

## SECTION 8

## QUEEN ELIZABETH II ISSUES, 1952-1966

## INTRODUCTORY NOTES

The pre-decimal issues of Queen Elizabeth II, 1952-1966, have been one of the most intensively-studied areas of Australian Commonwealth philately. At the time of the Queen's accession, intaglio printing of stamps from nickel electrotype plates was well-established as the printing process of choice, producing fine quality stamps in large quantities. By the eve of decimal currency, it was apparent that the days of intaglio printing were numbered, and that multicolour photogravure would be the process of choice in the future. While the advent of photogravure printing is by far the most significant change in this period, there were several others of considerable technical interest which were reflected in the stamps printed.

The first of these was the Produce Food letterpress "experiment" of 1953, which resulted in such poorly-executed stamps that it was never repeated, and no other stamp wholly printed by letterpress was attempted. The introduction of bicoloured stamps followed soon after; it was a preference of the Post Office, but not of the Note Printing Branch, as it presented registration problems.

Subsequent innovation, on the technical side, was in three major directions:

- the development of photogravure-printing, beginning in 1956 with the employment of overseas printers, and culminating in the acquisition by the Note Printing Branch of its own photogravure press and issue of locally-printed photogravure stamps in 1962.
- modifications of rotary recess printing plate production, the most important of which was the introduction of plastic into plate manufacture from 1959.
- the development of electronic sorting, facing and cancelling of mail, and the use of fluorescent substances incorporated into printed stamps for the activation of such devices.

All these were matters of experimentation and development for the Note Printing Branch. The Australian Post Office itself, however, also began to exert a much greater influence over its own postage stamps, especially in the matter of design. This coincided with the appointment of a Philatelic Officer and the establishment of a Philatelic Sales Centre. The first Philatelic Officer was a noted collector, Phil Collas, who remained in that position until 1968. The Philatelic Section became responsible for all aspects of postage stamps from design to production, and worked in conjunction with the Note Printing Branch to achieve this. Australian Post Office stamp issue policy remained conservative, but in common with overseas practice, commemorative issues increased, and consideration was given to purely philatelic considerations. The Stamp Advisory Committee continued to be the body responsible for the development of stamp designs, and began to use private artists outside the Note Printing Branch for this purpose much more frequently.