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**An Introduction to the Patent Office Stamps of Australia
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Adelaide Stampex 2008 hosted the National One Frame Class for the year and among the thirty-two entries there were three exhibits based on Australian Revenues. Material from one of these, *Patent Office Stamps of Australia 1954-1988*, entered by Eugene Klefisch forms the background to this account. It is hoped that a comprehensive account of this issue will be published by the Cinderella Society sometime in 2009. However as these stamps are rarely seen and research into their production and use is sparse it seems appropriate to discuss some of the highlights of this exhibit.

The Background

The stamps are listed by Craig in *The Revenue Stamps of the Commonwealth and its Territories* by WR Craig (1988) with brief background comments. Extracts of this are reproduced in an abbreviated form in the Barefoot *British Commonwealth Revenues* catalogue but note that the \$100 Second Series and the \$80 Third Series listed in the 2008 edition were never printed or issued. Apart from additional notes which include an introduction to some of the handstamps used to cancel the stamps on Dave Elsmore's web site (<http://users.bigpond.net.au/dave1/index>) there is virtually no other published information.

The reasons for this are that at the time of their issue the stamps had a relatively high face value, and although they were available for purchase by the public at the Patent Offices located in most State capital cities, few were purchased by collectors. The majority were bought by patent attorneys employed by law firms who specialised in patents, trade marks and designs which were the areas administered by the Patent Office. Thus mint stamps are extremely rare.

The other reason is that all cancelled copies to the original documents are retained in storage at the main office of the Patent Office located in Canberra. Interest therefore was limited as neither mint nor used stamps were readily available to collectors. In recent years a relatively small number of used copies have found their way onto the market and these have aroused wider interest. The exhibit at Adelaide is thought to be the first time that an exhibit solely related to Patent Office stamps has been displayed.

Revenue collectors are not only interested in the basic information such as what values were available, perforations, watermarks and the like but also in the use of the stamps. The latter requires an understanding of the fees that were paid by the use of the Patent Office stamps and how they were cancelled. Overall the scarcity of the stamps mint or used seems to have also acted as a deterrent to research into the aspects.

A forthcoming detailed study will attempt to provide a more detailed research background to these attractive and elusive stamps. For the present, comments are limited to some of the issues and information presented in the display at Adelaide.

Dates of issue and withdrawal

The prime source of information on the Patent Office stamps is *The Australian Official Journal of Patents, Trade Marks and Designs*. This publication was, and still is, produced weekly. It is important

because it establishes the date of issue and withdrawal of the Patent Office stamps. As it turns out the date of issue given in Craig is incorrect.

The Journal clearly states that commencing on 1 June 1954 all payments to the Patent Office must be made by using adhesive stamps available for purchase from the Patent Offices. The date given in Craig is 1 June 1955 and is incorrect.

The introduction of stamps for payment was solely for the convenience of the Patent Office, essentially it simplified their accounting. It was unpopular with the law offices who dealt with the bulk of transactions although in some cases patents and the like were submitted directly by individuals.

The date of withdrawal was 1 June 1988 although the Patent Office made it clear that it would continue to allow payment using adhesive stamps until stocks already purchased had been exhausted. The basic reason for the change in the system of payment was that many of the charges had escalated over the years to the extent that it was not uncommon for payments to run into hundreds or thousands of dollars for a single transaction. After withdrawal of the stamps payment were by account or by cheques and the like and the system ceased to have an attraction for revenue collectors.

The Fees

Revenue collectors and certainly exhibitors are interested in the fee structure as well as in the narrower philatelic aspects of the stamps. Thus there is interest in showing how the denominations match the fees. The Patent Office Journal on occasion lists the fee structure for which the stamps were used. This is complex in large part because there are four different categories of charges that applied to patents, trade marks, designs and copyright. Copyright ceased to be a responsibility of the Patent Office about 1969. However, within the three remaining classes there were in excess of a hundred different possible charges and in many cases these had multiple sub-classes. For example, 'renewal fee on the expiration of the year of the patent' had 12 sub-headings depending on how many years were involved.

The minimum fees in the 1950s related to charges for 'photographic reproduction' of documents, which commenced at 2/- (this was before the advent of photocopiers!) and the higher fees were mainly less than L10. However the advent of international search fees under the Patent Co-operation Treaty in the early 1980s led to an escalation of fees. In order to accommodate higher fees a new \$100 stamp was introduced at an as yet unknown date in the early 1980s. Eventually fees became so expensive that the use of stamps became impracticable and they were withdrawn.

The problem for collectors remains that there are few large pieces on the market that enable the stamps to be matched to the actual fees.

The Stamps

For many revenue collectors the major interest remains with collecting examples of all the issued denominations. The good news is that the listings of values in Craig (and reproduced in Barefoot) are essentially correct. However it is becoming apparent that some values are much scarcer than others and to date it has not proved possible to obtain detailed information on the numbers of stamps printed.

There are, as illustrated in Craig, three distinct series of Patent Office Stamps. The first was issued on 1 June 1954 and continued until decimalisation. In common with other Australian stamps on 14 February 1966 the sterling issues were no longer on sale and were replaced by stamps of similar

design but with decimal values replacing the earlier sterling values. Finally commencing about 1978 the Third Series were issued. These were of a new design and continued in use until all stamps were withdrawn in 1988. The third series stamps were not introduced at a single time but became available as stocks of equivalent value Series 2 decimal stamps were used up.

A complicating factor is that on occasion new values were introduced to match changes in the fee structure and more rarely earlier values were withdrawn when the fee structure changed. In the latter case existing stocks were used to make up new rates. An example of this is for the 6/8d value. This rather unusual denomination (for younger philatelists 6/8d is a third of a pound sterling) was because the fees for 'enlargement of time for payment of renewal fees' involved 6/8d or 13/4d. However this fee was changed in early 1957 and the 6/8d stamps continued to be used for some years until the stocks were exhausted.

The 6/8d therefore is one of the rarer values and so are the lower denominations of 2/- and 2/6d and the low decimal values of 25c and 50c. Indeed to date no used copies of the 2/- or 25c stamps have been seen. However archives do contain limited information on the early quantities that were printed and there are archival examples of full sheets of some of the values. These will be described in the more comprehensive account to be published by the Society next year!

The authors would be delighted to hear from collectors who have mint or used copies of the rarer values, especially for the 2/- and the Second Series decimal values of 25c and \$30 and the Third Series \$4, \$8, \$12, \$15, \$16, and \$30. Dingle Smith can be contacted on [dsm30722@bigpond.net/au](mailto:dsm30722@bigpond.net.au) or by phone on 02 62543294.

The exhibit by Eugene Klefisch attained a Ruby (78 marks) and was awarded the prize for the Best Novice Entry. The 16-page exhibit is reproduced on the web site of the Revenue Society and can be seen on www.revenuesociety.org.uk and follow the links to exhibits. The account above is accompanied by the title page of the Adelaide exhibit and the first three sheets which show examples of the First, Second and Third issues of Patent Fee stamps.