

Australian Decimal Postal Rates – 1966 to 1973 Airmail

In this third installment of a planned series of articles exploring Australia's Decimal Postal Rates covering the period February 1966 to July 2000 we will be dealing with the airmail rates for the period 1966-73 to complement the surface rates discussed in the last two articles.

Domestic Airmail Rates

Domestic airmail service was available for letters (including lettersheets and postcards) sent within Australia and to / from Australian territories including Christmas Island (Indian Ocean), Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and Papua and New Guinea.

Since 1959 all domestic letter mail was carried by airmail where appropriate at no additional charge to the basic domestic surface letter rate (ie. where an airmail service was available and its use would speed delivery). The only requirement was that such mail had to be within a "standard" size set by the Post Office as a rectangular shape between 3½ - 5½ inches high, between 4¾ - 9¼ inches wide with a ratio of side lengths not less than 1 : 1.414 and not exceeding 3/16th of an inch in thickness.

For convenience, we will repeat the domestic letter rate table set out in the previous article on surface rates here, since these rates also provided airmail service for standard-size letters, lettersheets and postcards where appropriate and available –

Domestic Airmail Letters, Lettersheets and Postcards (standard size)

	up to 1 oz	up to 2oz	up to 3oz	up to 4oz	up to 8oz	up to 12oz	up to 16oz
Rate effective from:							
14 February 1966	\$0.04	\$0.07	\$0.10	\$0.13	extra \$0.03 per oz	extra \$0.03 per oz	extra \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1967	\$0.05	\$0.09	\$0.13	\$0.17	\$0.21	\$0.25	\$0.29
1 October 1970	\$0.06	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.18	\$0.24	\$0.30	\$0.30
1 October 1971	\$0.07	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.18	\$0.24	\$0.30	\$0.30

The table below sets out the higher rates applicable to non-standard size articles. The airmail surcharge on such items was 3c per ounce in addition to the standard rate –

Domestic Airmail Letters, Lettersheets and Postcards (non-standard size)

	up to 1 oz	up to 2oz	up to 3oz	up to 4oz	up to 5oz	up to 6oz	up to 16oz
Rate effective from:							
14 February 1966	\$0.07	\$0.13	\$0.19	\$0.25	\$0.31	\$0.37	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1967	\$0.08	\$0.15	\$0.22	\$0.29	\$0.36	\$0.39	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1970	\$0.09	\$0.18	\$0.27	\$0.30	\$0.39	\$0.42	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1971	\$0.10	\$0.18	\$0.27	\$0.30	\$0.39	\$0.42	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz

In most cases it is not possible to ascertain for sure whether a particular item was carried by airmail or not, as very few items received transit and arrival datestamps that might prove airmail carriage. The exception is registered items, where the backstamps may well prove airmail carriage by showing faster delivery than would be possible by surface means. The payment of an airmail surcharge on non-standard articles (see Figure 1) and the addition of an airmail sticker to standard mail (as shown

in Figure 2) would also suggest carriage by airmail.



Figure 1: 1966 (Oct) 7c Fish paying 4c letter rate plus 3c airmail surcharge on non-standard size



Figure 2: 1971 (April) QE2 6c orange single paying standard domestic letter rate for airmail carriage

For very urgent mail a new airmail service offering same-day or overnight delivery was introduced in 1967 initially known as Special Despatch and later as Priority Paid. This will be discussed in detail in our articles on Special Services.

Printed Matter

Domestic airmail was also available for printed matter items. As we discussed in the previous article, printed matter includes printed and commercial papers, samples and merchandise, which are grouped together as “Other Articles” in the Post Office Rates Booklets. As with letter mail, standard-size printed matter items were carried by domestic airmail where appropriate at no additional charge to the basic domestic surface rates shown in the table below –

Domestic Airmail Printed Matter Articles (standard size)

	up to 2 oz	up to 4oz	up to 8oz	up to 12oz	up to 16oz
Rate effective from:					
14 February 1966	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.07	\$0.10	\$0.13
1 October 1967	\$0.05	\$0.09	\$0.13	\$0.17	\$0.21
1 October 1970	\$0.06	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.24	\$0.24
1 October 1971	\$0.07	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.24	\$0.24

The table below sets out the higher rates applicable to non-standard size articles. The airmail surcharge on such items was 3c per ounce in addition to the standard rate, as for letter mail, but the higher weight-steps allowed on the standard rate component of printed matter items resulted in different rates –

Domestic Airmail Printed Matter Articles (non-standard size)

	up to 1 oz	up to 2oz	up to 3oz	up to 4oz	up to 5oz	up to 6oz	up to 16oz
Rate effective from:							
14 February 1966	\$0.07	\$0.10	\$0.13	\$0.16	\$0.22	\$0.25	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1967	\$0.08	\$0.11	\$0.18	\$0.21	\$0.28	\$0.31	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1970	\$0.09	\$0.12	\$0.21	\$0.24	\$0.33	\$0.36	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz
1 October 1971	\$0.10	\$0.13	\$0.21	\$0.24	\$0.33	\$0.36	standard rate plus \$0.03 per oz

It is not surprising that there are very few surviving examples of non-standard size printed matter items with additional postage paid for carriage by airmail. As the correspondence was by definition not personal in nature, most senders wouldn't consider it urgent enough to pay extra for airmail service, and even if they did such envelopes tended to be discarded by recipients.

Parcels could also be sent by domestic airmail, and parcel rates applied to domestic letters and printed matter items weighing over 16 ounces (1 pound). However, as mentioned previously, an examination of parcel rates is currently beyond our scope, but may feature in a later article.

Overseas Airmail Rates

At the time of conversion to decimal currency there were seven charging zones for overseas airmail rates, which were reduced to five when the new decimal postal rates were published. The zones related to geographic distance from Australia and the length of routes by which airmail was delivered. The major countries and regions in each zone are listed below –

Zone 1 – New Zealand

Zone 2 – Malaysia, Indonesia

Zone 3 – Hong Kong, Philippines, Japan, India, Pakistan, Thailand, Hawaii

Zone 4 – USA, Canada, Israel

Zone 5 – United Kingdom, Europe (incl. Russia), Africa, Central & South America

Letter Airmail Rates

Airmail letters were charged per half-ounce weight irrespective of size and thickness. Most items seen pay the single base rate for a letter weighing up to ½ oz, but heavier articles had to pay a multiple of the base rate (ie. a letter weighing over 1 oz and less than 1½ oz would pay triple the base rate). The table below set out the rates for letters sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn

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Airmail Letter Rates 1966 - 1973

Per ½ oz	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
Rate effective from:					
14 February 1966	\$0.07	\$0.10	\$0.15	\$0.20	\$0.25
1 October 1968	\$0.10	\$0.15	\$0.20	\$0.25	\$0.30
1 October 1971	\$0.12	\$0.20	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.35

This selection of covers illustrates the various rates and also raises a question about whether the first increase to overseas airmail rates took effect in 1968 as stated in the tables or already in 1967.

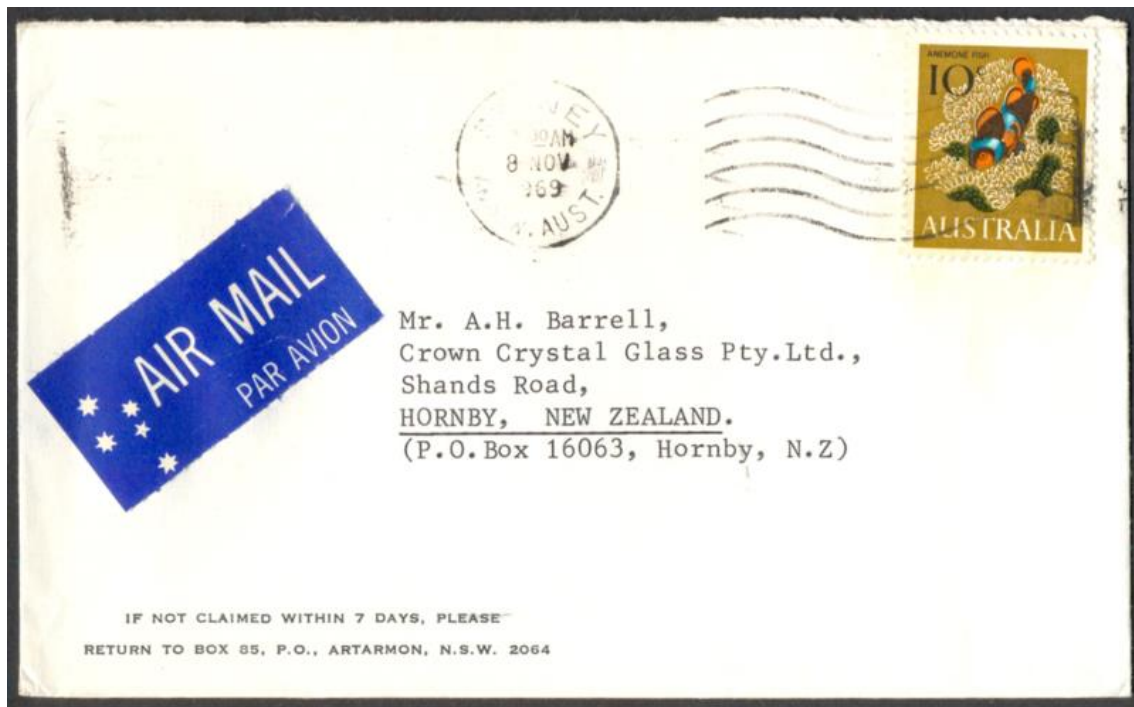


Figure 3: 1969 (Nov) 10c Anemone Fish single franking paying airmail rate to New Zealand (Zone 1)

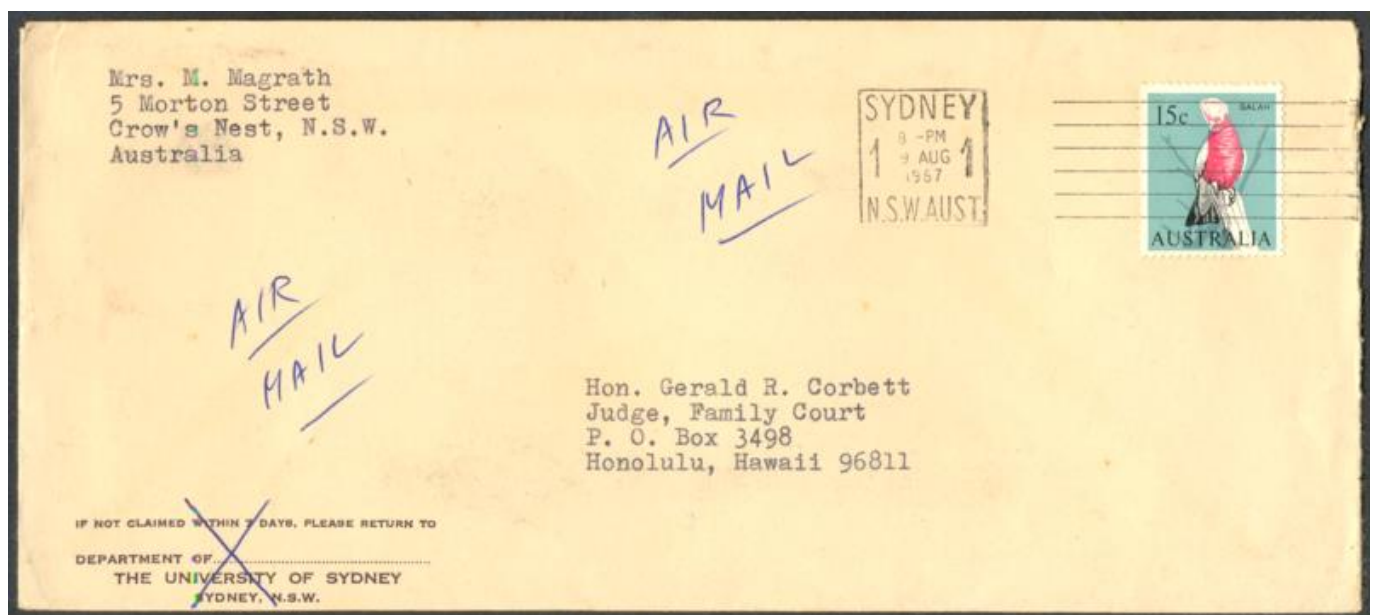


Figure 4: 1967 (Aug) 15c Galah single franking paying airmail rate to Hawaii (Zone 3)

Pre-decimal stamps were still valid for postage for two years after the conversion to decimal currency, and can occasionally be found used in this period. As explained in the articles on surface rates, their value was converted to dollars and cents and additional franking was required to make up any shortfall. The cover in Figure 5 shows a 5d Christmas 1962 stamp used to up-rate a 15c Galah to

make up the 20c airmail rate to the USA (Zone4). Although the 5d stamp was worth only 4c and so only 19c postage was paid, the cover was not taxed.



Figure 5: 1966 (July) airmail to USA with 5d Christmas 1962 and 15c Galah Bird pre-decimal / decimal franking to pay the 20c Zone 4 airmail rate (underpaid by 1c but not taxed)

The first rate increase after the original introduction of decimal currency gives rise to some confusion. There was a general increase in surface postal rates on 1 October 1967, and the Australia Post rates table for October 1967 also indicates increases in airmail rates. However, there is a lot of evidence in the form of surviving postal articles showing such an increase did not occur then and was not introduced until 1 October 1968.

Figures 6 and 7 show the initial 25c per ½oz airmail rate to England paid in March 1968 and the now-increased 30c per ½oz airmail rate paid in October 1968. These are only two examples of many covers I have seen in this period that indicate the first increase in airmail rates did not occur until 1 October 1968, and I would be interested in hearing from readers whether their covers match this pattern.



Figure 6: 1968 (March) 5c and 20c World Weather Watch paying 25c per ½oz Zone 5 airmail rate



Figure 7: 1968 (2 Oct) 5c and 25c Mexico Olympics paying increased 30c per ½oz Zone 5 airmail rate

Postcard & Greeting Card Airmail Rates

Postcards and greeting cards were entitled to specific reduced airmail rates (unlike surface mail where postcards were subject to the same rates as letters and greeting cards were entitled to printed matter rates). As with letters, the reduced postcard and greeting card rates were divided into charging zones and charged per ½oz, and were set at half the corresponding letter rate (rounded up to the nearest cent). The tables below set out the rates for postcards and greeting cards sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn –

Airmail Postcard & Greeting Card Rates 1966 - 1973

Per ½ oz	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
Rate effective from:					
14 February 1966	\$0.04	\$0.05	\$0.08	\$0.10	\$0.13
1 October 1968	\$0.05	\$0.08	\$0.10	\$0.13	\$0.15
1 October 1971	\$0.08	\$0.10	\$0.13	\$0.15	\$0.18

The following selection of items illustrates some of these rates -

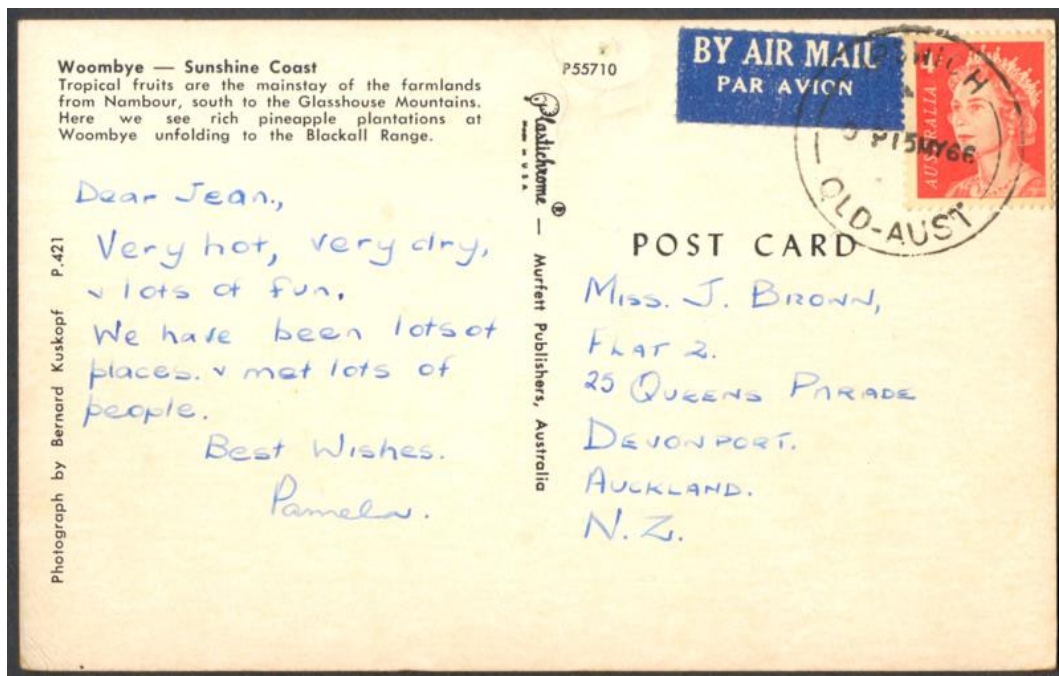


Figure 8: 1966 (May) QE2 4c red paying postcard airmail rate to New Zealand (Zone 1)

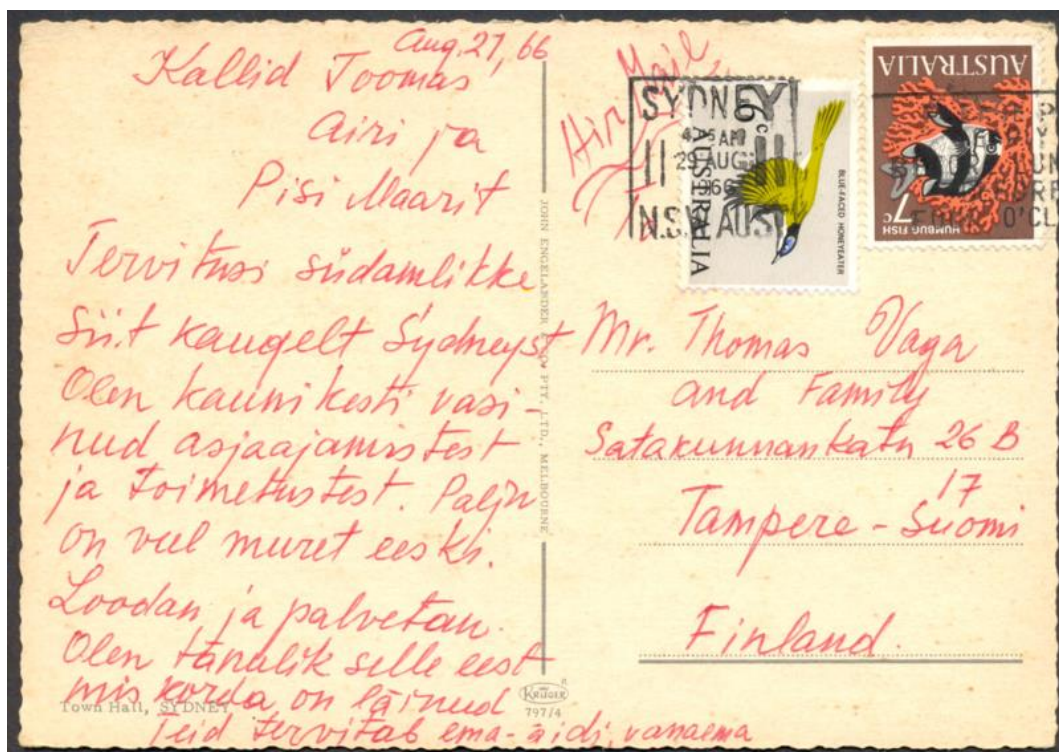


Figure 9: 1966 (Aug) 7c Fish and 6c Bird paying 13c airmail postcard rate to Finland (Zone 5)

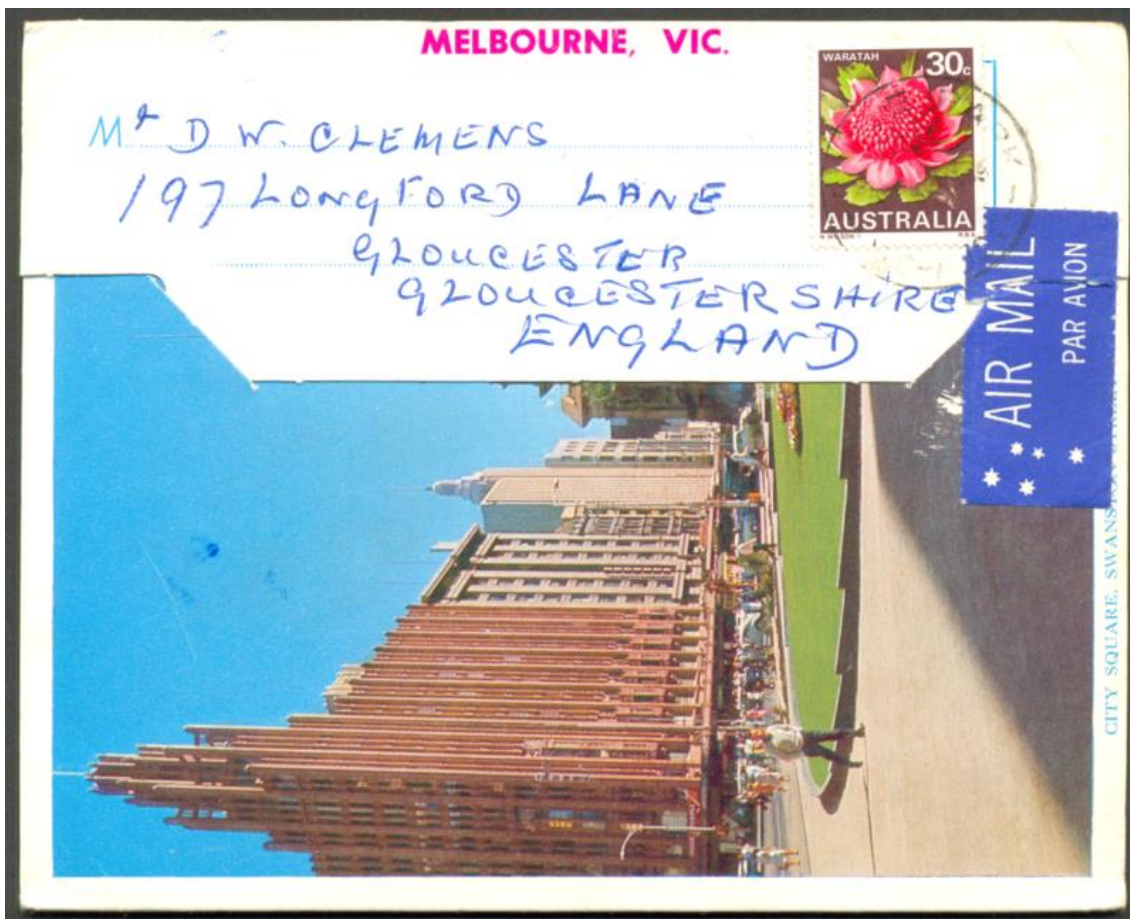


Figure 10: 1969 (Jan) 30c Waratah single franking paying second weight-step airmail postcard rate to UK (an example of how a “postcard” can weigh more than ½ oz !)

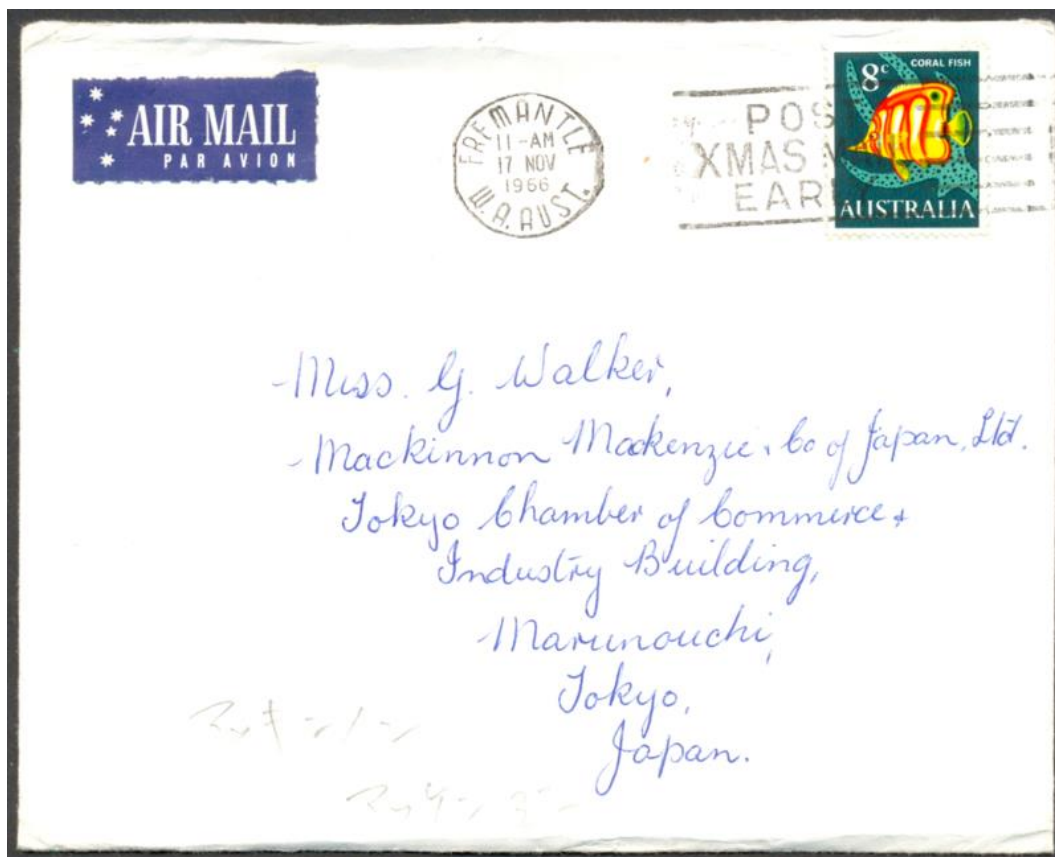


Figure 11: 1966 (Nov) 8c Fish single franking paying greeting card airmail rate to Japan (Zone 3)



Figure 12: 1967 (Sept) 10c Anemone Fish single franking paying greeting card rate to USA

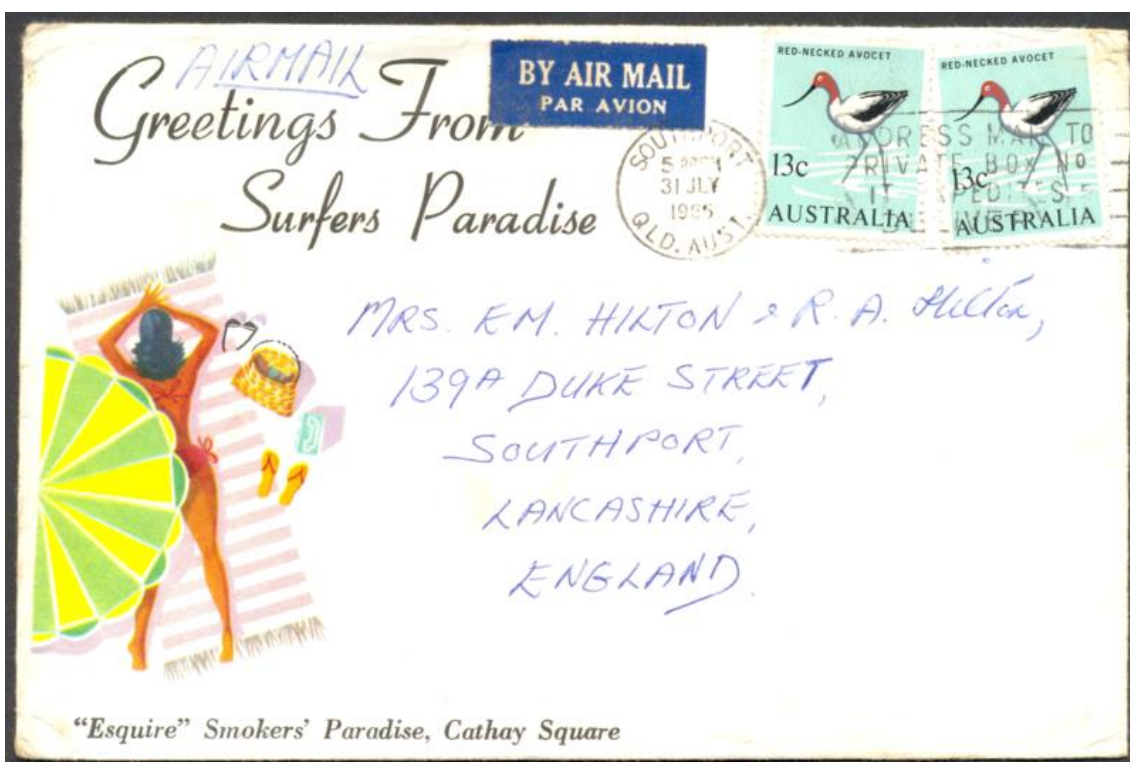


Figure 13: 1966 (July) 13c Avocet (2) paying second weight-step UK (Zone 5) greeting card airmail rate

Printed Matter

Printed matter items were also entitled to reduced rates of postage for carriage by airmail overseas (see the domestic section above for an explanation of what is included in “printed matter”). However, printed matter articles were charged in 2oz weight-steps, and the base rate was higher than that for letters, meaning it was cheaper to send light-weight printed matter items at letter rates than at printed matter rates. Indeed some printed matter items can be found posted at greeting card rates, but as mentioned with domestic airmail printed matter rates, surviving examples of such material is difficult to find. The tables below set out the rates for printed matter sent overseas by airmail to each Zone in turn –

Airmail Printed Matter Rates 1966 - 1973

Per 2 oz	Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5
Rate effective from:					
14 February 1966	\$0.08	\$0.15	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.35
1 October 1968	\$0.12	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.45
1 October 1971	\$0.15	\$0.25	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.45



1970 airmail printed matter to England overpaying 45c per 2oz rate by 5c (an adding error?)

Aerogrammes

Aerogrammes are a separate class of mail available only to overseas countries offering reduced rates of airmail postage in most cases lower than the applicable letter or postcard / greeting card rates. Unlike these classes of mail, a single aerogramme rate applied to all overseas countries irrespective of charging zone.

The other unusual characteristic of aerogrammes was that the preferential rate only applied if the correspondence was limited to writing on the paper that was folded up to comprise the aerogramme. If anything was enclosed (an additional sheet of paper, or a photo or newspaper clipping or the like), the aerogramme was subject to letter rates. Accordingly, only a single weight-step rate applied for aerogrammes. The table below sets out the rates for aerogrammes –

Aerogramme Rates 1966 - 1973

	All Zones
Rate effective from:	
14 February 1966	\$0.09
1 October 1967	\$0.10
1 October 1971	\$0.12

The Post Office produced Aerogrammes with imprinted stamps for purchase, and most aerogrammes seen are such items. As with other classes of mail, pre-decimal values could continue to be used after decimalisation. However, unlike most other rates, aerogramme rates were actually increased on decimalisation from the previous 10d rate (which converted to 8c) to 9c per aerogramme. The result was that pre-decimal Post Office Aerogrammes used after decimalisation had to be uprated to meet this new rate, and Figure 14 is an example of such an item.



Figure 14: 1966 (March) 10d Aerogramme to England with QE2 1c brown added to pay increased 9c aerogramme rate after decimalisation (10d converted to 8c and required additional postage)

Apart from Post Office Aerogrammes, private aerogrammes were available and could be used at the same rates with the postage paid by adhesive stamps. Figure 15 is an example of such an item. Adhesive stamps could also be used to uprate Post Office Aerogrammes after rate changes, as shown in Figure 16.

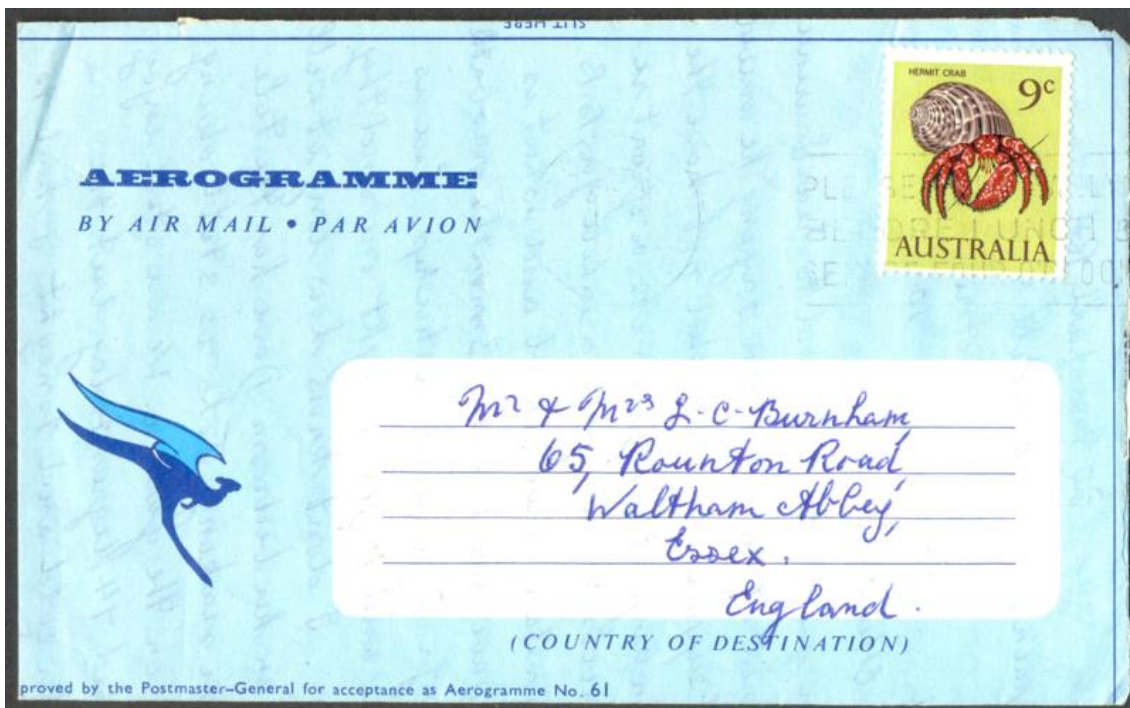


Figure 15: 1967 (May) private aerogramme to England with 9c Hermit Crab

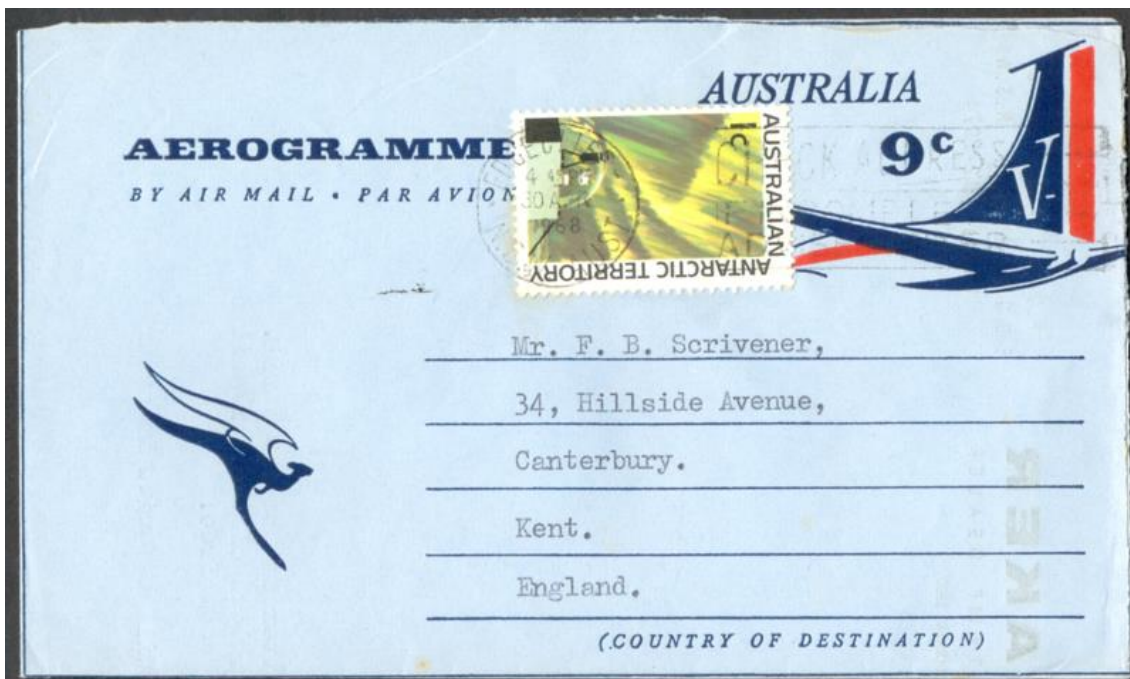


Figure 16: 1968 (April) 9c Plane Aerogramme to England with 1c AAT added to pay increased 10c rate

Although the aerogramme service and rates were well-known to residents, apparently some visitors to Australia were not aware of the reduced rates enjoyed by aerogrammes, as shown in Figure 17, where a Danish tourist has paid the full 30c letter rate on a private aerogramme sent to Denmark rather than the 10c aerogramme rate. With such items it is always important to check whether the aerogramme contained any enclosures (evidence of which can be reference to enclosed photos in the message, headings such as "sheet 1" that indicate a second sheet was enclosed, or just the absence of a goodbye and signature suggesting the message continued onto another sheet of paper), in which case the payment of the letter rate was required rather than accidental.



Figure 17: 1970 (Jan) private aerogramme to Denmark with Primary Industry 15c Timber pair mistakenly paying 30c letter rate rather than 10c aerogramme rate

I hope that this introduction to Australian decimal postal rates gives readers a glimpse into this fascinating area and encourages some to try their hand at forming a collection of decimal postal history. For those already engaged in this fascinating area I trust that the rates tables help with identifying the rates paid on your covers, and for those focused on single franking covers we have shown some of the unusual way such singles can be found. Look for further installments in future issues.