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## Prestige Points #148

### Brian Peace's International Gold Medal Exhibit/Collection of Pre-Stamp Mail and Historic Letters of New South Wales

Anyone with even a passing interest in or knowledge of the early mails of Australia will know that acquiring fine and interesting material from the pre-stamp period (pre-1850) is a tall order. To assemble enough such material to create an 8-frame international exhibit, and to still have just as many items that didn't "make the cut", is the stuff of philatelic legend.

This is just such a collection. Doubtless when Brian Peace began acquiring covers from early Colonial Australia, he would have been told that it was an interesting, even "important" field, but that it would not be possible for anybody to put together hundreds of these early artefacts. What we are proud to present here then, is "an impossible collection", the creation of which many very knowledgeable philatelists believed could not be achieved, even in the nearly 50 years that Brian has been hard at it.

In fact, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first time ever, anywhere in the world, that a public auction has been devoted to a collection of our colonial pre-stamp mail. Of course, all the major New South Wales collectors opened with a sprinkling of pre-stamp "forerunners". But if all their relevant items were combined, they still wouldn't come close to matching the Brian Peace Collection.

Naturally, the great Bill Purves had a swag of delectable pre-Victoria Port Phillip District mail. Not even he was accorded the distinction of a sale devoted to his pre-stamp covers.

By any measure, what Brian Peace has achieved amounts to a collection that is far and away the finest of its type ever brought to auction. It may even be the best, and the most important, ever formed.

Even if your interests lie in other fields, I encourage you to take an hour or two to study this catalogue. You will be amazed at some of the items for sale: from the earliest letter out of Tasmania, to evocative instructional handstamps; from rarely seen free and registered mail, to no less than two covers bearing Australia's very first postal marking (one of them the earliest recorded by three years); from sought-after *Toulmin Packet* letters to a complete run of Government Gazettes for the period.

To provide context for the material, this catalogue is partly auction, partly history lesson. You may be surprised to learn that not only was Tasmania originally part of New South Wales, but so were Victoria, Queensland, and New Zealand! Have you heard of Australia Felix? Were you aware that in 1824 a settlement was established in what is today the Northern Territory? Do you know which of the early governors were forced out of office, and why? Did you know that postmasters were allowed to keep the fee paid to register a letter? Were you aware that postage was calculated on the number of sheets of paper used? What natural disaster almost caused the settlement at Sydney Cove to fail? How much would you have had to pay 170 years ago for a horse?

The letters accompanying many of the items on offer here provide the answers, along with fascinating insights into life in pre-1850 Australia. Here you will find politicians and swindlers; convicts and clergymen; soldiers and explorers.

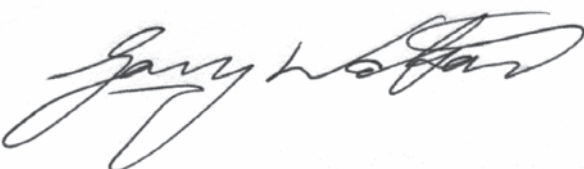
Theirs are fascinating tales of life on a new continent, literally on the other side of the world from where most of them were born. They struck out into totally unknown regions; they formed new businesses; they made mistakes; they made history. And their letters make that history come to life.

If you are a stamp purist, this sale is not for you: there are only two stamped items in the entire auction. However, if you are fond of postal history, you will have a ball, and may become totally addicted!

I have thoroughly enjoyed tackling the challenges of how to present Brian's collection. Despite having handled numerous Australian pre-stamp covers over the past 30 years, I have learned a great deal from processing this collection, and that knowledge is shared with you throughout the catalogue. It is one of our underlying precepts at Prestige Philately that we wish to empower our clients by providing as much information in our catalogues as possible. Well, this edition is crammed with information about the early post offices, the legislative framework for the postal system, the exasperatingly challenging mileage rates, and so on.

In addition, biographical notes are provided for dozens of notable persons who were the writers or the recipients of the letters offered here. Geographical matters such as distances, locations, property names etc are also touched on. We know that having all this information in one place will assist our describers in the future. If you also derive benefit from it then one of our small goals will have been achieved.

Despite being jam-packed with rare material, there are items here for collectors at all price points. It is fair to say that the philatelic world has not yet properly appreciated our early postal history. If this was an equivalent collection of American Colonial mail, you can bet it would receive both major coverage in the general media and the attention of many very wealthy collectors. Perhaps next time! But for now I personally commend this collection to you and encourage your participation in what all of us at Prestige Philately believe is one of the most important philatelic auctions to ever be held in this country.



### Introducing Brian Peace



Brian Peace hails from Leeds, in Yorkshire. A successful property developer, Brian and his wife Kate spend about half their time in Thailand. They are also involved in several child-survival and education initiatives in Africa and Thailand, and have contributed to a number of community projects in their home town.

Brian got his start in philately as a lad when his grandfather gave him the stamps from his firm's overseas mail. From the age of 10 Brian specialised in Australia and New Zealand, joining the *British Society of Australian Philately* as a teenager and becoming editor of the society's journal at the ripe old age of 22.

Collectors of Australian postal history should know his name well. In addition to his fondness for old letters, a passion kindled 50 years ago by his mentor the late *Tony Rigo de Righi*, Brian is the author of "Australasian Wreck Mail" (1997), disaster mail being a subject that still consumes him. He also formed a wonderful collection of Australian pioneer flight covers that was sold in England many years ago.

Ever mindful of historical context, Brian decided that the year 2009, marking as it does the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Post Office in Australia, was the ideal time for him to offer his treasures to other enthusiasts.

# The Facts of Life About Australian Pre-Stamp Mail

The first thing that needs to be understood about collecting pre-stamp (ie pre-1850) mail from New South Wales is that it's fundamentally different from buying new issues from the Philatelic Bureau. If you must have perfection, then this is not a field for you. The fact is that almost every item has a fault of some kind. Virtually every item that has been liberated from commercial, government or mission archives - and that's probably 99% of everything that's available - has one or more filing folds across the face. While these have often been ironed-out, there is no getting away from the fact that the items have been folded.

As a consequence of having been stored for 150+ years in often less than ideal conditions, many pieces have some evidence of soiling, foxing or aging that ranges from the minor to "Oh dear!" My advice is, buy what's available and upgrade if the opportunity arises.

Of course, there are some items that are visually very appealing. They should be worth a huge premium over average-condition material, in spite of the fact that even some of these will have internal faults.

On this point, it's important to note that it is common for letters 200+ years old to have some internal splitting and in some cases to be literally falling apart from having been unfolded and refolded many times. It is also normal for repairs to be effected. Use of "sticky" tape is frowned on and stamp hinges can be very unsightly. However, judicious use of transparent archival quality tape can work wonders in rejuvenating even very shabby customers. It is our professional opinion, that careful repairs of this nature actually enhance the value of an item.

Turning to the postal markings of the period, these were not engraved on hardened steel using a pantograph to give perfect lettering. They were cut by hand on much softer metal (possibly cast iron) by the likes of blacksmiths and general engineers. Most of these crude implements wore-out quickly. If a strike is legible, in most cases it is above average! Bold complete strikes are as rare as hen's teeth, far more desirable, and far more valuable!

Often the value of an item is less in the externals than in what lies within. While the majority of the letters that have survived are boring commercial missives, those that contain personal observations, stories of the opening-up of this vast land, of exciting discoveries, of a robbery or an execution, are much sought after as historical artefacts. And one should not overlook the signatures: old letters are a great hunting ground for autograph collectors.

A critical factor in appreciating the scarcity - and desirability - of our pre-stamp material is an awareness of the realities of life in early colonial Australia. It was genuinely tough, rather like the American Wild West. Just about everything had to be made from scratch. And there weren't a great many people to do it. The 1828 Census of New South Wales accounted for only some 35,000 non-Aboriginal people inhabiting an area larger than the United States. And at that stage the majority of them were convicts or the children of convicts, most of whom were illiterate, as were many of the soldiers and even the free settlers. By 1840, the population had grown to 110,000 or about half of the population of Greater Geelong today! Over the next ten years it "exploded", with about 400,000 people calling Australia home. That's a village in China!

Taking into account the small population, the low level of literacy, the loss of mail through shipwrecks (a quite common occurrence) and other disasters, and the ravages of time, it's perhaps surprising that so much pre-1850 material has actually survived. But again, putting it into perspective, the vast majority of what is in the hands of collectors originated in Sydney. Mail from just about any other town - excepting Melbourne and Geelong from the mid-1840s - can be excruciatingly difficult to locate and, when found, frustrating for its problems.

But that's the lot of the collector of pre-stamp mail. It's not for the lazy, the impatient, or the perfectionist. Brian Peace spent nearly fifty years assembling his collection. Mostly it came to him one item at a time. Occasionally an auction would contain a section of 20 or 30 pieces. It would be a mistake to be lulled into thinking that because there are about 300 items in this sale that it's easy to come by. It simply isn't. And don't think that if you pass on something here that you will be able to buy a better example next year. In general, you won't.

This is, without any doubt, the best collection of its type ever to come onto the market. It represents a wonderful opportunity for existing collectors to obtain key items that have eluded them for decades. It provides opportunity also for the collector who desires a new challenge. Well, Australian pre-stamp mail is certainly challenging. But it is also extremely stimulating, fascinating and simply enchanting.

When it comes to these ancient letters, beauty is both in the eye of the beholder, and more than skin-deep. We at Prestige Philately invite and encourage you to rekindle or embark on a love affair with real postal history.

## Acknowledgement

We wish to express our gratitude to Sydney postal historian Stephen Browne whose thoughtful feedback on the draft catalogue pages, and especially in respect of postal rates and provenance, amounted to a significant contribution to this catalogue.

## There are No Restrictions on the Export of Lots in this Auction

It isn't much to look at, but the issuing of the document illustrated here was critical to the successful sale of Brian Peace's collection in Australia. Had this Certificate of Exemption not been granted, we could have been confronted with a bureaucratic nightmare after the auction. In respect of any of the major items in the sale that happened to be bought by overseas residents we, or the buyers, would have been required to apply for permits allowing the items to be exported.

Because Prestige Philately took the initiative and applied for and obtained this Certificate of Exemption prior to the auction being conducted, that situation has been avoided. Consequently, **overseas clients can bid in the knowledge that there are no grounds for the export of any item in the sale to be refused or restricted.**

FORM PMCH 4

### CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION FROM EXPORT CONTROL: No.1919C

under the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*

This authorises **Mr Gary Watson of Prestige Philately Pty Ltd,**  
to import the described object for the purpose of **sale by auction**  
and subsequently to re-export the object from Australia.


This permit is valid until: **31 December 2009**

#### THE OBJECTS

Description: **Collection of postal history of New South Wales to 1850 comprising approximately 300 objects including letters**

Control List Ref: **Class B Object: Part 6 – Documentary Heritage  
Part 8 – Philatelic Objects  
Part 9 – Objects of Historical Significance**

(The following objects are excluded from this permit: Nil)

SIGNED..........DATE 18/2/ 2009  
Kim Allen, Assistant Secretary, Collections Branch, delegate of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

This certificate is in the form approved by the Minister under sub-section 11(1) of the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act 1986*. It is not valid without the signature of the Minister or Delegate of the Minister.

If you wish to have this certificate changed, please fill in the form on the back of this certificate. If the Minister approves the variation, you will be issued with a new certificate.

## Auction catalogues referred to in this catalogue

The value of a well-developed library is amply demonstrated when we are called upon to prepare a major collection for auction. In addition to the leading textbooks, **all of the auction catalogues listed below were consulted to check for provenance and realisations.** (You will note that many of the sales listed were principally Tasmanian or Victorian material and that all the New South Wales sales were of a general nature. In fact, to the best of our knowledge, this auction is the very first time a major collection devoted to the pre-stamp mail of our oldest Colony has been offered at auction. Contrast that with there having been two important collections limited to Victorian [Port Phillip District] pre-stamp mail.)

Without ready access to these references, our descriptions would lack the colour, context and additional information that are integral elements of setting apart our descriptions from those of other firms. This attention to the history of a collection is merely one of the "little extras" that vendors of important properties can expect from Prestige Philately. It's a small part of what we term "**The Prestige Difference**".

<b>Date</b>	<b>Auction House</b>	<b>Vendor</b>	<b>Subject</b>
14/ 3/1978	Robson Lowe	Leslie Leon	New South Wales
3-4/ 4/1979	Harmers (London)	Ric Slade-Slade	New South Wales
27/11/1980	RLowe (Geneva)	Lew Viney	Tasmania
13/ 5/1981	RLowe (Zurich)	JRW Purves	Victoria – Part III
6/ 4/1982	RLowe	JRW Purves	Victoria – Part IV
26/10/1982	Robson Lowe	Rigo de Righi	Various
		JRW Purves	Victoria – Part VI
7/ 5/1985	Robson Lowe	Lester Shephard	Tasmania
<b>30/ 3/1987</b>	<b>Gary Watson</b>	<b>Malcolm Groom</b>	<b>Tasmania Postal History</b>
1/ 2/1989	Perry	Various	Australian Colonies
17/10/1990	CRLowe (Melb)	Gene Tinsley	Tasmania
22/ 5/1997	Spink	John White	New South Wales
<b>29/ 2/2000</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>Max Watson</b>	<b>Victoria Postal History</b>
26/ 5/2000	Feldman	Victor Frankenstein	New South Wales
9/ 3/2001	Cavendish	George Molnar	NSW Maritime Mails
		Michael Blake	Tasmana Postal History
28/ 5/2002	Feldman	Dale Forster	NSW Postal History (principally <i>Ex Dr Ed Druce</i> )
<b>20/ 7/2002</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>Moya Land</b>	<b>NSW &amp; Queensland</b>
<b>19/ 7/2003</b>	<b>Premier</b>	<b>Ray Kelly</b>	<b>Port Phillip District</b>
25/ 3/2004	Leski	Hans Karman	Free Mail
16/ 9/2004	Mohrmann	Ludwig Baetgen	NSW Postal History
23/ 9/2004	Spink	Miles Rivett-Carnac	New South Wales
12/ 5/2005	Spink	Rod Moreton	Victoria Postal History
<b>8/10/2005</b>	<b>Prestige</b>	<b>Max Watson</b>	<b>Victoria - Registered Mail</b>
<b>22/ 4/2006</b>	<b>Prestige</b>	<b>Michael Silvasich</b>	<b>Port Phillip District</b>
3/10/2006	Spink	John Woolfe	New Zealand Postal History