

Australian Decimal Postal Rates – 1973 to 1982

Previous articles have discussed Australia's Decimal Postal Rates in the period 1966 to 1973, from the introduction of decimal currency through to the end of imperial weights & measures. This article is the first in a series covering our next period starting in July 1973 with the conversion to metric weights & measures (meters & grams) and ending in 1982.

As with the coverage of the 1966-73 period we will begin with surface mail rates, and expand from here to airmail (both domestic and overseas) and special services (registered, priority paid, express delivery etc). We will cover most of the different classes of mail, from letters and postcards to printed matter, samples, small packets, newspapers & periodicals, and parcels (to a limited extent). Defence Forces Mail has been covered in detail in its own dedicated article.

The various classes of mail were described these in some detail in our first article and we refer readers to this for assistance in identifying to which class of mail a particular item may belong.

Domestic Surface and Airmail Rates

Domestic rates are broken down into Letters, Other Articles, 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 and Norfolk Island. Overseas postage rates now applied to mail sent to Papua and New Guinea.

Letter & Other Articles Rates

Letter rates also included lettersheets and postcards. Other Articles essentially covered items that were not personal correspondence and included printed matter (previously known as "printed papers" and "commercial papers") as well as samples and merchandise, and was now also extended to cover books.

Some items sent at Other Articles rates may look very similar to letter-rate items, but the distinction remains important while there were entitled to lower rates of postage or higher weight-steps or a combination of both.

Mail delivery in the early 1970's was going through substantial modernisation with the increasing use of electronic systems and standardised container transport, while the growth in airline travel provided a greater number of domestic plane services that could carry airmail items. These developments shortened delivery times for all types of mail, and the "second-class mail" that cost less but took longer to arrive slowly became obsolete. Size and weight rather than delivery time became the main cost drivers, and this was reflected in new postal rates.

The major distinction between Letters and Other Articles we saw in previous chapters only remained in place for the first year after the metric conversion, and in that year the following rates applied –

1 October 1973	up to 20g	up to 50g	up to 100g	up to 250g	up to 500g
Surface Letters*	\$0.07	\$0.15	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.40
Other Articles - Surface	-	\$0.07	\$0.15	\$0.20	\$0.30
Airmail Letters & Other Articles#	\$0.10	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.50	\$0.90

* includes letters, lettersheets and postcards

standard-size letters posted at surface rate were carried by airmail where available

Items weighing over 500g were subject to parcel rates, which are explained briefly below, but a more detailed discussion is currently beyond the scope of these articles.

Standard Letter Rates

From 1 October 1974 the major new concept of Standard Letters was introduced. The Standard Letter (which could also be a lettersheet or postcard as previously) became the basic postal item and covered all items up to 500g weight that could be posted in a standard-size envelope (now defined as a rectangular shape between 90mm - 120mm high, between 140mm - 235mm wide, no thicker than 5mm and with a ratio of side lengths not less than 1 : 1.414), as well as postcards and lettersheets.

The concept of “standard size” was not entirely new: before October 1974 a “standard-size” item was eligible for domestic airmail acceleration at no extra charge whereas larger items had to have an airmail fee paid, and from 1 October 1974 the Standard Letter was guaranteed airmail carriage where available.

The table below sets out the Standard Letter rates. The first thing of note is the substantially rising cost of posting an “ordinary” letter in the two years after October 1973, during which time this jumps from \$0.07 to \$0.18 (a two-and-a-half-fold increase). Of course the new Standard Letter in October 1975 could now weigh up to 500g compared to the basic letter in October 1973 with its 20g weight limit, but while this probably reduced the overall cost for businesses sending weighty documents, it was of little benefit to personal correspondents –

Standard Letter Rate	up to 500g
Rate effective from:	
1 October 1974	\$0.10
1 September 1975	\$0.18
1 July 1978	\$0.20
31 March 1980	\$0.22
1 July 1981	\$0.24



Figure 1: 1974 (Nov) QE2 7c envelope with Marine Life 3c Coral Crab added to pay 10c domestic standard letter rate (increased from 7c on 1 October 1974)

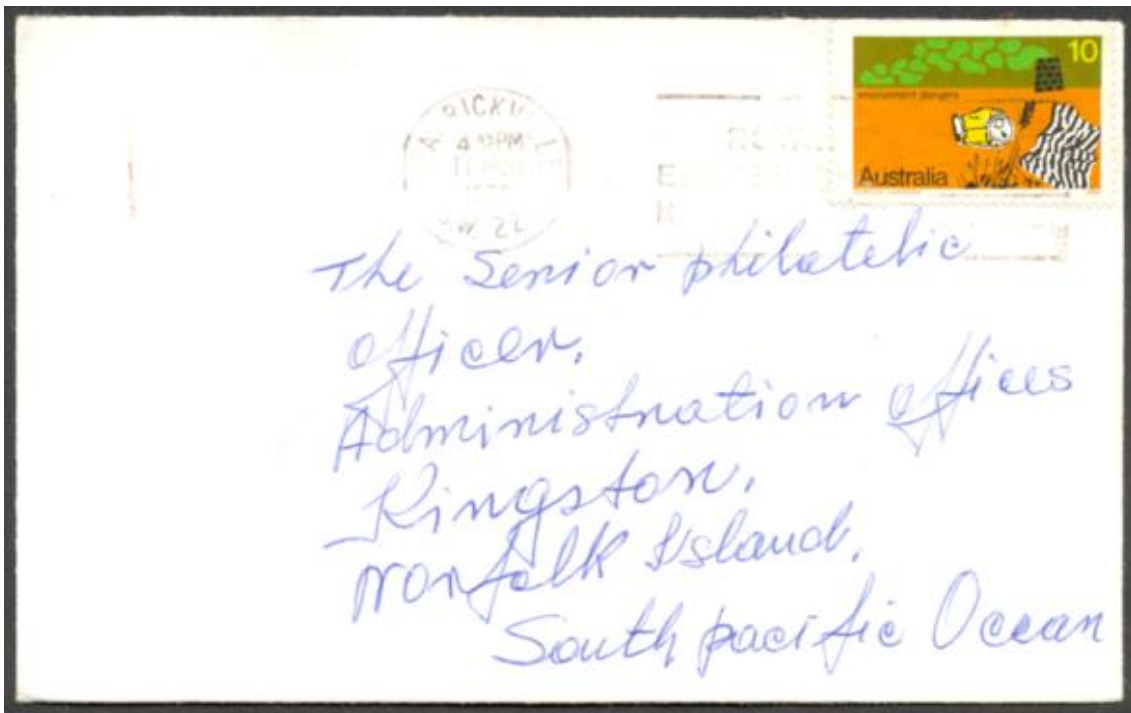


Figure 2: 1975 (May) sent to Norfolk Island with single franking 10c Pollution paying domestic standard letter rate (and presumably forwarded by airmail at no extra charge!)

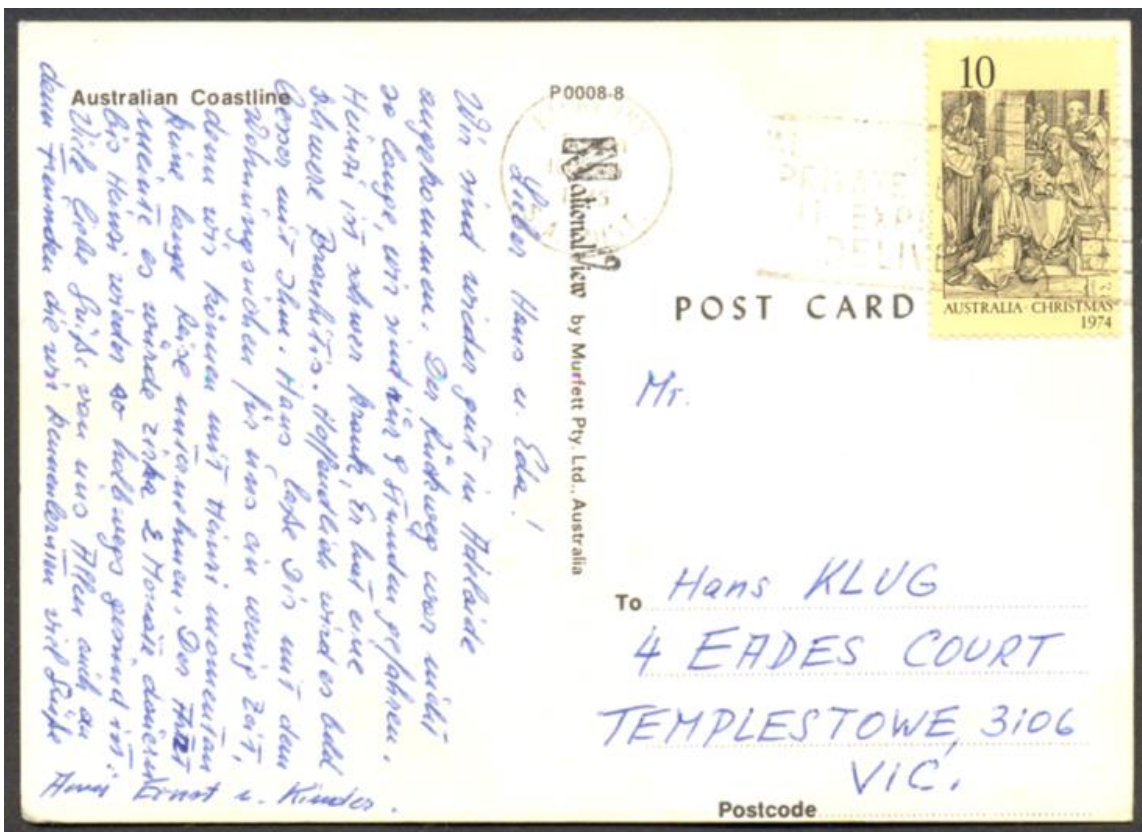


Figure 3: 1975 (Jan) picture postcard with single franking 10c Christmas 1974 paying domestic standard letter rate

Non-Standard Articles – Surface Mail

Anything beyond the Standard Letter limits was classified as a “Non-Standard Article” and subject to higher rates (up to 500g in weight, above which Parcel rates applied). There were no lower rates or higher weight-steps for what had previously been known as Other Articles or “second-class mail”, so from now on all mail items (other than Newspapers & Periodicals and Parcels) were subject to the same rates based solely on their size and weight –

Non-Standard Articles By Surface Mail	up to 50g	up to 100g	up to 250g	up to 500g (intrastate)	up to 500g (interstate)
Rate effective from:					
1 October 1974	\$0.11	\$0.24	\$0.33	\$0.48	\$0.48
1 September 1975	\$0.20	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.60	\$0.60
1 July 1978	\$0.25	\$0.35	\$0.45	\$0.70	\$0.80
31 March 1980	\$0.28	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.80	\$0.90
1 July 1981	\$0.30	\$0.45	\$0.55	\$0.90	\$1.00

These rates tables begin to explain some of the more unusual denominations of issued stamps in this period, such as the Scientific Development series of May 1975, which can be seen to correspond to the various rates for each weight-step of Non-Standard Articles. In July 1978 a new distinction was introduced for items weighing over 250g and up to 500g, with a slightly higher rate charged for items sent interstate (and thus more likely to be carried by airmail, as we shall see below).

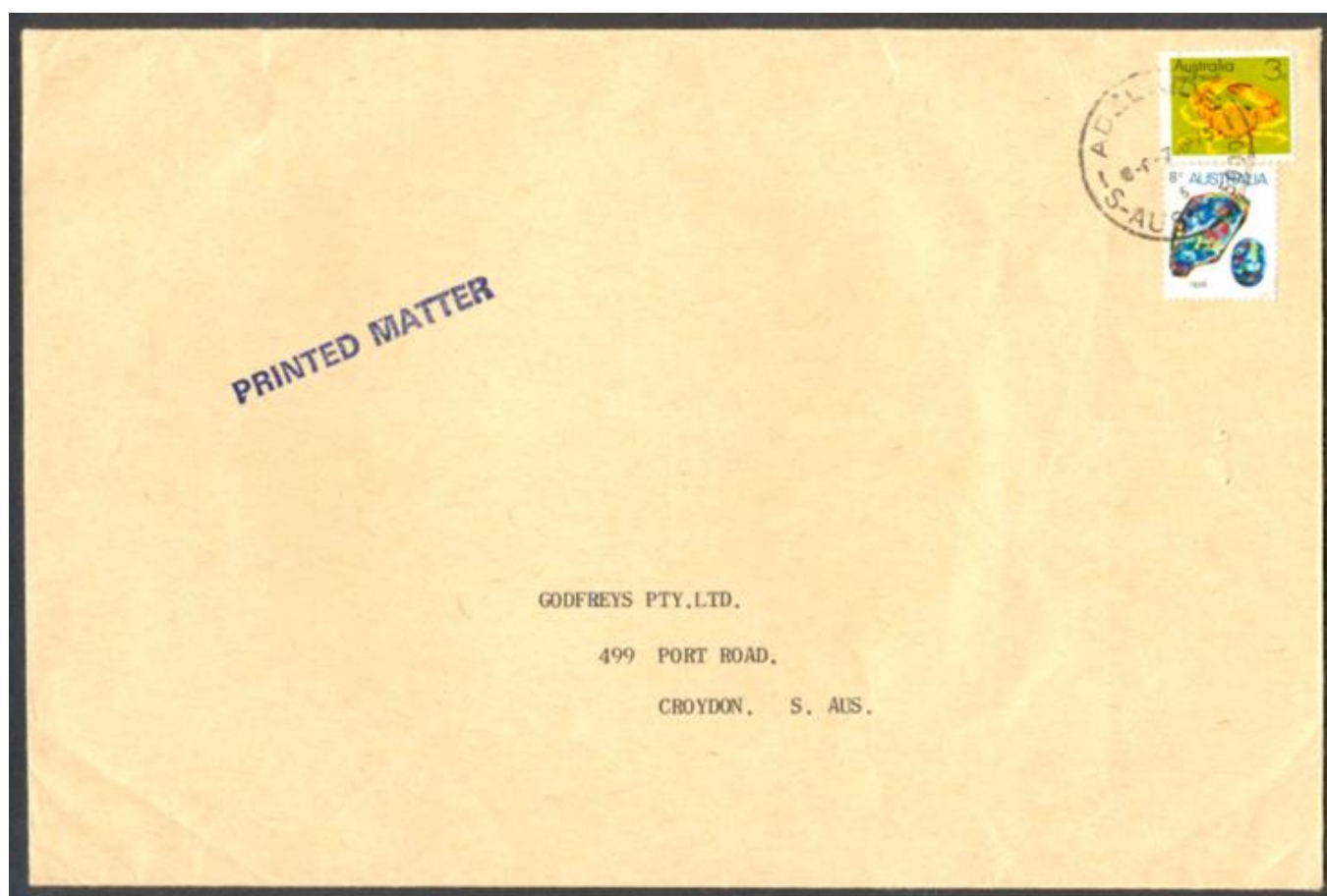


Figure 4: 1975 (April) large cover endorsed "Printed Matter" franked 8c Opal and 3c Crab paying the 11c non-standard (up to 50g) domestic letter rate (the Printed Matter cachet now being obsolete)

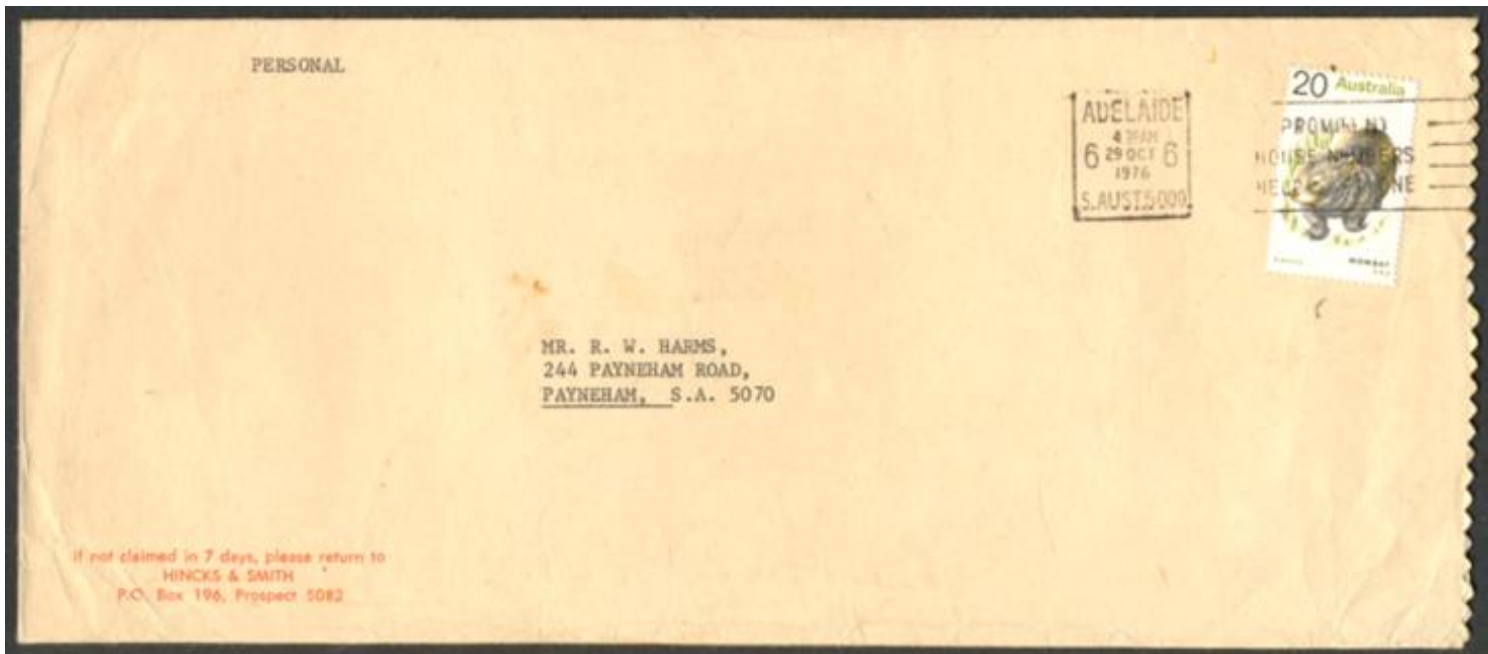


Figure 5: 1976 (Oct) long cover with single franking 20c Wombat paying non-standard (up to 50g) domestic letter rate

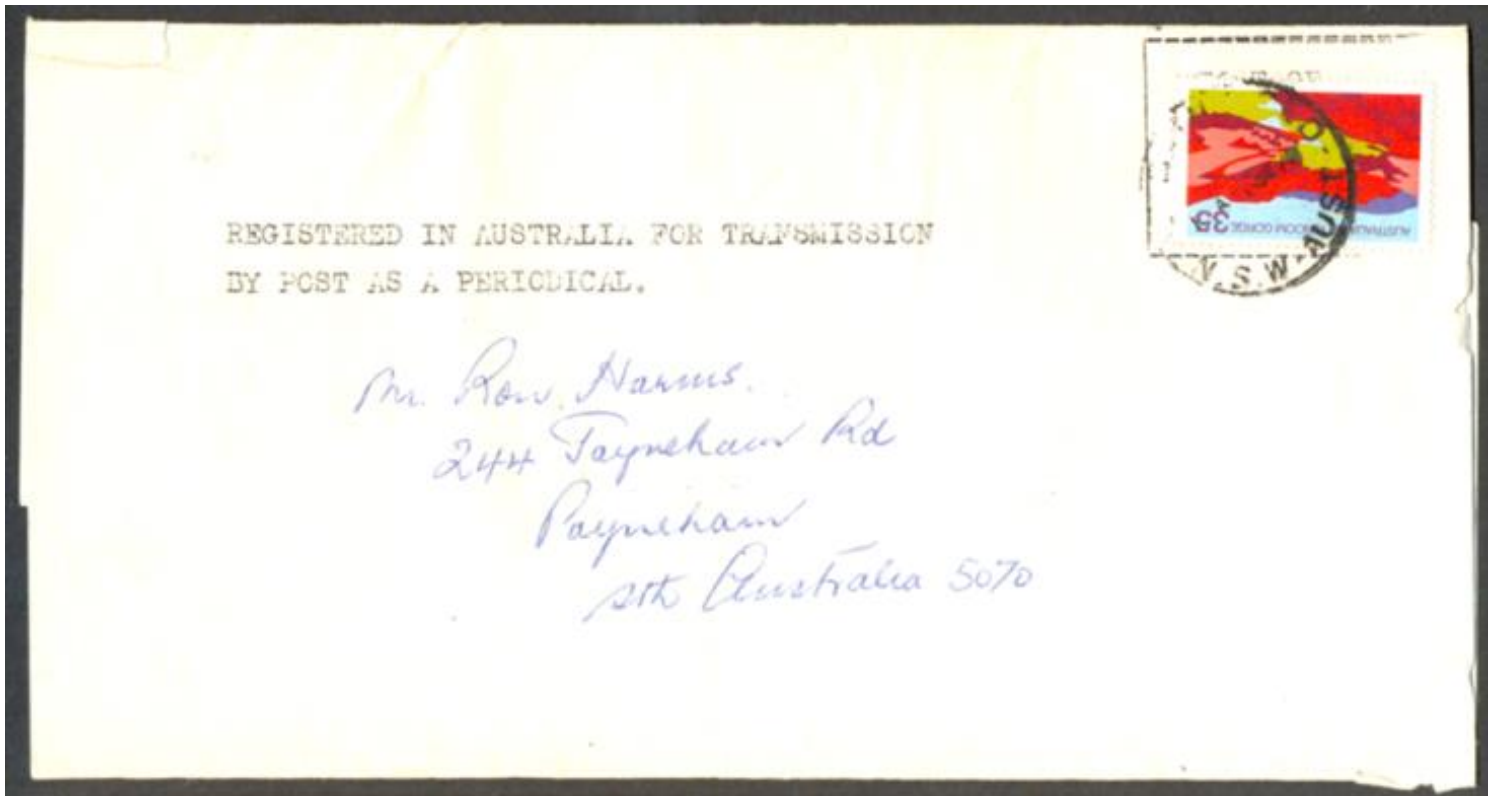


Figure 6: 1978 (Sept) private wrapper endorsed "Registered in Australia for Transmission by Post as a Periodical" with single franking Scenes 35c Wittenoon Gorge paying second weight-step (up to 100g) non-standard domestic letter rate (presumably because an insufficient quantity was posted to qualify for the registered publications rates)

Non-Standard Articles – Airmail

As the increased availability of airmail within Australia reduced delivery costs involving airplanes to near or even below those by truck or train alone, so the distinction between postal rates for surface mail and airmail began to be further eroded. By July 1978 the Australia Post Postal Charges Guide stated that Non-Standard Articles posted at surface rates may be carried by airmail to “improve delivery”. However, to guarantee airmail carriage for Non-Standard Articles an airmail sticker needed to be applied and the following domestic airmail rates paid –

Non-Standard Articles By Airmail	up to 20g	up to 50g	up to 100g	up to 250g	up to 500g
Rate effective from:					
1 October 1974*	\$0.15	\$0.25	\$0.35	\$0.60	\$1.00
1 September 1975	-	\$0.25	\$0.40	\$0.70	\$1.20
1 July 1978	-	\$0.30	\$0.40	\$0.70	\$1.20
31 March 1980	-	\$0.35	\$0.45	\$0.80	\$1.35
1 July 1981	-	\$0.40	\$0.50	\$0.90	\$1.50

Given the speed of surface transport between most capital cities (Hobart and Perth excluded) and the very real possibility that items would be forwarded by airmail eventhough only surface rates of postage were paid, it is not surprising that very few items paying the Non-Standard Articles airmail rates are found today.

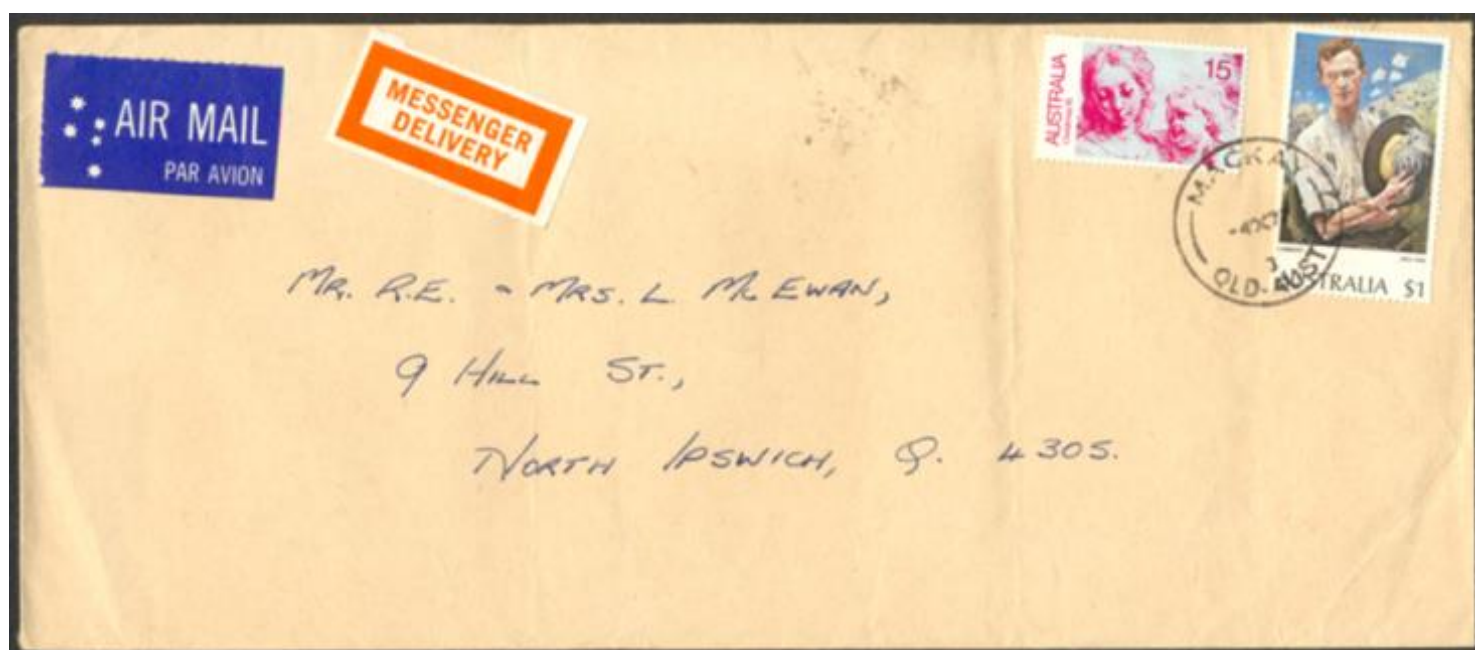


Figure 7: 1977 (Oct) long cover sent Messenger Delivery airmail franked with \$1 Painting and 15c Christmas 1976 paying 25c non-standard (up to 50g) domestic airmail rate plus 90c Messenger Delivery fee (special service fees will be the subject of a later article).

Seasonal Greeting Cards

After all this amalgamation of the different classes of mail, one new concessional postal rate was introduced in 1975, being the Seasonal Greeting Card Rate. This rate applied to cards posted after 31 October and before 1 January enclosed in a standard-size envelope and marked "Card Only", but there was no requirement to send the envelopes unsealed -

Seasonal Greeting Cards	
Rate effective from:	
1 September 1975	\$0.15
1 July 1981	\$0.18

It became standard for Australia Post to issue a stamp as part of its annual Christmas series to pay the Seasonal Greeting Card rate as can be seen in Figures 8 & 9 below.

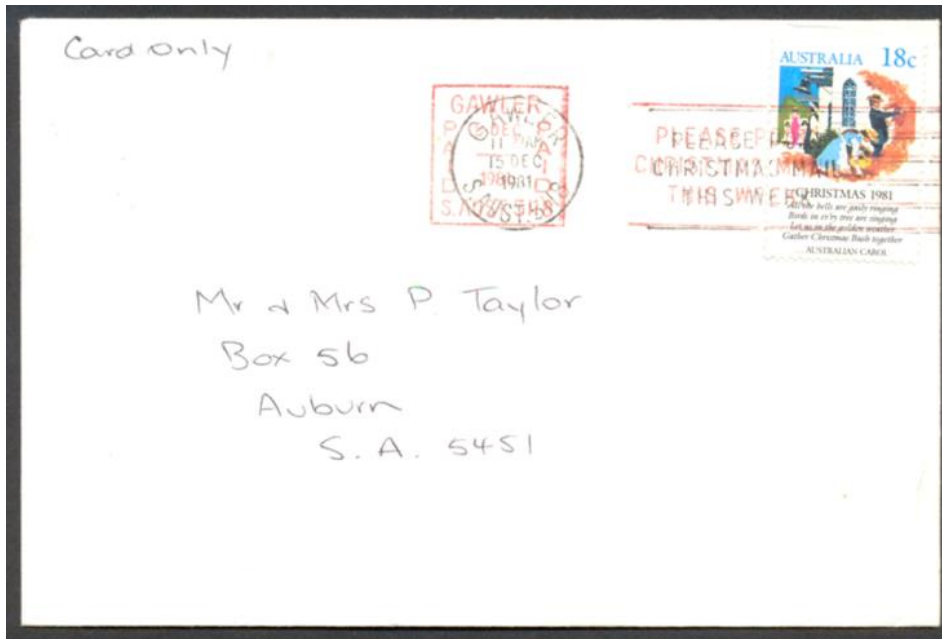


Figure 8: 1978 (Dec) cover endorsed "Card Only" with single franking 15c Christmas 1978 paying the reduced seasonal domestic greeting card rate

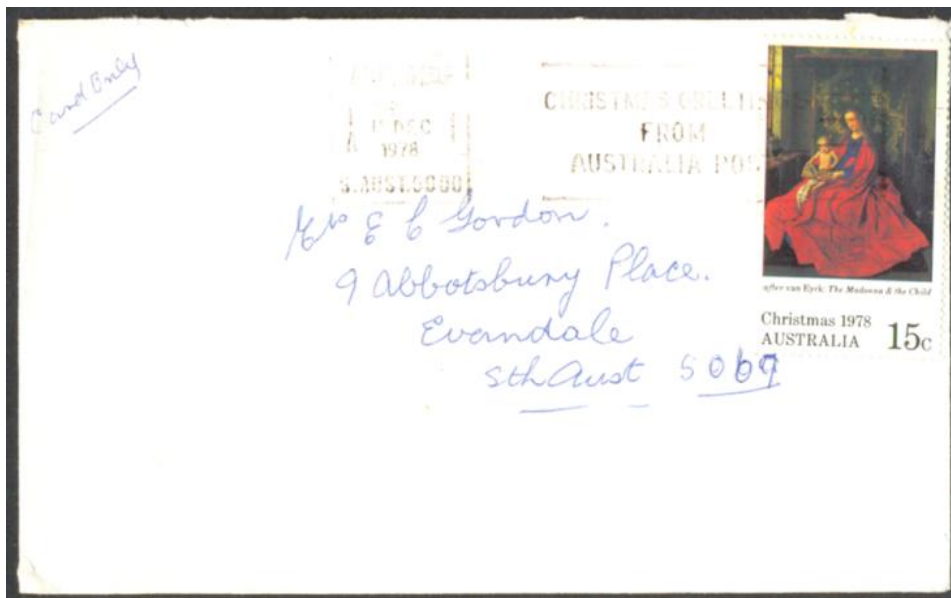


Figure 9: 1981 (Dec) cover endorsed "Card Only" with single franking 15c Christmas 1978 paying the seasonal domestic greeting card rate

The last class of mail that will be mentioned briefly is parcels. As we have seen, domestic letter rates were charged up to 500g and heavier items were subject to parcel rates. Domestic parcel rates were divided into five scales depending on distance (1. within 50 kilometers of posting, 2. within state but greater than 50kms, 3. to adjoining state, 4. to a distant state eg. between Victoria and Queensland and a new category 5. to a "far distant" state eg. between Tasmania and Western Australia) with each scale having its own rates starting from up to 1kg weight. By 1982 these scales were further divided into surface-only transmission and a higher set of rates for partial carriage by airmail (where appropriate).

We will take a look at the overseas postal rates (both surface and airmail) for the period 1973-1982 as well as the various special services fees (registration, messenger delivery, priority paid etc) in our next installments.