cover recorded from Victoria to the Cape of Good Hope



Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Unpaid to the City State of Hamburg.

"1d"(d) handstamp in red credit to Great Britain for a Victorian contract ship letter;

"9"(schillings)manuscript in red for the unpaid transit from England to the City State of Hamburg to be paid by the recipient.

Melbourne, Victoria 12.11.1856 to the City State of Hamburg

Route - Victorian contract clipper - Black Ball Line : Departed Melbourne 14.11.1856 per "Morning Light" to Liverpool 8.2.1857; by rail to London 9.2; by steamer to Hamburg, arriving 11.2.1857. (91 days).

Ex Chester Beatty, Forster, Perry, Kellow, Geitenbeek, Winchester

3. Post-contract Clipper Sailings

England; England

With the conclusion of the Crimean War in February 1856, the British Post Office tendered for two new contracts to provide steam services to the Australian Colonies. This did not commence until January 1857. However, colonists still had choices of how they wished their mail to be sent. Whilst most opted for the new steam service, occasionally, some were sent via clippers.

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

An unusual cover with the sender offered two different types of transportation to England



Melbourne, Victoria 30.1.1857 to Manchester, England

Route - Non contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 31.1.1857 per "South Carolina" to Liverpool 6.6; by rail to Manchester, arriving 6.6.1857. (127 days).

Note: The last contract clipper to leave Melbourne was the Gibbs Bright vessel "Royal Charter" on the 17.1.1857. The next steamer voyage was the European and Australian Royal Mail Co. steamer S.S. Simla, departing on the 15.2. If the sender had waited until this sailing, the envelope would have arrived at Liverpool on the 9.4, a full two months before the arrival of the "South Carolina" on the 6.6.



Melbourne, Victoria 31.12.1857 to London, England

Route - Non contract clipper: Departed Melbourne 1.1.1858 per "Morning Light" to Liverpool 5.4; by rail to London, arriving 6.4.1858. (94 days).

Note: If the sender had waited another eleven days, the letter would have sailed on board the European and Australian Royal Mail Co. steamer "Columbian" which departed on the 17.1.1858, arriving Southampton on the 15.3.1858, three weeks beforehand. This shows the range of choices that the early colonists had for sending their mail to England.

Single Rate:

Prepayment of 6d for a ½ oz ship letter to England.

Postal Markings:

Unusually, the Victorian 6d stamp is cancelled on arrival at Liverpool, England on the 5.4.1858.

An unusually late clipper voyage cancelled on arrival at Liverpool, England