

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.

INTRODUCTION TO THE SECOND EDITION (2006)

This second edition of the Queen Elizabeth II section of the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue is some 80 pages larger than the first edition of 1996. In the period since the first edition there has been little new significant research into these issues, and the listings remain essentially the same as those of the earlier edition. That said, new work has been incorporated where this seemed appropriate. A number of new plate varieties have been added, as well as a number of new shade listings. The most significant changes to the text result from the last ten years' researches into the Note Printing Branch archives held at the Reserve Bank of Australia, Sydney. The earlier edition incorporated the printing instrument data for most of these issues, enabling an exact assessment of the printing plates used for each stamp for the first time. A number of corrections and additions have been made to this information. New records, unavailable in 1995, regarding the printing quantities of each stamp have now been incorporated, and supplement the quantities issued which have been known for most stamps.

The listing of all plate numbers have been revised, to differentiate between those with or without dashes or crosses, which are now separately listed.

New illustrations have been prepared for all plate varieties that have been incorporated. These enlarged illustrations are a great improvement on those in the first edition.

A new feature of this edition is the inclusion of the pre-decimal issues of Australian Antarctic Territory and Cocos (Keeling) Islands, which were placed on sale at Australian post offices and valid for postage.

The Market

The market for Queen Elizabeth II issues has seen many spectacular rises for all rare and unusual material since the publication of the first edition. There has been little movement in the prices of basic stamps since the first edition, a sign of the new sophistication of the market.

Proof material is in considerable demand. The presentation sunken die proofs have seen significant rises, although levels here are somewhat dependent on condition, which is very variable. Other proof and essay material is of such rarity, and appears on the market so infrequently, that its current market value is difficult to gauge. There is also a much greater appreciation of the publicity cards which exist in limited numbers for most issues.

The plate numbers on Queen Elizabeth II issues, although not as numerous as those of King George VI have, like those of the earlier period, experienced spectacular rises, especially for those rarities of which only a few examples exist.

Another area of major market movement has been the major production errors of printing and perforation. All these items are in great demand on the isolated occasions they appear on the market. In particular, the small group of pre-decimal missing colour errors has seen spectacular price rises as the real difficulty in acquiring many of these has been appreciated.

INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION (2015)

The Third Edition of the Queen Elizabeth II section of the *Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue* is some 20 pages larger than the second edition of 2006. There are signs of some increasing interest into researching these issues, and the few new findings that have been made have been incorporated into the listings. Further releases of Note Printing Branch archive material to the Reserve Bank of Australia in Sydney has meant that all the files for the issues covered by this volume are now available. It is believed, therefore that information on all the printing instruments used, as well as quantities printed, is now as accurate as it can be.

Relatively few new plate varieties have been added, but some additional illustrations are now included. Some new plate numbers have come to light, and some corrections made to the notes regarding the numbers known for many of these.

A number of new essays and proofs have been added. These result from the release of the archive of Courvoisier of Switzerland (the 1956 2/- Olympic Games), and also several new Harrison essays of the 1/- of the same issue are listed for the first time. New essays relating to the introduction of photogravure in Australia are also listed for the first time. These were known from the Australia Post archival collection but were not thought to exist in private hands. It is possible that other essays of this sort will appear in the future.

The Market

The market for basic Queen Elizabeth II stamps has been stagnant for some time, and remains so, and this new edition reflects this insofar as no significant price changes have been made. Consistent with the King George VI catalogue release earlier this year, a base price of \$1 has been placed on all stamps, mint or used. This is intended to represent a reasonable handling charge for retail sale, rather than an accurate valuation.

The market for specialised and unusual material is quite strong. Demand for essays and proofs is variable, and the demand for the presentation die proofs in sunken mounts has been steady rather than spectacular. Other proofs are more popular.

Plate numbers continue to be in demand. This area differs from the King George VI period in that there are a group of plate numbers that are relatively common (for example, the 1954 Red Cross, and the 1959-62 coil sheet numbers), whereas all others are of considerable rarity, and often unique.

Rare printing and perforation errors also remain strong, and of most of these only very limited quantities exist. On the next level of rarity, misplaced perforations, offsets and similar varieties are very popular and their prices have increased considerably.

The biggest movement in the current catalogue has been in the value of constant plate varieties. The real scarcity of many of these, especially in the intaglio issues, is only now being appreciated, as is their difficulty of acquisition. The rarities in this field have been increased somewhat in price, as demand continues for those, but the greatest increases are at the lower level. It is also the case that mint examples, due to the efforts of contemporary collectors, are often more easily found than used, so the difference in price between mint and used has been reduced in most instances.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOURTH EDITION (2019)

This fourth edition of the Queen Elizabeth II section of the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue appears some four years after the third edition. As for the recent revisions of Kangaroos and King George V, this is the first edition of Queen Elizabeth II in full colour. This is also the first of the Brusden-White catalogues to be produced in A4 size, following the format of the Postal Stationery catalogue. This larger size has been introduced to accommodate a major new pricing innovation. Two cover prices are now provided, one for the solo usage of the stamp on cover, and a second for other uses of the stamp, either in multiple form or in combination with other stamps (whichever is the cheaper). This reflects a burgeoning interest in this field of collecting, and the prices for a number of the cover categories will surprise some. At the same time the opportunity has been taken to increase the font size, which will also be welcomed by many.

The new format has also enabled a number of new illustrations of various printing and perforation errors to be included.

The listings have been fully reviewed. Several new plate numbers have been reported and these have now been listed, and many of the notes regarding these have been revised in the light of new information. It was noted in the last edition that perforation errors arising from paper folds were rising in popularity. That trend has continued and has resulted in a number of previously unrecorded examples coming to light. A few new plate varieties have been included, plus new or additional illustrations of existing listings.

It has also been decided to include the Postage Due stamps issued during the Elizabeth II period so that all issues of the reign are included in the volume. These issues have been relatively neglected in recent years, and it is hoped that their inclusion here may lead to an increased interest in these stamps.

The Market

There is evidence that the stamps of Queen Elizabeth II are growing in popularity. This has not affected the market for the basic stamps, of which the large stocks that exist are sufficient to meet the demand.

However, specialised material is in much more limited supply, and prices are beginning to rise. Areas such as the perforation pip blocks are a typical example. For many issues these are not easy to find, and indeed, although all the possible combinations are listed, some may in fact not exist. Obvious examples are the perforation pip blocks of the Navigator stamps, but more seemingly mundane material can also be placed in the rare to virtually impossible category, and prices will rise rapidly if demand increases.

Several plate numbers have appeared on the market recently after having not been seen for many years, and the prices for these have been strong. For those numbers for which more than 3 or 4 examples exist, the market is much less firm, and some rationalization has been made of the prices in this catalogue.

Proof material is probably the weakest area. A large number of sunken die proofs of the Queen Elizabeth II period have reached the market in recent years, and these have struggled to be absorbed at prices approaching the catalogue prices. This material has, in most cases, been lowered in the current catalogue. Other proof material tends to be of great rarity, but is also not experiencing great demand.

The demand for the popular or rare plate varieties has continued, and in general the prices for these is on an upward path. Some of the scarcer plate varieties exist in very limited numbers.

Arthur Gray's major collection of Queen Elizabeth II appeared on the auction market recently. The prices realised indicate that the market for the major rarities remains very strong. There are relatively few missing colour errors in this period, and most are of considerable rarity and sought after not only by Australian Commonwealth collectors but also from general collectors of this material.