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Design Errors on Postage Stamps

by Malcolm Givans

Many philatelists collect errors created by the printing or perforation processes, but few seem to have delved into the area of errors created as part of the design and pre-press stages. I do not recall seeing anything on the subject of Design Errors in *Philateli-Graphics* since I joined the Graphics Philately Association.

I have been interested in, and collect material relating to, British Empire Stamp Design and Production for a while. All very serious stuff. I became aware of actual errors of fact on stamps and collected a few design errors as a little 'light relief.' I also found that a good friend of my wife is the widow of David Irvine, a philatelist who co-authored a book* on the subject.

To my surprise, I found that there is virtually no country that has not issued stamps with errors of fact, spelling or misrepresentation. Indeed, the 1939 USA 3¢ 300th Anniversary of Printing in Colonial America [Sc857] that our editor Joseph Sullivan used as an illustration on a letter he sent to me is one. The printing press illustrated is captioned 'Stephen Day Press.' David Irvine's book informs me that in addition to some argument about

United States, 25 September 1939 [Sc857]. 3¢ commemorative issued to mark the 300th anniversary of printing in Colonial America.



dates, the printing press on the stamp is an early press in the possession of the Vermont Historical Society, whereas the actual Stephen Day Press is in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Design errors mostly, but not always, have their origins in ignorance, an error in the design brief, or an error in the creation of artwork or engraving that is missed in the checking stages. Sometimes the error is discovered shortly after the offending stamp is issued and a new version is produced that corrects the error. What is the origin of the error on the Stephen Day stamp? Perhaps it was a lack of a correct source picture for the engraver.

Australia, my current domicile, has produced its share of errors. The first (shown below) is the 'Newcastle' issue from 1947 [Sc207], which has two errors; one of fact and one of illustration. The 2 1/2d purports to show Lieutenant John Shortland. However, the naval uniform worn by the man on the stamp does not have epaulettes, which were standard Royal Navy issue in 1797. It transpires that the illustrator of the stamp used a painting of his father as source material. In the father's day there were no epaulettes for that rank.

Australia, September 1947 [Sc207]. Commemorates the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Hunter River estuary, site of Newcastle by Lieutenant John Shortland.



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Australia, September 1947 [Sc209].
Scene showing loading of coal in
Newcastle.



The second error in that issue is on the 5 1/2d stamp [Sc209]. The coal carrier crane in the foreground has jib-stays joining the rear of the cabin to the overhead cable mounts. They are clearly missing from the centre crane. Without the jib-stays the crane would collapse.



Australia, 19 March
1952 [Sc248].
Indigenous people
of Australia.

An error of English is shown on the 2/6 from 1950 [Sc248]. The correct singular word to describe the indigenous people of Australia, in Australian and English dictionaries, is ABORIGINAL. The correct plural is ABORIGINES. The stamp, as you may be able to see, has ABORIGINE.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service issue from 1957 [Sc305] has an illustrative error. There should only be one serpent entwined around the Rod of Aesculapius for the international medical symbol. The twinned serpent version is the symbol for Mercury, the god of trade and communications. It is interesting to note that our Federal Government has the correct one serpent version on the badge of the Army Medical Corps, but the Queensland (State) Government Ambulance Service has the two serpent error, as does this stamp, on all its ambulances.



Australia, 21 August 1957
[Sc305]. The Royal Flying
Doctor Service of Australia
is honored with a stamp fea-
turing Caduceus and a map
of Australia.



Australia, 9 October 1974 [Sc599].
Sesquicentennial of the first Australian
independent newspaper, *The Australian*.
W.C. Wentworth and Dr. Robert Wardell
were the editors and the "A" is type
from the masthead.

The stamp to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first independent newspaper in Australia, *The Australian*, [Sc599] leaves even Australians guessing, due to a communication error. Nowhere are we told the name of the newspaper. Also, the name and significance of the man appearing on the stamp have not been included. His name is William Wentworth, the co-founder of the newspaper.

The 1976, 75th Anniversary of Nationhood 18¢ stamp [Sc628] has problems with the coat of arms. The border of the shield uses the monochrome designation for silver, instead of ermine, and the wreath below the star shows only five twists instead of six.



Australia, 5 January 1976
[Sc628]. 75th anniversary of
nationhood stamp features
the Australian Coat of Arms.

There are hosts of other Australian errors, as there are from virtually every country, and new errors occur continually.

* The book is *Errors in Postage Stamp Design* by D.E.G. Irive and M. Seshold. Published 1979 by National Philatelic Society. London.
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