

G.B. STAMPS PUNCTURED C of A

This article is taken from Stamp Collecting for January 1954. It was sent in some time ago by John Marriner but as there had been articles in the Bulletin on previous occasions on this subject I let it lie in my 'forward tray'. Perhaps now is the time to print it again as there are some new facts contained in it. The article was by **E.L. Page** of the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Society of G.B.

The offices of the Commonwealth of Australia in England use(*d*) the stamps of Great Britain punctured "CofA", standing for Commonwealth of Australia, and the following information is fairly complete and quite authentic.

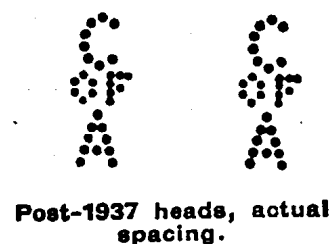
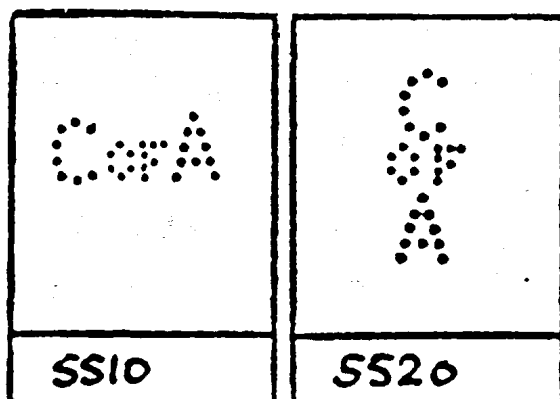
As is usual in matters of great philatelic interest, the early history of the punctures is lost in the mists of time. Recollections and modern facts start about 1922, although the new London headquarters of the Commonwealth of Australia House in the Strand opened in 1918.

Three dates are prominent in this study: 1916, 1922 and 1937. The early history, adducing that the punctures started in 1916, is mentioned in an undated cutting I have from the A.S.M. It first quotes STAMP COLLECTING for 1916 as informing readers that stamps of G.B. from

½d. to 1s. were being punctured CofA, and that the 1d value was being extensively used by A.I.F. inmates in hospital in England (1d postage for letters then!). The same A.S.M. records two other facts: (1) It quotes a letter from D.A.P.S., A.I.F., of 1916 to General Sellheim reading: "Herewith please find specimen of the special stamp issued to A.I.F. hospitals for use of soldier inmates" - and enclosing a strip of CofA punctured stamps, and (2) a note recording the issue of CofA punctured stamps to the men of H.M.S. Stuart on its visit to this country in 1922. No information is known as to the shape of the outline of the puncture of this period.

It has always been common practice for large firms with heavy postal accounts to puncture stamps with their initials so that the risk of pilfering and unauthorised use is reduced to a minimum. And it was for these reasons that in 1922 Australia House. with its new offices, is known definitely to have used CofA punctures.

From 1922 to 1937 the puncturing apparatus gave one puncture at a stroke "CofA" exactly as written. The "apparatus" consisted of a simple hand-operated machine, exactly similar to the simple lever punch used for company seals or for embossing one's address on notepaper. In 1937 this punch was damaged and the base badly cracked, and a second punch, giving two perforations of "C" over "of over "A", was drawn from a store room where it had lain for many years. *[Ed.- there were illustrations of the "CofA" and "C/of/A" dies but they were not accurate size, although the two headed die did state that it was 'actual spacing'. I have therefore illustrated our own catalogue dies for accurate illustration and included the two headed die. from Stamp Collecting.]*



The origin of this second punch (in use [as late as] 1952) lies with a Service unit in the 1914-18 War. Large amounts of stores were disposed of after this war, and it is said that this punch, being recognised as having civilian application, was wisely stored away for further use. Whatever its origins, the damage to the "horizontal format" punch and the finding, ready to hand, of the vertical format punch in 1937 are definite facts.

The way the puncturing was done is as follows:- The sheet is torn down the middle and each half-sheet (six stamps wide) is folded into three thicknesses of two stamps wide. Reference to *Fig. 1* will help the following explanation. The faces of the stamps in *Fig. 1* are indicated by the letters A, B and C, and the sides of the strips marked X and Y. Side X is first passed along the punch, two stamps being punctured at a time (i.e. two stamps down the strip of three thicknesses.) Then side Y is passed along, completing the punctures on one half-sheet of stamps. It has been known for a sheet to be torn into horizontal strips, six deep, and the punctures then fall as shown in *Fig. 2*. The exception to this method described above is the treatment of the high values, 2s 6d, 5s, 10s, and £1 stamps.

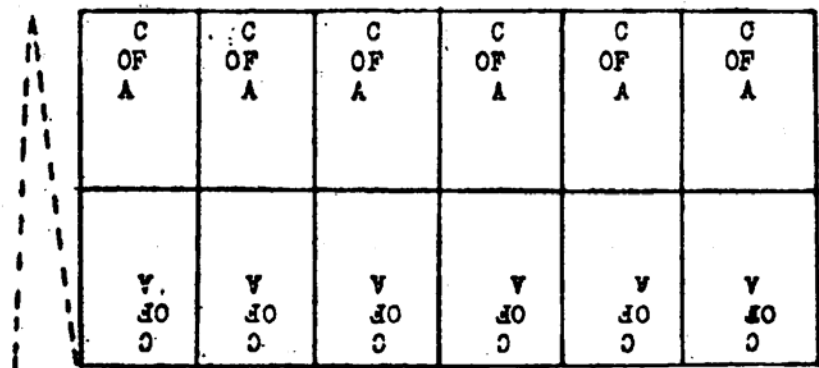
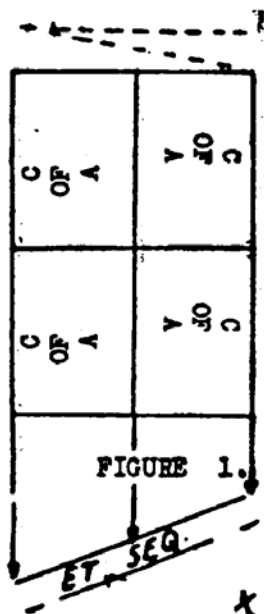
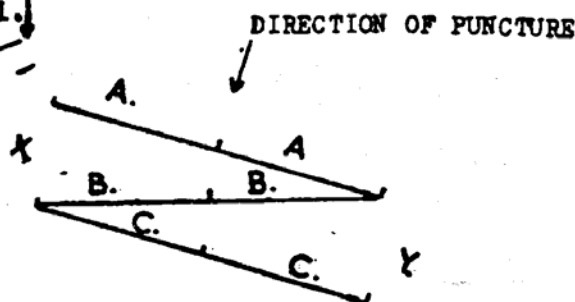


FIGURE 2.



Such sheets are folded into three strips of one stamp wide, and owing to their size each high value received two impressions, e.g. one strike of the punch. The old or broken punch involved the same treatment outlined above, but only gave one impression on the large format high values. The tearing and handling of the sheets are really at the discretion of the operator, and the variations, both in singles and *se tenant* pairs, are infinite in number. It will be seen that the 'A' and "o" can be read backwards, but the "C" and "f" if written in reverse are distinctly 'Different'. Reversed pairs, or one upside-down. or thru' gum *se tenant* with thru' face, both reversed, both upside-down. etc., etc., are all possible.

A question of great interest has always been "who uses them and when?". The answer is any and all Commonwealth departments in Australia House who work later hours than those of the staff of the Post department (who use the franking machines and add the attractive stamp showing the Commonwealth Government's arms). In the absence of this staff, resort is had to puncture G.B. stamps. They are also used by outside offices such as those at Glasgow, Canberra House., Regent Street etc., where or when franking machines are not available. No list of stamps known punctured has been made, but I understand all values of all issues have been punctured. The high values are used mainly on airmail letters and parcels. The 2½d is, of course, the commonest stamp, if "common" can be applied to these quite rare punctures. I have not been able to find any visible difference between the two heads of the punch in use today. They appear to match perfectly.

Ed:- for those who have a particular interest in these perfins, the previous Bulletin articles can be found in 221.06; 222.07.. 248.08-09; 249.13; 254. 10-11.

More information in "G.B. Official Perfins" by T.A. Edwards and B.C. Lucas, chapter 13 {Overseas Governments, b) Australian High Commission}.

The above references are well worth checking out and the most obvious additions I have noted in past Bulletins, to add to the above article by E.L. Page, are:-

- *The die C/of/A has been seen with dated postmark in 1971*
- *CofA with badly damaged pins seen on a KGVII 1939 5/- red so this die must have been used later than 1937*
- *A cover has been seen with CofA dated London 10-2-1911*