



The Postal History of Norfolk Island

Presented by David K. Foot to the PSSC Zoom Meeting on 21 October 2020.

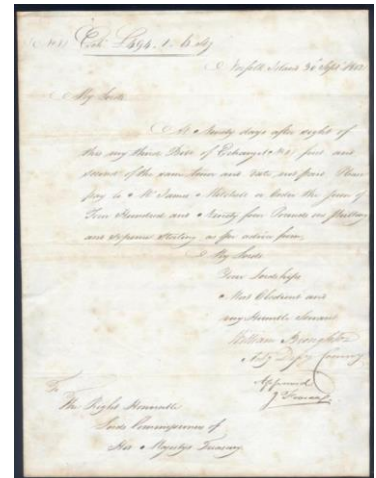
(NOTE: A short history and brief summary of this display was included in the April Newsletter (pp. 6-7). This will not be repeated here.)

Norfolk Island lies off the east coast of Australia on the largely submerged Norfolk Ridge that connects New Zealand and New Caledonia. The small (35 km²), subtropical volcanic island is currently home to about 1750 residents, many descended from the Pitcairn mutineers. The presentation was organized into eight sections.

1. Early Settlements:

Norfolk Island lies on the western boundary of the Polynesian triangle in the Pacific Ocean. There is archeological evidence of Polynesian visitation, but not of settlement (circa 1300). Captain James Cook discovered Norfolk Island in 1774 during his second voyage to the Pacific that circumnavigated Antarctica.

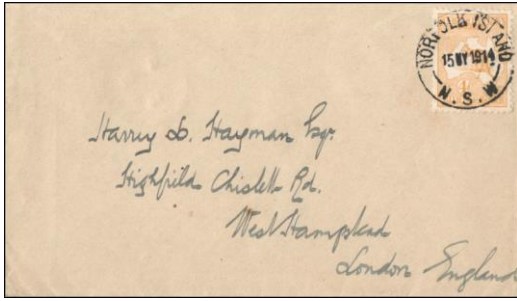
The island was first settled in 1788 as an adjunct to the establishment of the British settlement and penal colony in Australia. The island settlement was never self-sustaining and was closed in 1814. Documents from this First Settlement are scarce, but the display included a letter to His Majesty's Treasury headed in manuscript 'Norfolk Island 30th Sept^r 1802' and approved by J(oseph) Foveaux who was commandant from June 1800 to September 1804. Having arrived in Sydney in 1792, he became one of the wealthiest men in New South Wales. To take up this position, he sold his land and livestock to Capt. John Macarthur. This was the time of the 'Irish uprising' when many Irish malcontents were deported without trial to Australia. Many were shipped to Norfolk Island. A plot was discovered and the two ringleaders hanged without trial, the first such hangings on the island. Others were flogged. Foveaux was the prototype of other sadistic taskmasters yet to come. He did, however, improve the settlement with the building of roads, bridges, seawalls and many stone and timber buildings, including government house.



The island remained abandoned until 1825 when a second penal settlement was established for the worst offenders – those who had committed additional crimes in the colonies and had become so insensitive to punishments that they were willing to risk the death penalty because it offered an escape from a hopeless existence. They were a danger to other convicts, their keepers and the system. As an illustration, the two-page conduct record of Abraham Crabtree was shown. He was sent to Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) in 1832 and then, because of numerous additional crimes, he was sent to Norfolk Island in 1846 where he was to be 'handcuffed for 7 years'. After housing up to 1,500 convicts, troops and officers, the last of the convicts on Norfolk Island were shipped to Tasmania in 1855. Transportation of convicts had ceased in 1853. Crabtree was freed in 1854.

The settlers from Pitcairn Island arrived on 8 June 1856. They occupied many of the penal settlement buildings and were given land, livestock and tools. The island was proclaimed a Crown Colony in 1857. Over the last half of the twentieth century, mail to Australia and New Zealand was carried on contracted ships, but mail to and from Norfolk Island was carried 'by favour' of ships' captains, as illustrated in a number of items displayed from the Nobbs correspondence. George Hunn Nobbs had become the unofficial leader of the Pitcairn community. He died in 1883 and is buried in the island cemetery.

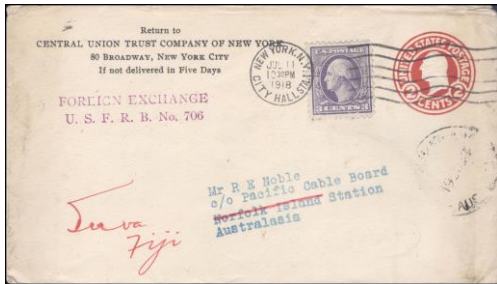




In 1877 the colonial post office of New South Wales (N.S.W.) agreed to supply N.S.W. stamps, although the island remained a separate colony thereby necessitating inter-colonial postage rates. The first NORFOLK ISLAND circular date stamp was introduced sometime in the 1890s, but it is not recorded as cancelling a stamp until 1899. An example on a 1906 postcard to England cancelling a N.S.W. 1d. stamp with a transit barred A of Auckland was shown (and was illustrated in the April PSSC Newsletter). In 1904 a new circular date stamp with N.S.W. around the base was introduced.

The more common form of this postmark has the horizontal part of the letter L in island missing and this was shown on cover, also to England.

2. Australian Stamp Period:



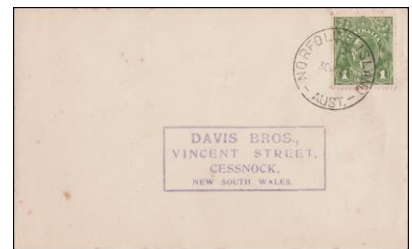
The status of Norfolk Island as a British colony was unaffected by the federation of the Australian colonies on 1 January 1901. In 1902 an undersea cable linking Australia and New Zealand to Europe via the Pacific and Canada was laid and became operational. It joined the British cable network that became known as the All Red Route because it was laid on British territory alone (coloured red on most maps). From Vancouver, the Pacific Cable was routed via Fanning Island and Fiji to Norfolk Island where it divided with a line going to New Zealand and another continuing to Australia. The cable station

on Norfolk Island was located at Anson Bay on the northwest coast and provided the island with a direct link to the outside world.

On 1 July 1914 the British transferred Norfolk Island to the recently established Commonwealth of Australia to be administered as an external territory with an administrator appointed by the Crown. A new date stamp with AUSTRALIA replacing N.S.W. around the base was sent to the island on 3 December 1914. This circular date stamp remained in use until at least 1940. Inland and Empire postage was increased from 1½d. to 2d. on 4 August 1930. Postage to the U.S.A. and other 'foreign' destinations was 3d. Registration labels were introduced in the late 1920s, firstly as blank labels and later (from September 1936) with labels printed NORFOLK ISLAND/NEW SOUTH WALES. The registration fee was 3d.



In 1931 British aviator Francis Chichester attempted the first solo crossing of the Tasman Sea in his floatplane, a converted de Havilland Gypsy Moth aircraft. He was the first person to land an aircraft on Norfolk Island. No covers were carried on the first leg to Norfolk Island on 28 March.



On his next leg to Sydney on 1 April his aircraft was severely damaged on Lord Howe Island.

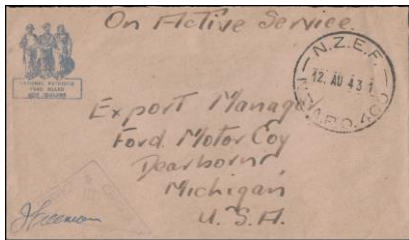
A new circular date stamp with AUST. (note the dot) replacing AUSTRALIA around the base was first introduced in June 1937. Three cancellers of this type were used; the first two can be distinguished by the shape of K in NORFOLK and the slightly larger third coincided with the introduction of the Empire Air Mail Scheme in 1938 where a faulty letter E in the date stamp reads SF rather than SE (for September) on inward covers. This canceller type was used until 1948.



World War II was declared in September 1939 and Norfolk Island invoked censorship almost immediately. Three 'Passed by/Censor #/NORFOLK ISLAND' boxed markings were used for civilian mail, initially on the back of covers and from early 1940 on the cover front. The three censor markings were used concurrently until August 1945, with Censor 1 apparently reserved for official mail. A ½d. war tax on postage was introduced on 10 December 1941, making the internal rate 2½d. Because of the strategic importance of Norfolk Island for the war in the Pacific, the N.S.W. Main Roads Board built an airstrip in 1942 using equipment supplied, in part, by U.S. Army Corps. In October 1942 New Zealand army units comprising N Force of 1500 troops replaced Australian personnel. Over the next three



years four different New Zealand military (expeditionary force) post marks were used – N.Z.E.F./FIELD/POST OFFICE (1942-45), N.Z.E.F./N/POST OFFICE (late 1942 and early 1943), N.Z.A.P.O. 400 (April 1943 to early 1944) and R.N.Z.A.F./E./N.Z.A.P.O. (March 1944 to July 1948). Over this period military mail and civilian airmail were carried by the Royal New Zealand Air Force (R.N.Z.A.F.) via New Zealand as part of the island airmail service serving New Zealand Forces throughout the South Pacific. Civilian mail had to be appropriately stamped from 1 April 1947. This wartime period provides variety (and challenges) for the Norfolk Island postal historian. The last day of use of Australian stamps on Norfolk Island was 6 June 1947.



Zealand as part of the island airmail service serving New Zealand Forces throughout the South Pacific. Civilian mail had to be appropriately stamped from 1 April 1947. This wartime period provides variety (and challenges) for the Norfolk Island postal historian. The last day of use of Australian stamps on Norfolk Island was 6 June 1947.

3. First Stamp Issue:

After an unsuccessful request in 1923, Norfolk Island was approved for postal autonomy in 1937, but World War II delayed a stamp release. The twelve-stamp Ball Bay design issue appeared on 10 June 1947, along with a new circular date stamp. Two versions have been identified related to the width of N in the JUN dateline. Registered covers show the post office using blank labels hand stamped NORFOLK ISLAND in lilac or labels with New South Wales obliterated by blue crayon. The backstamps show that cover preparation took place over many days. Air mail covers were carried by the R.N.Z.A.F. to New Zealand or by ship to Australia for subsequent air mail service. On 25 September 1947 Qantas Empire Airways sent a survey flight from Sydney to Norfolk Island and return. A regular bi-weekly service was inaugurated on 14 October 1947. Norfolk Island now had direct air mail service to Australia, which cost 3d. On 1 July 1949 the ½d. war tax was rescinded and the internal letter rate increased to 2½d. leaving the effective rate unchanged. The registration fee was increased to 6d. On 1 December 1950 the internal letter rate was increased again to 3d. and then again to 3½d. on 9 July 1951, with the registration fee set at 9d. Air mail rates to the rest of the world were



cached was used on Coronation day mail out of Norfolk Island on 2 June 1953. The Ball Bay stamps can also be found on Australian territorial formula stationary and on paquebot mail cancelled on other neighbouring islands or at Sydney.



4. Pre-decimal Period:

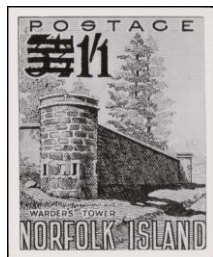
As a result of changes to postal rates and fees over 1949-51, a supplementary six-stamp series was needed with different values to the Ball Bay issue. Each stamp had a different design related to the convict period, with the exception of the 6½d. stamp that pictured the airfield built in 1942. A new version of the 'no dot' AUST postmark with a long 10 JU 53 dateline was used on the first day of issue only. New printed registration labels inscribed just NORFOLK ISLAND were received around 1953, but the post office seemed intent on using up the 'old' labels first. In November 1955 the Qantas Sydney-Norfolk Island air service was extended to Auckland by Tasman Empire Air Lines (TEAL, later Air New Zealand). Special cachets were produced for the inaugural flights. The



first non-definitive issue was a two-stamp set released on 8 June 1956 commemorating the centenary of the landing of the Pitcairn Islanders on Norfolk Island. A special circular date stamp incorporating the dates 1856-1956 was used on the first day of issue. Two types are known. Postal rate changes on 1 October 1956 resulted in a shortage of 7d and 8d. stamps so the 7½d. and 8½d. of the supplementary issue were revalued and issued on 1 July 1958. As a result of another postal rate increase on 1 October 1959, the post office decided to overprint and revalue to 5d. the Australian



issue commemorating 150 years of the post office on the justification that the postmaster of N.S.W. was at the time also the postmaster for Norfolk Island. Also, he had been a convict on Norfolk Island before receiving a release in 1802 and returning to N.S.W. This was the first time that a First Day of Issue circular date stamp was used. There were five variations used to service most first day covers until 1975. A new regular circular date stamp with NORFOLK around



the top and ISLAND around the base separated by dashes was also introduced in 1959. Many variations were used over subsequent years. Further shortages and overprints appeared in 1960.

The first five stamps of a new flower definitive series were released in May and June of 1960. These were followed by a single stamp for the election of a Norfolk Island Council in October and the first Christmas stamp in November, which was an adaption of the current Australian design. Single Christmas stamps adapting Australian designs appeared



every year from 1960 to 1965. The new definitive series was completed with stamps depicting more flowers, birds and two

of the previous convict building designs now in bicolour over 1961 and 1962. A multicolour six-stamp set of fish endemic to Norfolk Island that supplemented the previous definitives appeared over 1962-3.

These were printed by Harrison and Sons of London and were the first Norfolk Island stamps *not* printed by Reserve Bank of



Australia's Note Printing Branch. In 1964 a four-stamp island views issue, also printed by Harrisons, and a two-stamp issue for the 50th Anniversary of Norfolk Island as an Australian Territory appeared. An stamp honouring the 50th Anniversary of the ANZAC landing at Gallipoli was the only other issue in 1965.



5. Early Decimal Period:

Norfolk Island joined Australia in adopting decimal currency on 14 February 1966 (with 10/- = \$1). The stamps issued on that date were overprints on the then current definitive series with the old values obliterated by silver panels and new decimal values printed in black on the panels. The work was carried out in Melbourne. Internal letter postage was reduced from 5d. to 4c. These provisionals were replaced by a 14-stamp definitive issue of ships issued in four groups over 1967-8. Meanwhile, a last day of issue circular date stamp was introduced as the provisionals were taken out of service. The first to go were the four low values on 14 April 1967 and the last to go were the three high values on 17 June 1968. However, it appears that the first use of the last day of issue cancellation was for the 1966 Christmas stamp issued on 24 October that was taken off sale on 17 March. In addition to the provisionals, five stamps were issued in 1966, two in 1967, three in 1968 and five in 1969. Harrison and Sons were now the main printers. Coil stamps were introduced in 1968 in three vending machines of Australian design at the post office. Three stamps based on the current Australian Queen Elizabeth II coil design were issued and an additional coil stamp in 1971 after the letter rate was increased from 5c to 6c. An attractive 15-stamp definitive birds of Norfolk Island series was issued in four groups over 1970-1. Three additional stamps were issued in 1970, five in 1971, three in 1972 and four in 1973, including a three-stamp Christmas issue. Then issues started to proliferate. Another definitive issue (of historical buildings) appeared in four groups between November 1973 and February 1975 and, in 1974, a two-stamp issue for the Royal Visit introduced the first rubber First Day of Issue cancel with fixed date. It included a crown in its design. This was a new policy. Fourteen stamps were issued in 1974 including the first die-cut peel-off stamps printed on self-adhesive paper for the Universal Postal Union Centenary. The four stamps and a souvenir sheet (also a first) were in the shape of the island and the first day of issue cancel was in the shape of a Norfolk Island pine tree. Walsall Security Printers printed the stamps using photolithography. This approach was repeated in 1975 for the two-stamp issue commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Second Settlement. 1975 also featured a three-stamp Christmas issue and four additional stamps related to the history of Norfolk Island. Colloquially speaking and with the benefit of hindsight, these developments suggested that Norfolk's comparatively conservative stamp issuing policy was under threat and beginning "to go off the rails".



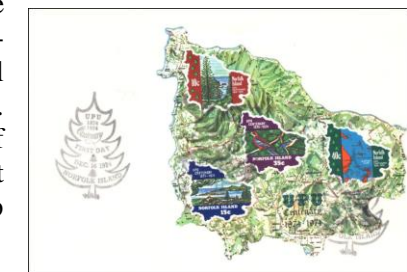
three high values on 17 June 1968. However, it appears that the first use of the last day of issue cancellation was for the 1966 Christmas stamp issued on 24 October that was taken off sale on 17 March. In addition to the provisionals, five stamps were issued in 1966, two in 1967, three in 1968 and five in 1969. Harrison and Sons were now the main printers. Coil stamps were introduced in 1968 in three vending machines of Australian design at the post office. Three stamps based on the current Australian Queen Elizabeth II coil design were issued and an additional coil stamp in 1971 after the letter rate was increased from 5c to 6c. An attractive 15-stamp definitive birds of Norfolk Island series was issued in four groups over 1970-1. Three additional stamps were issued in 1970, five in 1971, three in 1972 and four in 1973, including a three-stamp Christmas issue. Then issues started to proliferate. Another definitive issue (of historical buildings) appeared in four groups between November 1973 and February 1975 and, in 1974, a two-stamp issue for the Royal Visit introduced the first rubber First Day of Issue cancel with fixed date. It included a crown in its design. This was a new policy. Fourteen stamps were issued in 1974 including the first die-cut peel-off stamps printed on self-adhesive paper for the Universal Postal Union Centenary. The four stamps and a souvenir sheet (also a first) were in the shape of the island and the first day of issue cancel was in the shape of a Norfolk Island pine tree. Walsall Security Printers printed the stamps using photolithography. This approach was repeated in 1975 for the two-stamp issue commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Second Settlement. 1975 also featured a three-stamp Christmas issue and four additional stamps related to the history of Norfolk Island. Colloquially speaking and with the benefit of hindsight, these developments suggested that Norfolk's comparatively conservative stamp issuing policy was under threat and beginning "to go off the rails".



between November 1973 and February 1975 and, in 1974, a two-stamp issue for the Royal Visit introduced the first rubber First Day of Issue cancel with fixed date. It included a crown in its design. This was a new policy. Fourteen stamps were issued in 1974 including the first die-cut peel-off stamps printed on self-adhesive paper for the Universal Postal Union Centenary. The four stamps and a souvenir sheet (also a first) were in the shape of the island and the first day of issue cancel was in the shape of a Norfolk Island pine tree. Walsall Security Printers printed the stamps using photolithography. This approach was repeated in 1975 for the two-stamp issue commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Second Settlement. 1975 also featured a three-stamp Christmas issue and four additional stamps related to the history of Norfolk Island. Colloquially speaking and with the benefit of hindsight, these developments suggested that Norfolk's comparatively conservative stamp issuing policy was under threat and beginning "to go off the rails".



This feeling was confirmed in 1976 by a four-stamp issue commemorating the Bi-centenary of the American Revolution, which had no direct connection to Norfolk Island, although attempts were made to find common subjects (whaling, Thanksgiving, World War II and the California quail). Three stamp Christmas issues (for 1976 and 1977) had now become the norm.



This feeling was confirmed in 1976 by a four-stamp issue commemorating the Bi-centenary of the American Revolution, which had no direct connection to Norfolk Island, although attempts were made to find common subjects (whaling, Thanksgiving, World War II and the California quail). Three stamp Christmas issues (for 1976 and 1977) had now become the norm.

Flight anniversaries in 1976 and 1977 provided the opportunity to introduce innovative cancellations in diamond and island shapes (with varieties). A new attractive 17 stamp definitive series this time depicting local butterflies and moths appeared in four groups in late 1976 and 1977. Also, Norfolk Island jumped on the Royalty 'bandwagon' with a Silver Jubilee issue in 1977 followed by a coronation anniversary issue in 1978 (and a Queen Mother 80th birthday issue in 1980 and a three stamp Charles and Diana wedding issue in 1981). More die cut 'peel and stick' stamps appeared in 1978 with four stamp issues each for the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts. A total of 20 non-definitive stamps were issued in 1978. Three stamps and a souvenir sheet for the death centenary of Rowland Hill appeared in 1979. The three stamp Christmas issue for 1979 also included a souvenir sheet, as did the 125th Pitcairn Anniversary issue in 1981. Sixteen non-definitive stamps and souvenir sheets were issued in 1981 and 26 in 1982!

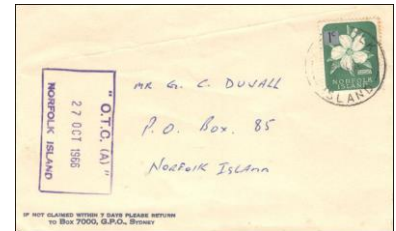
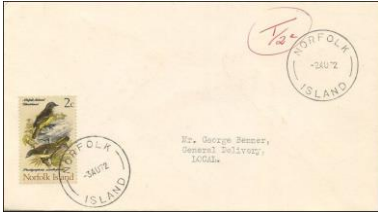


Many of these issues over the late 1970s and early 1980s were designed with an international audience (and local revenue source) in mind, even though attempts were made to link them to the island whenever possible. Since almost all new issues had unique fixed date first day of issue postmarks, the postal history collector was "going nuts" as the Aussies would say. In addition, Norfolk Island returned to the postal stationary 'game' issuing aerograms and pre-stamped envelopes starting in 1981 (also with unique first day of issue cancels with researchable varieties). This marked the end of the Early Decimal Period.



6. Local Mail:

There was no postal delivery and only one post office on Norfolk Island, located centrally in Burnt Pine, so all mail users deposited their mail there and had postal boxes for mail pick up. As a result of this unique situation, the Norfolk Island Post Office instituted an Island "Penny Post" for letters destined to local addresses. The one penny postage rate became one cent after decimalisation. If the sender did not stamp the mail, the post office charged double deficiency in line with international conventions. This low rate made the production of souvenir covers very attractive.



7. Official Mail:

Official Mail can be identified by the use of appropriately printed or handstamped envelopes. Both the Norfolk Island Administration and the Post Office used this service. No stamps were required after 1947.



8. Miscellaneous:



The presentation concluded with miscellaneous items such as missent mail, QSL cards and the note that in 2015 Australia abolished self-government on Norfolk Island. Norfolk Island stamps are now produced by Australia Post and subject to the Australian rate schedule, which means the elimination of Local Post.