

Convict Mail

Barbara Kloss (#870) often spends time at the Smithsonian in search of philatelic information. Two recent discoveries concern the use of punctures on stamps of the Australian continent.

A writer in Hobart, Australia, in July 1890 noted that small triangular holes had been punched in the 1d and 4d first issues of Tasmania. His view was that the punches were to keep convict clerks from using the stamps as money. With the punches, the stamps could be used for postage only.

And a writer in the Essex County Philatelist of Lawrence, MA, in July 1890 had this to say:

The fact is, all letters are thus punched through, stamp and all, which are mailed by convicts to their friends. Hundreds of convicts are sent to Australia each year and the government takes this means of identifying their mail."