



Stamps and Postal History of British New Guinea/ Territory of Papua 1883-1952

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The Island of New Guinea is the second largest island after Greenland. Geologically, it is part of the Australian Continental plate, like Greenland is part of the North American continental plate. But New Guinea is the largest fully inhabited island. European explorers visited the island beginning in the 1500s, but colonization began in 1828 when the Dutch annexed the western portion of the island to the Netherland East Indies, west of the 141st meridian.

The German Navy began establishing trading posts on the northern coast of New Guinea sometime in the 1860s. The British Colonial Office refused repeated requests for colonization until after the German Navy had occupied the entirety of the northern coast of New Guinea east of the Netherland East Indies, as well as the Bismarck Archipelago. Security for the Queensland colony convinced the British to form a protectorate of the southern coast of New Guinea east of the 141st meridian on 6-Nov-1884 called British New Guinea.

This article will briefly describe the stamps and postal history of British New Guinea (later,

the Territory of Papua) up to the issuance of “Papua and New Guinea” stamps in 1952, as a result of the joint administration of the two Australian Territories in 1949. Papua New Guinea became independent from Australia in 1975. The ex-German Territory of New Guinea will be the subject of another article.

British New Guinea



The administration of B.N.G. was established in Port Moresby, officially renamed Granville between 1886 and 1888, in honor of Queen Victoria’s Foreign Minister. Mail in the early years to 1891 is quite scarce. A newspaper notice on 30-Apr-85 advised that Burns, Philip & Co. was granted a 3-year contract to run a monthly mail steamer between Thursday Island, Port Moresby and East Cape, B.N.G. Roger Lee states in his 1983 book on Papuan postal history that “Apart from a small group of missionaries and government officials, the main European “residents” were traders and gold prospectors in this early period, and neither latter group could



possibly be described as prolific letter writers!"
Figure 1 is the earliest recorded postal item connected to British New Guinea dated 17-Dec-86



Figure 1: Earliest recorded B.N.G. postal item, Melbourne to Granville 17-Dec-86. Victorian 6d postage.

from Melbourne, Australia to Granville, B.N.G. sent to Capt. Anthony Musgrave, the Assistant Deputy Commissioner at Port Moresby.

The Queensland colony administered British New Guinea, the B.N.G. postal rates were Queensland rates, and the stamps used by B.N.G. were from Queensland. Initially, and an 8-bar "N.G." cancel was used. In 1891 a new 8-bar "B.N.G." cancel and a Port Moresby circular date stamp were issued. Samari received a 9-bar B.N.G. cancel, likely at the same time. Figure 2 is

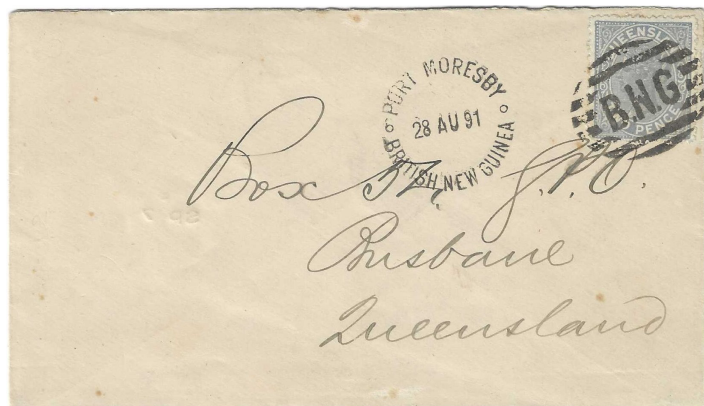


Figure 2: Port Moresby to Brisbane 28-Aug-91, franked with an 1890 Queensland 2d. Likely the first day of use of these two handstamps.

a likely example of a first day cover of these two new cancels as a few identical covers are known, franked with an 1890 2d Queensland stamp to Brisbane. Although seven post offices were open during this Queensland stamp period, most of this early mail is known sent from either Port

Moresby or Samarai, and no covers are known from three offices.

On 28-Dec-91 the postal rates were regularized and published. The 2d per ½oz letter rate was expanded from B.N.G. and the Australian Colonies to Tasmania, New Zealand, Fiji and New Hebrides. All other places, including England, were 2 ½d per ½oz.

A real-photo postcard of a double-hulled Papuan sailing vessel called a Lakatoi is shown in Figure 3. This distinctive boat became the subject of B.N.G. / Papuan postage stamps for 30



Figure 3: A real-photo postcard of a double-hulled Lakatoi sailing vessel, circa 1910-1915, copyright A & K Gibson, Port Moresby.

years, from 1901 to 1931! Upon inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1-Jan-1901 the administration and postal services of British New Guinea became the responsibility of the Australian federal government. Thus, on 1-Jul-01 a set of Lakatoi stamps labelled British New Guinea were issued in the protectorate which were designed, engraved and recess-printed by de la Rue in London.

The exotic Lakatoi design and rich colors of British New Guinea stamps were very popular with collectors. So much so, that B.N.G. stamps on cover are relatively scarce as many covers sent between 1901 and 1906 were destroyed for examples of used stamps. Lakatoi stamps were highly collectable because of varying combinations of watermarks (horizontal and vertical), paper types, and perforations in these early years.

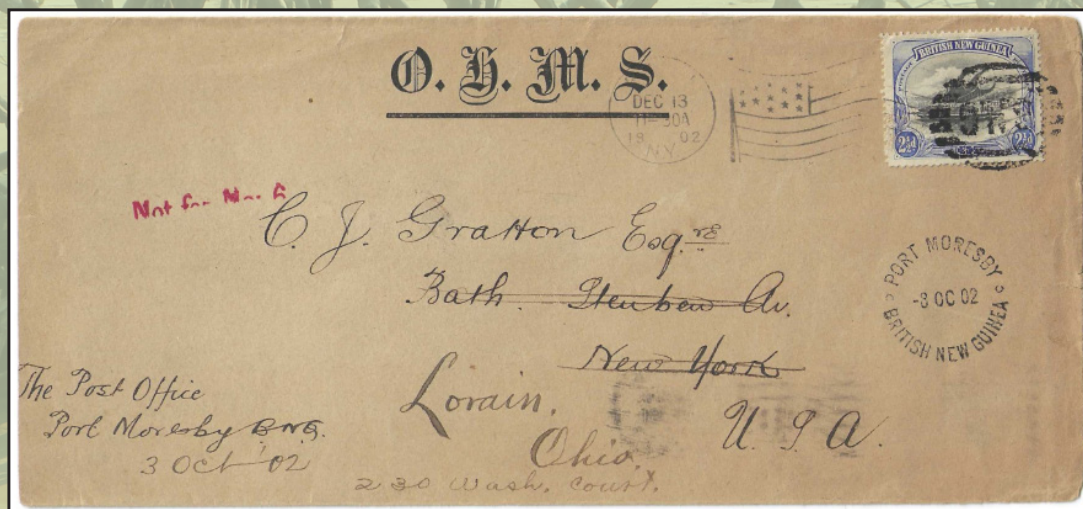


Figure 4: Port Moresby Post Office Official British New Guinea letter to the USA. 2 ½d ½ oz overseas rate.



Figure 5: Registered cover from Samarai ED to Sydney, 19-Sep-07. 1d pair overprinted with the small “Papua” and the 2 ½d pair overprinted with the large “Papua”. 7d pays 3d registration and 2 times 2d per ½oz.

An official cover from *The Post Office Port Moresby B.N.G.* 3 Oct 02 to the U.S.A. is shown in Figure 4 franked with a bright blue 2 ½d Lakatoi paying the ½ oz overseas rate. The cover travelled to Samarai (10-Oct), Cooktown QLD (27-Oct), Brisbane QLD, New York City (12-Dec), Bath NY and forwarded to Ohio (13-Dec), arriving in Lorain Ohio 15-Dec-02.

On 1-Sep-06, the Papua Act was passed which a) made British New Guinea an Australian Territory instead of a British Protectorate, and b) changed the name of British New Guinea to Papua. Thus, on 8-Nov-06, B.N.G. stamps were overprinted “Papua” in Port Moresby (2.5mm tall). During May-June 1907, more B.N.G. stamps were overprinted “Papua”, but this time in Brisbane (2.0mm). The Brisbane overprints are thinner and smaller and are referred to as the “small Papua”

overprints. These overprinted stamps saw limited use, but philatelists were keen to find them.

Figure 5 is a registered cover from Samarai ED to Sydney on 19-Sep-07 franked with a pair of 2 ½d BNG stamps overprinted with a large Papua overprint (12,000 printed) and a pair of 1d stamps overprinted with a small Papua overprint (35,100 printed). 7d pays 3d registration and two times the 2d per ½oz rate to Australia. Stamps are cancelled with a double-line, straight-line “REGISTERED SAMARI B.N.G.”

British New Guinea also printed 1d red and 1 ½d blue postal cards. Only 4558 1d and 2974 1 ½d cards were sold. The remainders were destroyed when the territory was renamed to Papua. Finding non-philatelic commercial examples is difficult.

Papua



New Papuan stamps were printed in Australia utilizing transfers from the Lakatoi dies of the British New Guinea stamps. These bi-colored Papuan stamps were lithographed in Melbourne by J.B. Cooke between 1907 and January 1910. They featured a heading with the inscription "PAPUA" in short, wide letters (1.3mm tall) and are referred to as the "small Papua" issue. Between September and December of 1910, another printing was made with taller "PAPUA" letters in the heading (1.8mm) and are referred to as the "large Papua" stamps.

Figure 6 is an envelope from Port Moresby to England franked with 5d of "small Papua"



Figure 6: "Small PAPUA" cover to England, dated 1-Aug-08. 4d Lakatoi with a "deformed d" on the left. Double 2 1/2d overseas rate. Cooktown 6-Aug-08 transit; Dorking 20-Sep-08 receiving, reverse.

Lakatois dated 1-Aug-08, paying two times the 2 1/2d per 1/2oz letter rate. The 4d has a "deformed d" on the left, which is a known catalogued flaw, rare on cover. Figure 7 is an envelope from Samarai ED to England franked with two pairs of "large Papua" 1/2d Lakatoi stamps dated 5-Dec-11, paying two times the 1d per 1/2oz letter rate.

Because of the new Uniform Postal Rates across Australia beginning May of 1911, the Territory of Papua and Australia now had the same postal



Figure 7: "Large PAPUA" cover to England, dated 5-Dec-11. 2 times the 1d Commonwealth letter rate. 20-Jan-12 receiving, reverse.

rates as the British Commonwealth of 1d per 1/2oz letter rate.

In 1911, Australia issued a set of 8 values of Lakatoi stamps in monochrome colors, and the colors were not very pleasing. Philatelists and collectors of the time were outraged at how such a beautiful stamp could be made so ugly! Collectors had to wait until 1916 when new bi-colored stamps were once again issued.

The monochrome 1d stamp was overprinted with a straight-line "Stamp Duty." in May 1912. Figure 8 is a parcel piece sent registered from Wanigera, but postmarked Samarai 25-May-12, franked with an irregular block of eight 1d Rose-Pink Lakatoi overprinted "Stamp Duty." This is both first month and rare usage. Unfortunately, the address is cut away, but it was likely sent within Papua. Parcel rates were 1d for every 2oz. Book rates were 1d for every 4oz.



Figure 8: Parcel post piece utilizing irregular block of eight 1d pink monochrome Lakatoi overprinted Stamp Duty. 25-May-1912.

Figure 9 is a cover sent from the BNG Development Co Ltd in Samari to Kobe, Japan on 21-Mar-16. It is franked 2 ½d overseas



Figure 9: Monochrome stamp cover to Kobe, Japan 21-May-16. 2 ½d overseas rate plus 1d late fee. Extremely rare “Late Fee” handstamp.

postage and 1d late fee, followed by a rare LATE FEE handstamp. Even in Australia, late fee handstamps are not common; usually the fee is simply paid by an additional adhesive. This cover transited Singapore on 23-May and arrived in Kobe on 6-Jun-16.

In 1917, after the reintroduction of bi-colored Lakatoi stamps in 1916, six values of the monochrome stamps were overprinted with a provisional “ONE PENNY”, not because Papua needed 1d stamps, but because Australia wanted to make some use of the large stocks of these unpopular stamps.

The post WW1 Lakatoi stamps (1916-1931) are interesting for their color, shade, and perforation variations reflecting the four different government printers Australia employed during this timeframe: J.B. Cooke, T.S. Harrison, A.J. Mullett and John Ash.

Two 4d registered envelopes with an orange indicium were issued in 1917 (sizes G, H). Only 1000 of each were printed, but there is no record of the number of envelopes sold. Like the B.N.G. postcards, it appears they were not very popular. It had been suggested that size G may have been issued in 1920, and if true would imply a definite need of registered envelopes, but few now exist. Four pence paid 3d registration and 1d postage within the Commonwealth. Figure 10 is a registered envelope to Sweden uprated to 6d for 2 ½d overseas postage plus ½d War Tax and 3d registration.

Air transport was an early necessity in Papua to access the gold fields and cross the mountains. The early Australian pilots were dinkum daredevils. Papua issued their first airmail stamp by overprinting the 3d Lakatoi with a straight-line “AIR MAIL” in October 1929. This 3d Lakatoi was also used for airmail postage across Australia on Papuan mail. All three printings of the 3d Lakatoi were overprinted: Cooke, Harrison and Ash. In 1930 an overprint of an airplane was used, on 3d, 6d and 1s values.

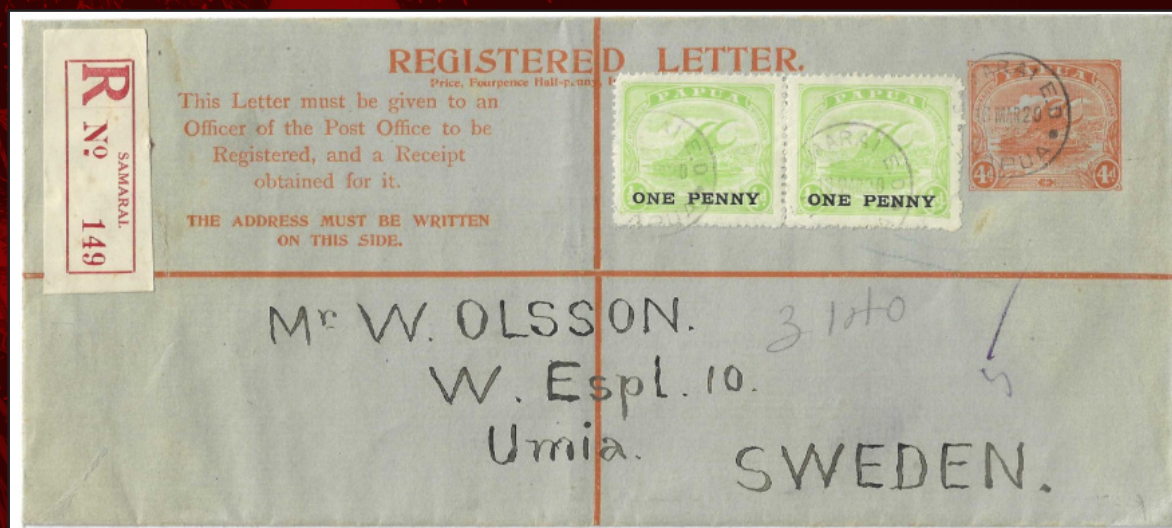


Figure 10: 4d Registered envelope from Samarai ED to Sweden 18-Mar-20, uprated with two provisional “ONE PENNY” overprints on ½d. 6d pays 3d registration, the 2 ½d overseas rate and ½d War Tax.



Figure 11: Airmail from Port Moresby to Salamaua, across the Owen Stanley Mountain range, 19-Jul-30. 1929 provisional airmail overprint on a T.S. Harrison 3d Lakatoi.



Figure 13: Jubilee of Declaration of British Protectorate Commemorative stamps on cover to Switzerland, 13-Mar-35.

Figure 12: 5d single-rate registered cover to South Australia, 5-Dec-32.



Figure 11 is a Papuan airmail cover sent from Port Moresby to Salamaua. Salamaua is across the mountains on the eastern coast of Papua, only accessible by boat or air, and was a staging post to explore for gold in the inland areas such as Wau and Bulolo.

The Lakatoi stamp era ended in 1932 with the 14-November issuance of a marvelous Definitive 16-stamp set of pictorials depicting the people and symbols of Papua, with values to £1. Figure 12 is a philatelically inspired registered envelope posted to South Australia on 5-December, about three weeks after issuance. It features a ½d Motuan Girl, a 1d Chieftain's son, a 1 ½d Tree House and a 2d Bird of Paradise with a boar tusk. The 5d franking pays 2d per 1oz letter rate (which began 4-Aug-30), plus 3d registration.

I am particularly fond of the 1 ½d Tree House stamp because I've hiked the rainforests of New Guinea in search tree houses, and I've spent a few days living with each of three different families who lived in tree houses. The 17 porters we hired for the expedition (now living on the river) grew up in the jungle and helped build a new treehouse for a family in one day, similar to a midwestern USA barn raising.

In the 1930s, a number of Papuan commemorative stamps were issued, as was the custom in Australia at the time. On 6-Nov-34, a set of 4 stamps (1d to 5d) were issued to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Declaration of the British Protectorate (Figure 13). On 14-May-37, a set of 4 stamps (1d to 5d) were issued to commemorate the Coronation of King

George VI, and on 6-Sept-38 a set of 5 stamps (2d to 1s) were issued to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of Declaration of British Possession.

World War II and post-war postal history



The Japanese controlled most the northern and eastern coastlines of the island of New Guinea in 1942. The Americans landed at Milne Bay, eastern Papua in early 1944. Figure 14 is an American Naval Construction Battalion letter sent to Washington, D.C. on 3-Feb-44. The Construction Battalions (CBs or "SeaBees") immediately followed the US Marine invasion forces to build infrastructure (buildings, landing strips, bridges) to support the troops. The Australian military has similar military postal history in Papua, using Australian stamps.

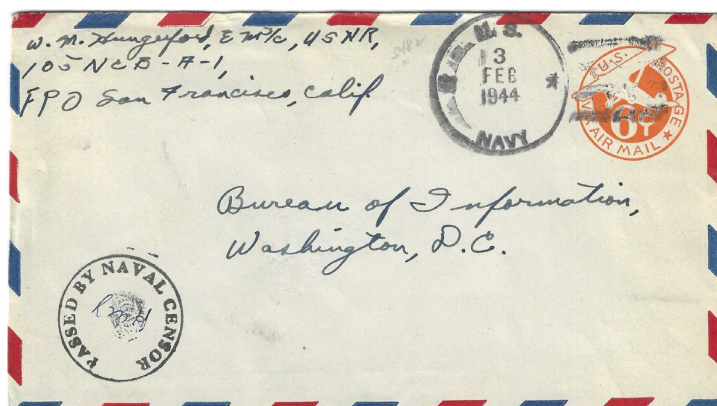


Figure 14: American 105th Naval Construction Battalion (CBs or "SeaBee's"), Milne Bay, Eastern Papua 3-Feb-1944.

Towards the end of 1944, the Allies controlled most of the northern and eastern coast of New Guinea. Japanese General Adachi's 18th Army had retreated to Nunbok, Papua near Mount Turu in October 1944. There Adachi formed a basecamp to conduct guerrilla warfare activities and make a final stand. Figure 15 is a postcard to Japan from a member of the 18th Army in Nunbok.

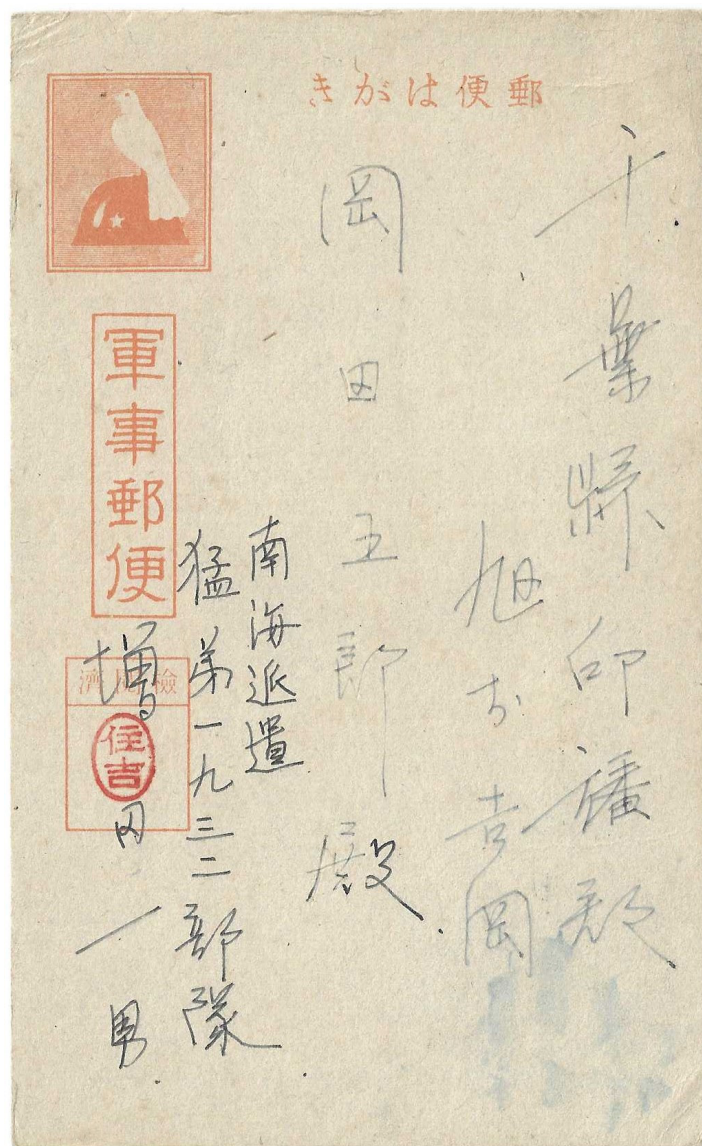
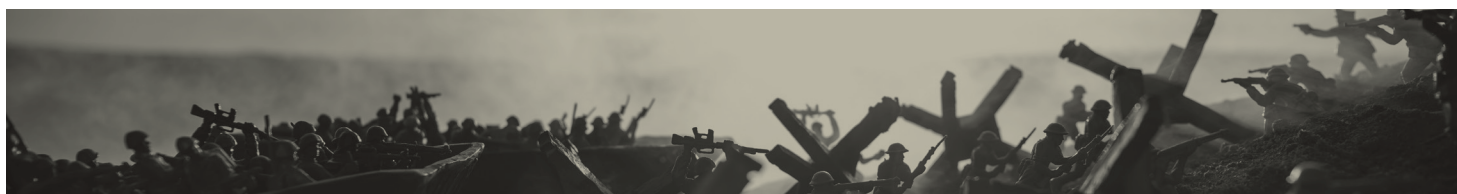


Figure 15: Japanese Military Gunji Yubin fieldpost card sent to Japan (after Oct. 1944) from the 18th Army that retreated to Nunbok near Mount Turu, Territory of Papua.

After the war, Papuan philately got into a bit of a lull in my opinion, but this is entirely understandable and also quite interesting at the same time. Because Australian stamps were used by the Australian military during the war, when Papua returned to civil administration on 30-Oct-45, Australian stamps continued to be used. Philatelists then realized that they could forward older Australian stamps to Papua and have them cancelled!



Therefore beginning in 1947, only Australian stamps issued from 1937 onwards were valid for postage because the 1937-49 series of stamps were “still current” within Australia. Any new or future Australian issues would

territories of Papua and New Guinea by merging their administrations to form a single “Papua and New Guinea”. Therefore, a new series of “Papua & New Guinea” stamps was finally issued on 30-Oct-52. Australian stamps were not accepted for

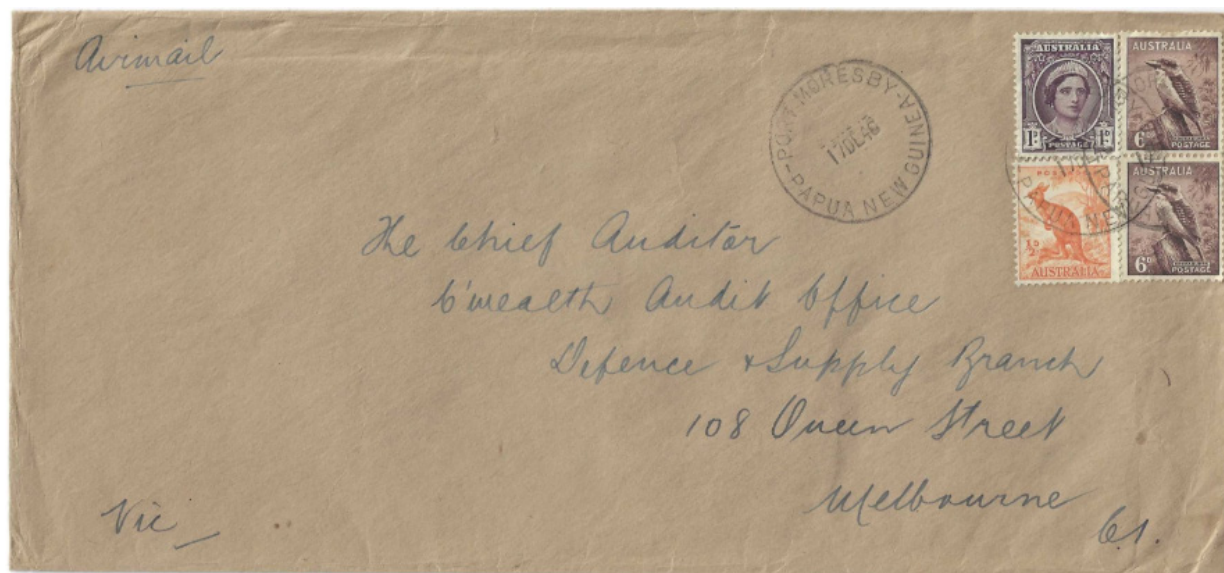


Figure 16: Airmail cover from Port Moresby to Melbourne dated 17-Dec-46, franked with 13 ½d in Australian stamps paying 5 times 2d/oz, plus 3d Airmail, plus ½d War Tax.

also be valid. This added a new dimension to collecting post-war Australian postal history! Figure 16 is an airmail cover to Melbourne dated 17-Dec-46, featuring two 1937 6d Kookaburras, one 1938 ½d Wallaroo, and a 1d 1943 Queen Elizabeth stamp. The 13 ½d pays 5 times 2d/oz, plus 3d Airmail, plus ½d War Tax.

Australia decided not to re-issue any pre-war Papuan stamps, thus the Papuan stamps held in the Treasury were destroyed. But any Papuan stamp ever issued would always be valid for postage.

There was not a lot of urgency regarding the issuance of new stamps for the Territory of Papua, even though there were lots of opinions and design ideas. It turns out that politics got in the way, and discussions regarding the future administration of Australia’s two territories on New Guinea had to be resolved first.

The Parliament of Australia passed the *Papua and New Guinea Act of 1949* which replaced both the *Papua Act of 1905* and the *New Guinea Act of 1920*. This Act changed the status of both

postage after 2-Mar-53.

The *Papua New Guinea Independence Act of 1975* allowed for Papua New Guinea's independence from Australia, and Papua New Guinea (PNG) became an independent country on 16 September 1975.

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