



Australia's Food for Britain Campaign 1946-1949

March 20 2024 Zoom presentation by Gary Watson FRPSL FRPSV

The full presentation is being posted on the PSSC website. The following is an edited version of Gary's comments and a few of the 37 items in his presentation.

For many years I have been fascinated by the variety in and the intricacies of Parcel Post. As generally larger items, often franked with high denomination stamps, they are visually engaging. But, like Hans Christian Andersen's Ugly Duckling, they tend to be little understood and generally unloved.

Today, I am concentrating on one small aspect of parcel Post. Between 1946 and 1948, individual Australians and businesses contributed mightily to the welfare of families in what was still, to most, from whence they had originated, Great Britain.

Wartime conditions resulted in most civilian shipping and aircraft being commandeered for military purposes. Movement of freight was controlled by governments. There was little interest in facilitating private consignments, and little if any space for such sendings.

Consequently, for almost five years, the carriage of parcels between Britain and Australia dwindled to a trickle.

Even after hostilities ended (which in Europe was in May 1945), it took several years for commercial shipping to return to normal operating conditions. Thousands of ships had been lost and needed to be replaced. Before commandeered ships could be returned to the merchant marine, millions of servicemen needed to be sent home. Prisoners of War and internees put similar pressure on the system in the opposite direction.

This was the intense situation into which the Food for Britain Scheme was launched in Australia.

Many people had petitioned the government to allow and then encourage them to send food to their friends and relatives in Blighty. Impetus for a formal scheme is generally credited to Melbourne businessman, Sidney Myer, who was knighted for his promotion of the idea. Myer had visited England in 1945 and returned home with harrowing tales of the plight of millions of Britons.

With Myer pushing the charitable agenda, the government got behind the idea and the formal scheme was launched early in 1946.

SLIDE 03

Keepings things relatively simple, throughout the period being discussed, parcels to England needed to have a 'P.P.8' label affixed. This was a gummed customs declaration label as shown here. It is clear that stamps were not supposed to be affixed to this label. However, the vast majority to have survived are festooned with stamps. Unused forms such as shown here are rare, and this one is "mint unhinged"!

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. P.P. 8.		PLACE TO WHICH THE PARCEL IS ADDRESSED.					
PARCEL POST.							
Form of Customs Declaration.							
Date Stamp of Office of Postage.		Gross Weight of Parcel.		NET WEIGHT OF CONTENTS.		VALUE AS MERCHANDISE.	
Ibs. ozs.		Ibs. ozs.		Ibs. ozs.		£ s. d.	
CONTENTS.—The nature and value of the contents should be accurately stated. Under-valuation of the contents, or failure to describe them fully, may result in the seizure of the parcel.							
(For use of Post Office of Exchange only.)		Name and Address of Sender—					
Parcel Bill No.							
No. of Rates prepaid.							
Entry No.							
Date Stamp of Office of Exchange.		INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN BY SENDER.					
If undeliverable as addressed—deliver to							
If undeliverable as addressed or at an alternative address if such is given		* ABANDON. * RETURN					
* Strike out according to which is desired.		Sender's Signature.					
		Sch. C.3226.—5/1941.—3815.					



SLIDE 12

Because of the sheer volume of orders for food parcels, Sidney Myer's firm, the Myer Emporium, requested the Post Office to provide them with pre-stamped postage on their gummed 'GIFT PARCEL' address blanks. Only 3/7d and 5/10d embossings were provided, there being little demand for the 1/11d rate.

The 3/7d labels are very scarce (and only two unused examples are known). This label is unusual because the gift-giver was from Singapore.



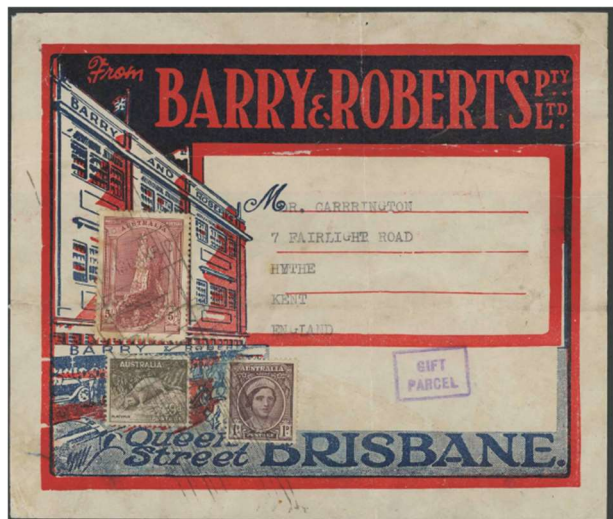
SLIDE 14

The 3/7d label for Fitzgerald's in Hobart was discovered only in 2004. My colleague, Torsten Weller, was offered an Australian stamp collection at a show in Christchurch, and this label was the only decent thing in it! A second example was believed to exist, but it turned out to be a colour photocopy of this piece!



SLIDE 20

Examples of printed gift parcel labels from States other than Victoria are very elusive. This example is from a Queensland department store.





SLIDE 24

Here's one of my most attractive labels from a food parcel. It is franked with the 1/4d magenta, which I think is Australia's prettiest stamp a 5/- Robes on thin paper, which is a rare stamp on cover. The rubber datestamp in violet ink is the cherry on the top. The rate has now risen from 5/10d to 6/4d, again an advance of 6d. Importantly, the rate is confirmed as being between 7 and 11 pounds.

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And this is the only insured food parcel I have come across. Dated October 1947, the rate was 5/10d, to which the minimum insurance fee of 6d was added, along with two related labels. 6d actually provided up to 12 pounds (monetary) compensation, but in this instance the declared value was only L1/10/-.

SLIDE 36

Almost finally - I know, that's an oxy-moron - here is a label dated 9th November 1948 to Sarawak, rated 6/3d for up to 7lb. This isn't just an exotic destination: it's the only recorded food parcel to any part of the Malayan Region. The Sarawak Study Circle thought so highly of it that they put it on the front of their journal.

I must acknowledge two philatelic friends. Firstly, Richard Breckon, my go-to guy for anything to do with postal services and rates, who published a series of articles about Australian postal rates in the mid-1980s and who has been promising for four decades to produce a book on the subject. And, the late Neil Russell from England. Many of the gems in my collection formerly reposed in Neil's albums. When Neil asked me to sell his parcel labels I was excited at the prospect of acquiring a few pieces. As it turned out, amazingly, I was the only bidder for most of this fascinating and historically important material, so Neil's presence is all over this display.

I hope I have encouraged you to look more closely at the historical and social context of your own material. Remember, every cover, and even every stamp, has a story to tell. By revealing those stories, and making them interesting to others, we make our hobby more accessible to people who might want to join our ranks.