

## Australian Decimal Postal Rates – 1966 to 1973 Ordinary Mail

### Domestic Mail

Domestic rates are broken down into letters (including lettersheets and postcards), printed matter, newspapers & periodicals and parcels. These domestic rates applied to items sent within Australia as well as to items sent to Christmas Island (Indian Ocean), Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Lord Howe Island, Norfolk Island and Papua and New Guinea.

Upon conversion to decimal currency the base domestic letter rate was set at 4c for the first ounce (which at the conversion rate of 1 cent = 1.2d made it equivalent to 4.8d, a slight reduction from the previous 5d rate). The table below sets out the rates for domestic letters, lettersheets and postcards to be forwarded by surface means –

Surface Letters*	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

\* includes letters, lettersheets and postcards

Pre-decimal stamps (sterling £sd values) remained valid for use until 13 February 1968 (two years after the conversion to decimal currency) and could be used on their own or in conjunction with decimal stamps to pay the current postage rates. Figure 1 is an example of a mixed franking cover to pay the 4c domestic letter rate:

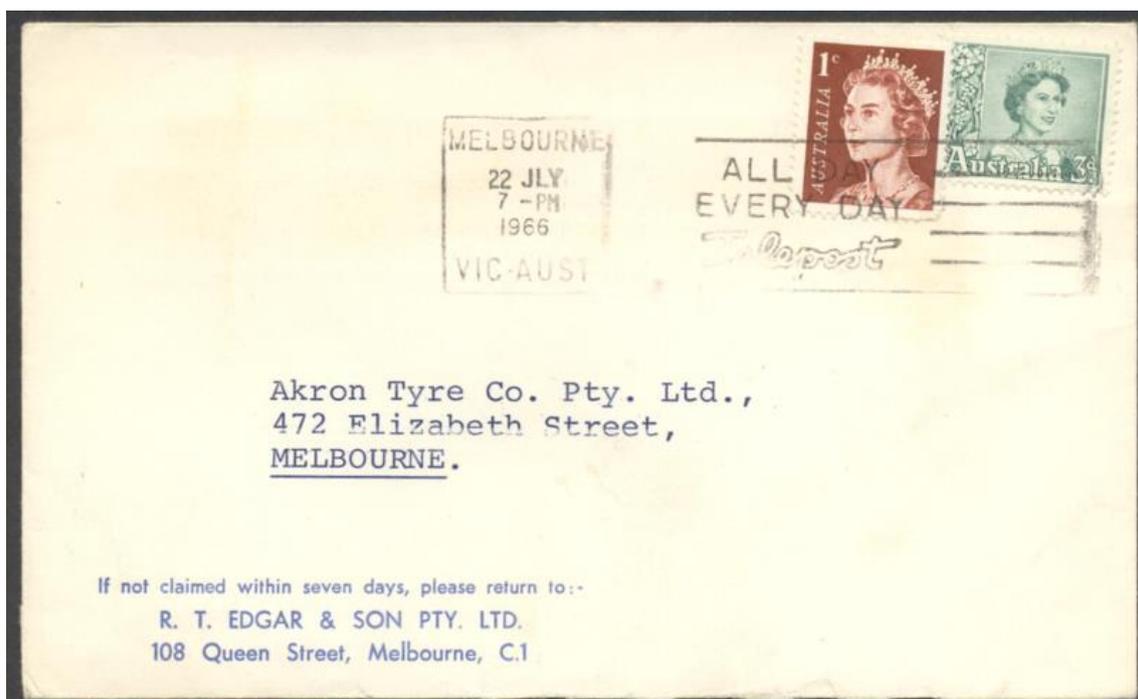


Figure 1: 1966 (July) mixed pre-decimal & decimal franking paying 4c domestic rate  
On 1 October 1967 the base domestic letter rate was increased to 5c for the first ounce with the second and subsequent weight-steps being increased also. However, as the higher weight-steps

(over 4ozs) were now charged per 4ozs instead of per ounce, heavier articles actually became cheaper to post.

In a move which was to be repeated a number of times during the decimal era, the rate change came shortly after the issue of the last two 4c commemorative stamps, the World YWCA Congress and the Gynaecology & Obstetrics Congress. Both issues were available for only around 5 weeks before the rate change, so finding single frankings of these items on cover paying the 4c rate is quite difficult (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: 1966 (Sept) 4c Gynaecology used just before the October change to 5c rate

There were many 4c stamps and postal stationery envelopes still in stock when this rate change was announced, which then had to be uprated to meet the new rate (see Figure 3).

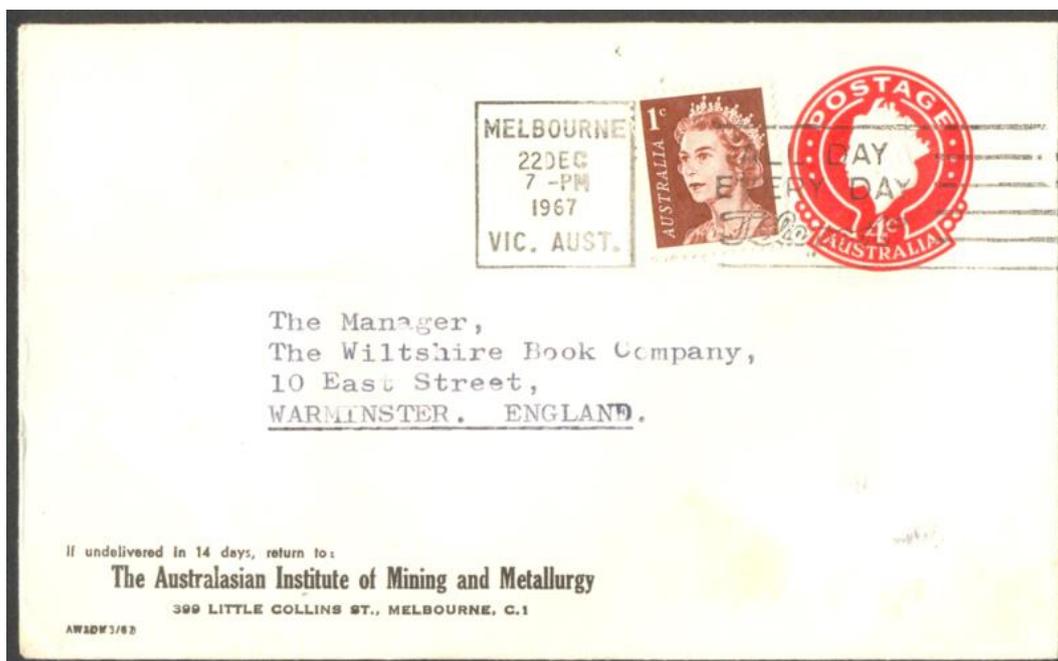


Figure 3: 1967 (Dec) QE2 4c red PTPO envelope uprated to meet the new 5c rate

The other main class of mail sent domestically by surface means was printed matter, which was entitled to lower rates of postage or higher weight-steps or a combination of both. Printed matter includes the classes of mail previously known as “printed papers” and “commercial papers”, as well as samples and merchandise. They are grouped together as “Other Articles” in the Australia Post Rates Booklets, and the rates for sending such material are set out in the table below –

<b>Printed Matter*</b>	<b>up to 2 oz</b>	<b>up to 4oz</b>	<b>up to 8oz</b>	<b>up to 12oz</b>	<b>up to 16oz</b>
<b>Rate effective from:</b>					
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

**\* includes printed and commercial papers, samples and merchandise**

As can be seen from this table, the basic rate for “Other Articles” during this period was the same as for domestic letters, the concessionary element being the higher weight-steps allowed before additional postage had to be paid.

The distinction between printed matter and commercial papers lies in the fact that the former had to be wholly printed (eg. notices, maps & plans, photographs etc) and the latter could contain some written communication of a commercial nature (eg. orders, invoices and receipts). However, as the rates charged were identical (unlike in the pre-decimal period), the distinction no longer had any practical effect and this class of mail became generally known as “printed matter”.

Printed matter did not have to be identified as such (although examples of endorsements such as “printed matter only” are regularly found), but they did have to be posted unsealed for postal inspection (or sealed in such a way that they could be easily inspected eg. by a staple or pin), which can be a useful way of identifying such mail.

The other class of mail that fits loosely within printed matter is newspapers & periodicals, which were generally sent through the mail in wrappers. Australia Post issued postal stationery wrappers (see Figure X) with imprinted values until the late 1970’s and many of the items seen here are used stationery wrappers (although private wrappers could be used and franked with ordinary postage stamps). The basic rate for newspapers & periodicals was the same as for printed matter, although the weight-steps were higher (initially per 8ozs and after October 1967 per 6ozs).

The last class of mail that will be mentioned briefly is parcels. As we have seen, domestic letter and printed matter rates were charged up to 16 ounces (= 1lb; “one pound weight”). Heavier letters and printed matter were charged at parcel rates. Domestic parcel rates were divided into four scales depending on distance (1. within 30 miles of posting, 2. within state but greater than 30 miles, 3. to adjoining state and 4. elsewhere in Australia) with each scale having its own rates starting from up to 2lbs weight.

A more detailed examination of parcel rates and newspaper & periodicals rates is currently beyond our scope, but may feature in a later article.

## Overseas Mail

Overseas rates are broken down into letters (including lettersheets and postcards), printed matter, small packets, newspapers & periodicals and parcels. Most rates for surface mail to overseas countries were initially divided into articles mailed to British Empire countries (which were charged at lower rates) and articles sent to all other countries.

The table below sets out the rates for letters, lettersheets and postcards sent overseas by surface means to British Commonwealth and / or Asia-Oceania countries –

Surface Letters *	up to 1 oz	up to 2 oz	up to 4 oz	up to 8 oz	up to 16 oz	1 - 2 lb	2 - 4 lb
<b>Rate effective from:</b>							
14 February 1966 (to British Commonwealth only)	\$0.04	\$0.07	add \$0.03 per oz				
1 October 1967 (to British Commonwealth only)	\$0.05	\$0.09	add \$0.04 per oz				
1 October 1970 (to British C'th and Asia-Oceania)	\$0.07	\$0.13	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.70	\$1.20	\$1.90
1 October 1971 (to Asia-Oceania only)	\$0.07	\$0.13	\$0.20	\$0.40	\$0.70	\$1.20	\$1.90

\* includes letters, lettersheets and postcards

The reduced rates to British Empire countries were extended to Asia-Oceania countries in October 1970. From October 1971 the reduced rates to British Empire countries were withdrawn, the lower rates now applying only to Asia-Oceania countries. Within a few years, Australian postage rates had changed from favouring British Empire mail (a principle that had been in place since before the 1911 introduction of the Empire Penny Post) to charging based on geographic distance from Australia.

As mentioned above, there were still large stocks of some 4c stamps in stock when the 1 October 1967 rate change was announced, particularly of the QE2 4c red booklet stamps. It was decided to surcharge these "5c" and continue to sell them in booklets to pay the new domestic and British Commonwealth surface mail rates, this being the first surcharged stamp to be issued since 1941 (see Figure 4).

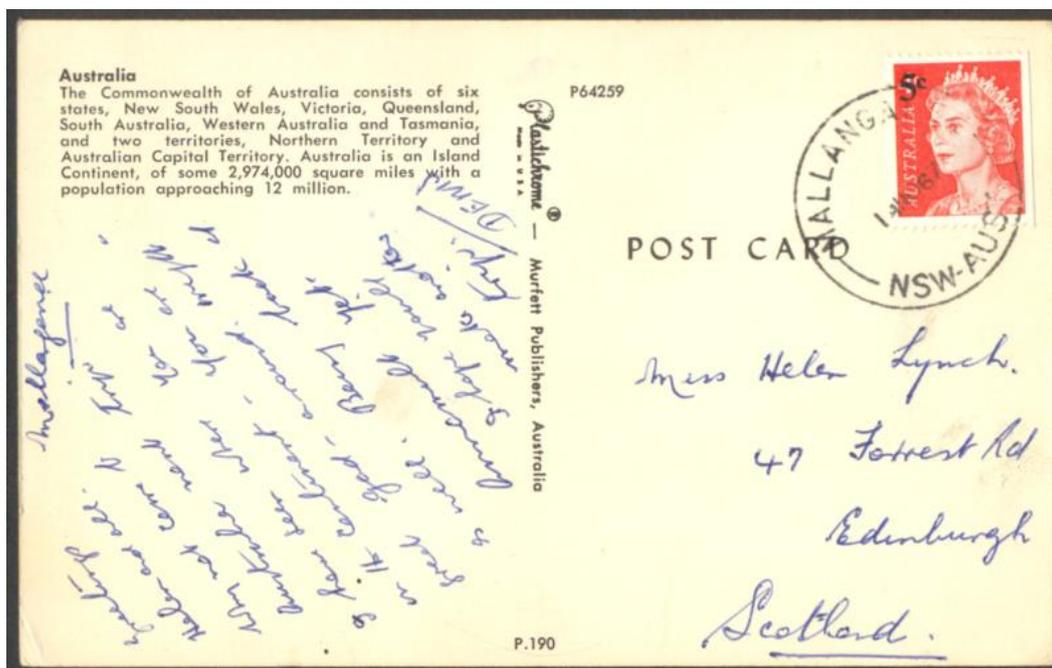


Figure 4: 1967 (14Nov) QE2 5c on 4c red surcharged booklet stamp on postcard to Scotland

Items weighing over the 1oz base rate were charged a slightly reduced rate for each additional weight-step, which explains some of the unusual total rates charged. Often heavier letters are franked with multiple stamps to pay the higher rates, but from time to time a stamp denomination fitting the higher rate was available and used making for a desirable single franking, such as the one shown in Figure 5.

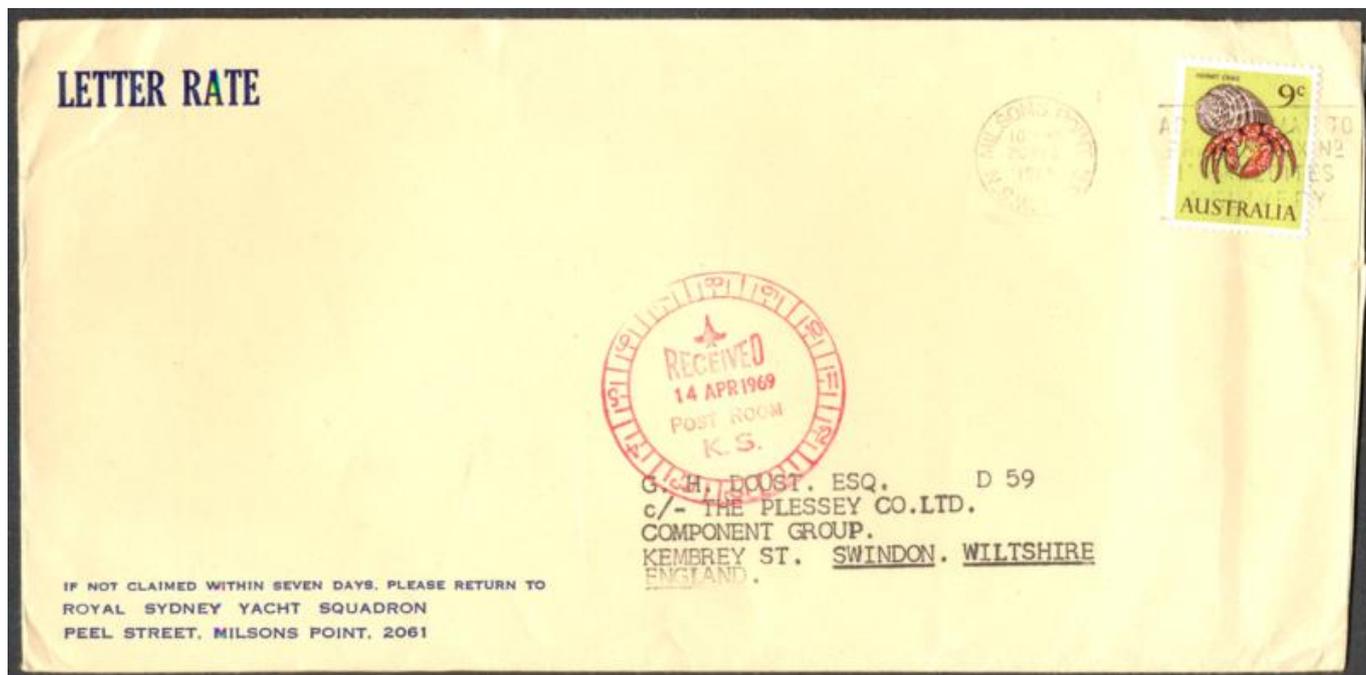


Figure 5: 1969 (Feb) 9c Hermit Crab paying second weight-step Empire surface letter rate

The basic rates for overseas surface mail to British Commonwealth countries mirrored Australian domestic rates until October 1970 (when these rates were extended to Asia-Oceania countries). When the domestic letter rate was increased to 6c on 1 October 1967, the overseas surface letter rate to British Commonwealth countries was increased to 7c for the first ounce. This new differential led to some confusion as evidence by the cover in Figure 6, where a 6c QANTAS stamp was used to pay a surface letter to England. Although paying the increased domestic letter rate, it underpaid the new British Commonwealth surface rate and was accordingly taxed 2c to pay for double the 1c deficiency.



Figure 6: 1970 (Nov) 6c QANTAS under-paying 7c overseas letter rate and taxed

We may well ask whether it was economically viable to bother taxing an item underpaid by 1c, particularly in the case of the cover in Figure 6 where there is no indication that the postage due was actually collected. There is some evidence that many postal clerks did not bother, as I have seen a number of items from the last months of 1970 immediately after this rate change that have paid only 6c for surface letters to England and have not been taxed.

The table below sets out the rates for letters, lettersheets and postcards sent overseas by surface means to all other countries –

Surface Letters *	up to 1 oz	up to 2 oz	up to 4 oz	up to 8 oz	up to 16 oz	1 - 2 lb	2 - 4 lb
<b>Rate effective from:</b>							
14 February 1966 (non-British Commonwealth)	\$0.07	\$0.11	add \$0.04 per oz				
1 October 1970 (non-British C'th and outside Asia- Oceania)	\$0.09	\$0.16	\$0.25	\$0.50	\$0.90	\$1.50	\$2.40
1 October 1971 (outside Asia-Oceania)	\$0.10	\$0.18	\$0.25	\$0.60	\$1.00	\$1.60	\$2.60

\* includes letters, lettersheets and postcards

The basic rate for surface items to “foreign” (non-British Commonwealth) countries remained at 7c for almost five years before being raised to 9c and then 10c in quick succession. However, by this time the majority of overseas mail was already being sent by airmail, and so comparatively few stamps were issued to pay the surface rates. Finding items showing the use of these stamps to pay the foreign surface rate is quite a challenge, reflected in the prices realised when such items are offered eg. Figure 7 which fetched A\$320 at auction in May 2010.

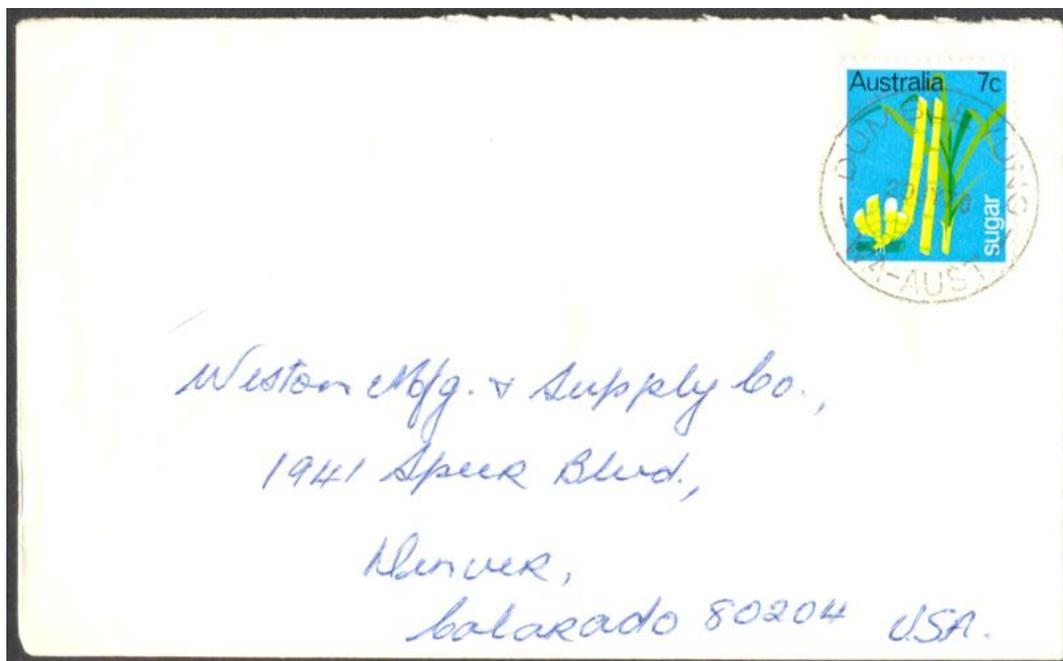


Figure 7: 1970 (July) 7c Sugar single paying surface letter rate to USA

The foreign surface rate for postcards was the same as for letters (whereas the airmail postcard rate was half of that for letters, as will be explained in a future article) as shown in Figure 8. This applied to postcards sent unenclosed or enclosed in envelopes with written messages; the exception was postcards sent without a written message (or a message of no more than five words), which could be enclosed in an unsealed envelope and sent at printed matter rates.

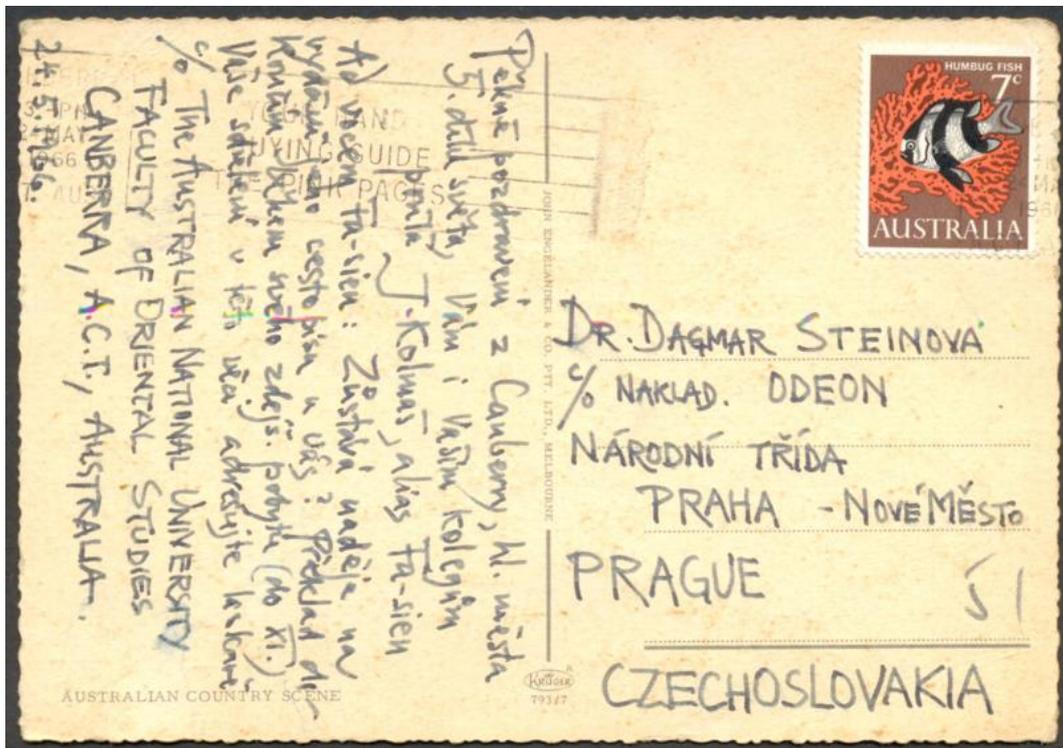


Figure 8: 1966 (May) 7c Humbug Fish single paying surface postcard rate to Czechoslovakia

Items weighing over the 1oz base rate were charged a slightly reduced rate for each additional weight-step, which can make calculating the rate paid a little complicated. The easiest way is to subtract the base rate and then divide by the rate for each additional weight-step. In the case of Figure 9, the base rate for surface mail to the USA was 7c, leaving an additional 8c paid, which shows that the item paid twice the additional 4c for the third weight-step (weighing up to 3ozs). As mentioned earlier, such items often bear multiple frankings, so a single franking paying the higher weight-step is a nice find.

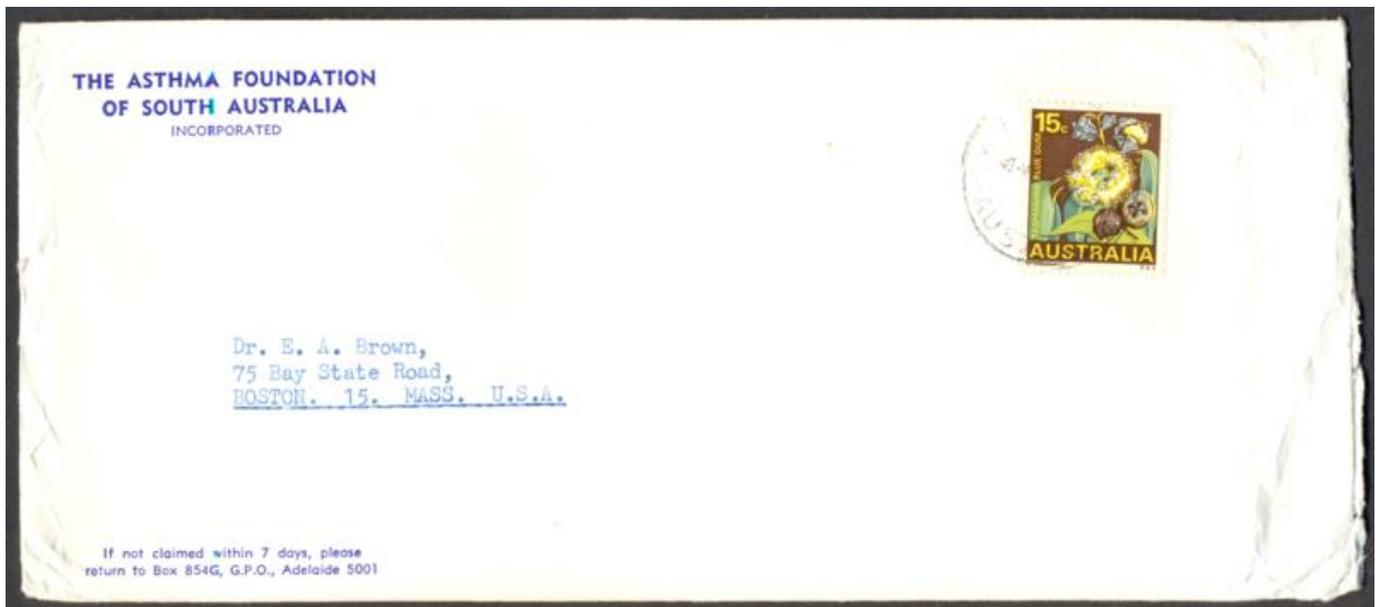


Figure 9: 1969 (June) Flowers 15c Blue Gum paying third weight-step surface letter to USA

As with domestic mail, the other main class of mail sent overseas by surface means was printed matter and the rates for sending such material are set out in the table below –

Printed Matter	up to 2 oz	up to 4 oz	up to 8 oz	up to 16 oz	1 - 4 lb
<b>Date effective from:</b>					
14 February 1966 (British Commonwealth)	\$0.04	\$0.04	\$0.07	add \$0.03 per 4oz	add \$0.03 per 4oz
14 February 1966 (non-British Commonwealth)	\$0.04	\$0.07	add \$0.03 per 2oz	add \$0.03 per 2oz	add \$0.03 per 2oz
1 October 1967	\$0.05	add \$0.04 per 2oz	add \$0.04 per 2oz	add \$0.04 per 2oz	add \$0.04 per 2oz
1 October 1970	\$0.06	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.25	\$0.70
1 October 1971	\$0.07	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.25	\$0.70

From 1 October 1967, the printed matter rates were the same no matter whether the item was sent to a British Commonwealth country or elsewhere in the world. Unlike domestic printed matter rates, the overseas printed matter base rates were often below the equivalent surface letter base rate.

If an item at first appears to be underpaid for the surface letter rate, it is important to consider whether it might have been sent at the printed matter rate. While it was not mandatory to identify printed matter with an endorsement, it did have to allow for postal inspection by being sent unsealed or sealed only by a staple or pin, and this is often the only clue. However, it is not uncommon to find items that were sent unsealed where the gum on the flap has later adhered and “sealed” the item either in transit or subsequently, in which case the overall nature of the item has to be considered in deciding whether it may have paid the printed matter rate.

Figure 10 is such an item, sent to Holland in February 1970 with a single franking of the 5c Standard Gauge Rail, which at first glance underpays the 7c foreign surface letter rate. The envelope has a side-flap which is now sealed and has been opened by slicing it at the top. However, the fact that it is a commercial envelope with imprinted company name and a side-flap and is addressed to the manager of an overseas firm paying the correct printed matter rate suggests that it was originally sent with the side-flap unsealed paying the correct rate.

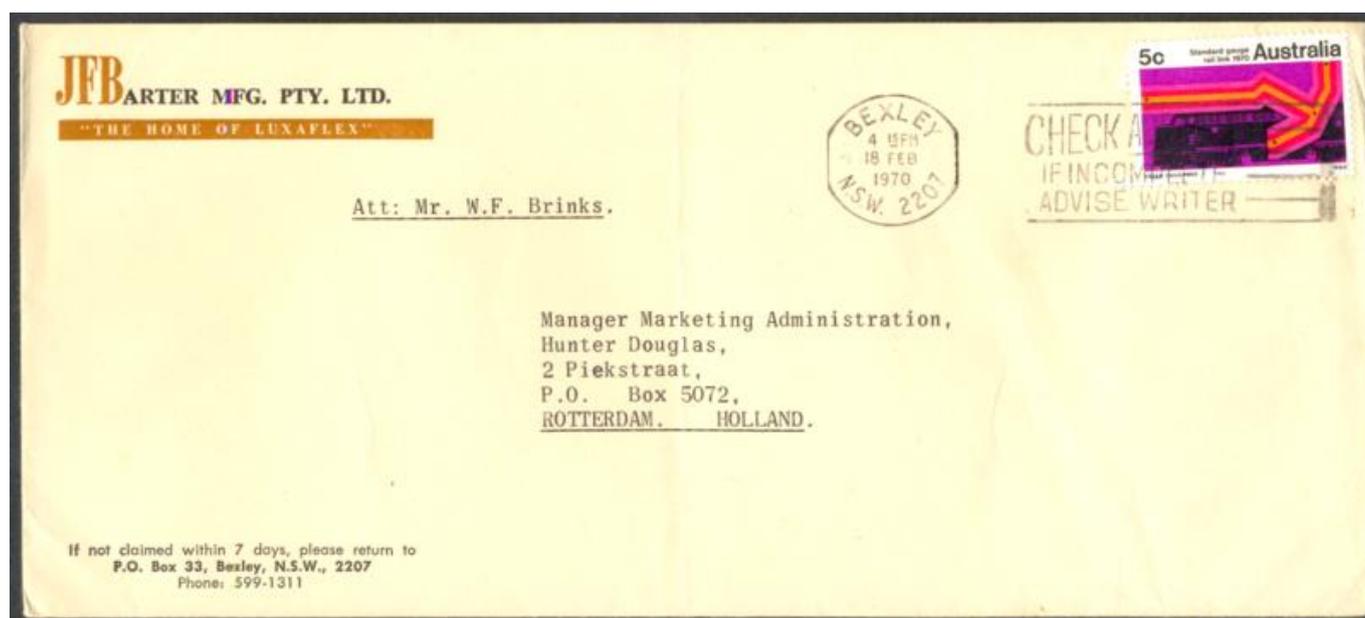


Figure 10: 1970 (Feb) 5c Standard Gauge Rail paying printed matter rate to Holland

In other cases the unsealed envelope is sufficient to identify the item as printed matter, as with Figure 11 where a greeting card (presumably a Christmas card) was sent to England at the 7c printed matter rate only a month after the rate was increased on 1 October 1971. We mentioned above that around the time of rate changes it is not unusual to find underpaid items, and this item could at first glance be

mistaken for under-paying the 10c overseas surface letter rate, but the unsealed envelope confirms the correct payment of the printed matter rate. Although greeting cards do not naturally fall within the printed matter class, they were accepted at printed matter rates as long as no more than five words were written.

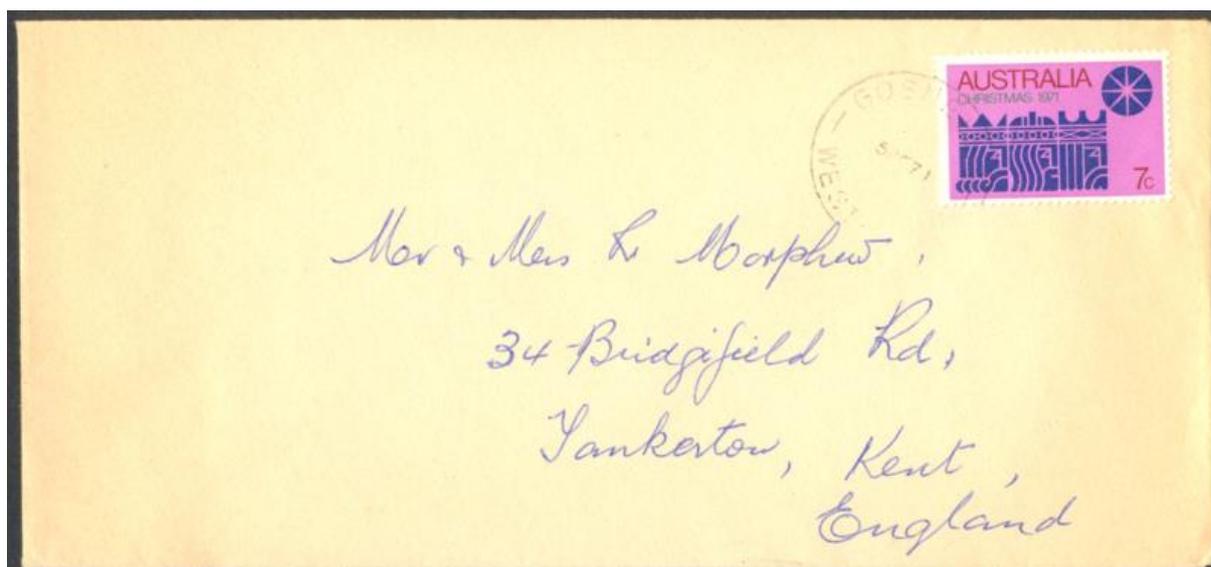


Figure 11: 1971 (Nov) 7c Christmas 1971 paying greeting card surface printed matter rate to England

Sometimes of course the work of identifying a printed matter item is done for us by the sender's endorsement, as is the case with the item shown in Figure 12.

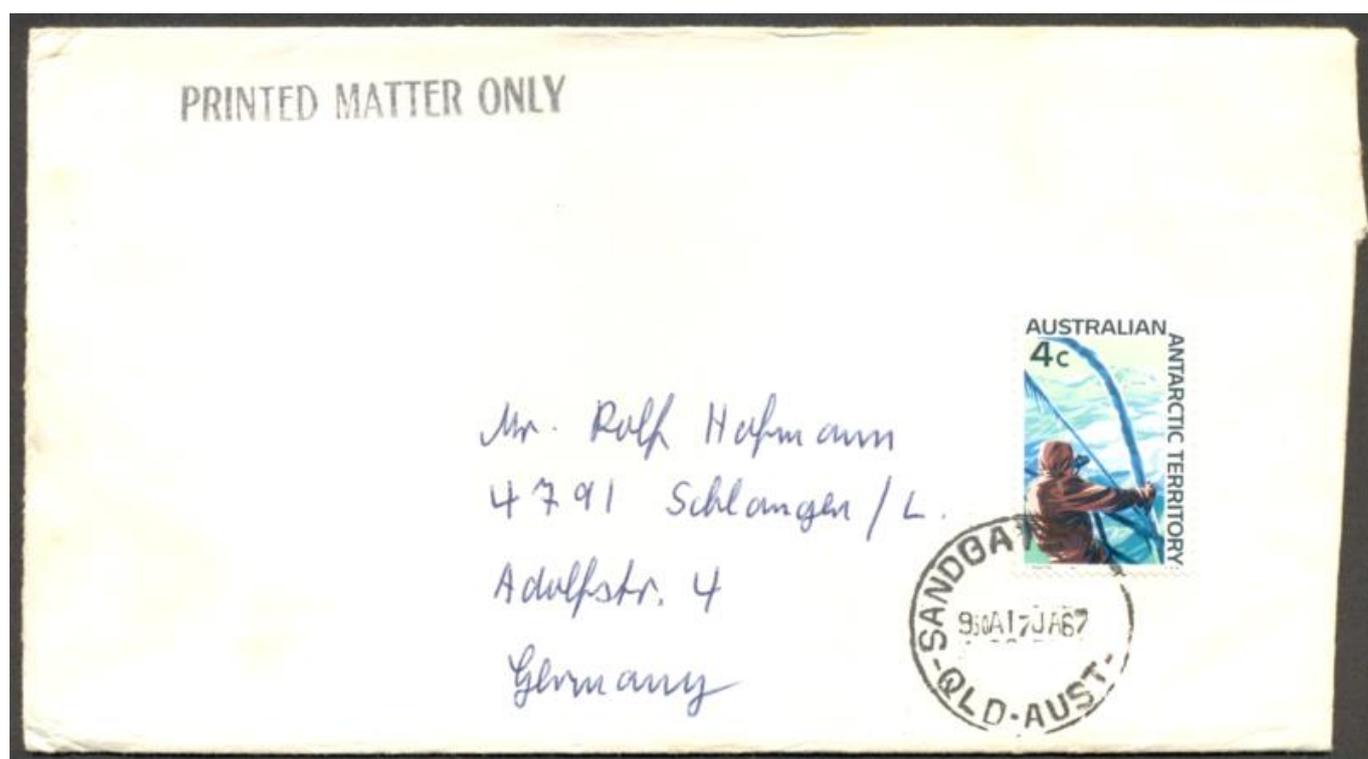


Figure 12: 1967 (Jan) AAT 4c Iceberg paying printed matter rate surface mail to Germany

Most printed matter items by their nature contained light-weight items such as pamphlets, notices and greeting cards and paid the base rate. Items that paid higher weight-steps can be elusive to find, in part because of the low survival rate of enclosures sending bulk printed papers. Figure 13 shows an envelope paying the second weight-step printed matter rate for personal correspondence, probably containing a number of photographs or picture postcards.



Figure 13: 1971 (Dec) 6c RSPCA pair paying 12c second weight-step printed matter rate to England

The items that fall under the “printed matter” class are listed in the discussion of domestic printed matter above. In addition, newspapers & periodicals could be sent overseas at the printed matter rates set out above (except to New Zealand and Fiji, where domestic rates applied), as shown in Figure 14.

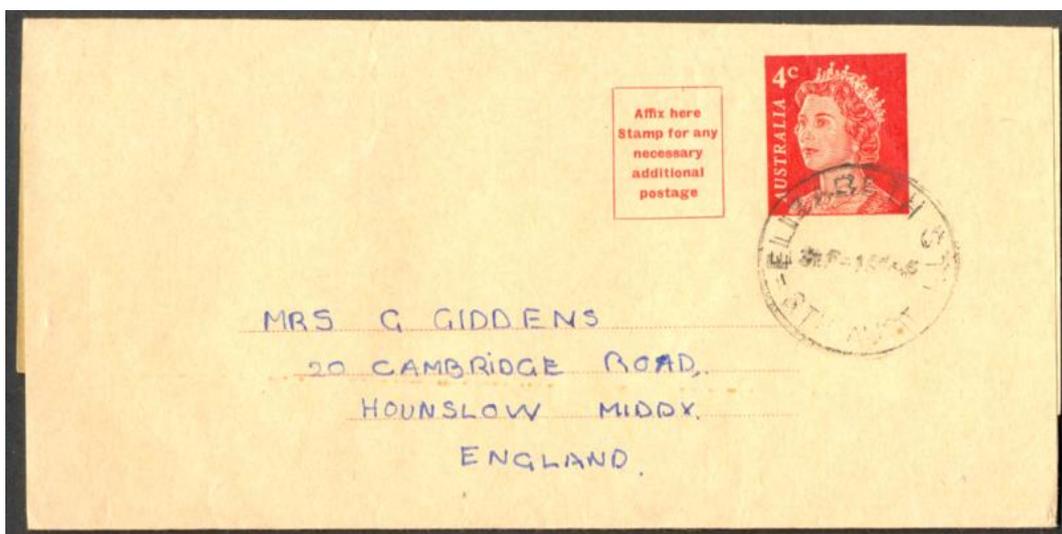


Figure 14: 1966 QE2 4c red newspaper wrapper paying Empire printed matter rate to England

Samples could also be sent overseas at printed matter rates, however, samples sent before 1 October 1967 were subject to the higher “other countries” rates even if they were sent to British Commonwealth countries. After 1 October 1970 samples had to be sent as small packets at the rates set out in the following table, subject to the 20c minimum charge.

Small packets fall within the scope of printed matter material, usually containing items of a commercial nature without personal correspondence, but being bulkier than standard printed or commercial papers.

Domestically, small packets were sent at printed matter rates, but if sent overseas special rates applied. Apart from samples (which had to pay small packet rates from 1 October 1970), small packets could contain small items of merchandise, small mechanical parts and the like. The rates for sending such material are set out in the table below –

<b>Small Packets</b>	<b>up to 2 oz</b>	<b>up to 4 oz</b>	<b>up to 8 oz</b>	<b>up to 10 oz</b>	<b>up to 16 oz</b>	<b>1 - 2 lb</b>
<b>Date effective from:</b>						
14 February 1966	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.20	add \$0.04 per 2oz	add \$0.04 per 2oz
1 October 1967	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.20	\$0.25	add \$0.05 per 2oz	add \$0.05 per 2oz
1 October 1970	\$0.12	\$0.12	\$0.18	\$0.30	\$0.30	-

Printed matter items heavier than 4lbs and small packets heavier than 2lbs (or 1lb after 1 October 1970) were subject to parcel rates, which varied depending on the zone of the destination country (countries were divided into zones based on geographic distance from Australia). As mentioned in discussing domestic mail, a more detailed examination of overseas parcel rates is currently beyond our scope, but may feature in a later article.

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.