

# Australia in Depth (Articles #97 to 99) Imperforate or not?

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Having studied and dealt in errors of various kinds for many years, I am often asked the question 'do you think this stamp is imperforate?'

Some time ago in my series on *expertising* in *Stamp News*, I concluded with regard to *missing colours*, that if there is any doubt, then as a general rule it will prove to not be correct. From the outset it must be said that it is no surprise that same rule *generally* applies to stamps that exist in imperforate and rouletted or perforated versions, and to imperforate errors. A proviso here is that roulettes, along with official punctures and even skilful reperforations are very difficult to prove genuine in the majority of cases. The three part series on expertising is available [here](#).

This new series will examine some of the types of *imperforate* errors known, together with some of the pitfalls in determining the genuineness of these errors and related facets with regard to stamps that were issued imperforated and either rouletted or perforated. Part 1 will explore the **Australian Colonies** issues; Part 2 the **Pre-decimal** issues, and Part 3 the **Decimal** issues.

## Part 1 - Australian Colonies

In the series on expertising I referred to the New South Wales 8d Diadem and the problems associated with larger than normal perforated stamps in *certain shades* being trimmed to appear imperforate. Since writing that series, this pair has been sold in the *Frazer* sale by *Spink* and certainly dispels any doubt as to its status as a genuine example of the fully imperforate issue.



Going back a little further, this example of the 20/- Carrington showing the error imperforate at top between margin and stamp was sold at auction in San Francisco. A similar example is on display in the *Tapling* collection in London at the British Library and they appear to be the only recorded examples of this error. It is very important to note that with such items the margin should be the *same or at least very close* to same width of a normal perforated margin for that position in the sheet. If that is not the case, then there will always be some doubt as to the genuineness of the error as a true imperforate.

This is one of the reasons why imperforate one side errors are not listed by Stanley Gibbons in the British Commonwealth catalogue as a matter of policy. It is also important to note that these should not be confused with stamps showing trimmed 'wing margins' or the like, or stamps that in some instances were issued in that format either

intentionally or unintentionally due to the actual format of the perforating machine used rather than an error. There will be more on this type of error later!

Another category of errors that are spectacular, popular and often very rare are perforated stamps showing an imperforate between error. As long as there is no evidence of the holes having been filled, there is no doubt as to their genuineness. A well known and very popular example of this error is found in the New South Wales 5/- Coin issue. There are also less noted examples that are somewhat rarer, and usually sell for a fraction of the price of this item. In terms of value, I expect that both time and careful research in this area will reveal some genuine sleepers.



A further category of imperforate error occurs where the stamps are *entirely* imperforate such as the attractive New South Wales 1/- Kangaroo block illustrated above. The main pitfall to be aware of here is to make sure that the item is a genuine imperforate error rather than a *plate proof* or even a *colour trial* that was intentionally produced in that format.

Some of this proof material can appear very close to the issued stamps, however, characteristics such as watermark, paper, colour and gum will *normally* be conclusive. If in doubt as to the status of an item, as always seek expert advice or require that a certificate of genuineness be provided as a condition of purchase.

Another problem that can occur is where a stamp issued in *imperforate* format is then issued as either *rouletted* or even in *perforated* format. Invariably one will have a greater value than the other(s). Take the early Western Australian swans as an example. A total of eight different stamps were issued in *both* imperforate and rouletted formats, and in every case, the rouletted version is worth somewhat more than the imperforate. It is therefore no surprise that efforts have been made by some to fake roulettes on an imperforate stamp.

The block of four illustrated here shows the typical spacing of the units on the 1854 4d blue, and is a fair indication of the spacing for *most* of the other WA imperforates. The notable exception to this being the 1857 Lithographs, which are typically almost if not actually touching each other. This makes it relatively easy to find stamps that might be a candidate for the forger to work on.



The 1860 4d deep blue is very rare with true roulettes and in nearly thirty years I have only seen two unused examples offered, both with faults of some kind, and no used examples. The most recent example, showing roulettes on *two* sides and carrying a certificate of genuineness from the British Philatelic Association (BPA) Expertising Committee (1963) fetched a total price of \$5,592 at Prestige Philately's 2005 Rarity auction, despite a vertical crease. This compares to the retail price of an equivalent imperforate stamp of about \$150.

In the same sale, a used example of the 6d sage-green showing roulettes on *four* sides fetched \$1,107 compared to a retail price of an equivalent imperforate stamp of about \$350. Even though I was under-bidder on the 4d illustrated above, I must say that I prefer my rouletted stamps to look like the 6d; somewhat rougher and I don't mind them being off centre. Some might cringe at that, however, the rouletting process by its very nature was rather crude and this is actually more typical of how they *should* look. Had the 4d shown these characteristics, I certainly would have bid substantially higher.

Sometimes the reverse occurs, where rouletted or perforated stamps have been trimmed in an effort to pass them off as imperforates where the value is greater. Examples of this to watch out for include the first series of Queensland and South Australia. In the case of the latter, the first three stamps are all in much deeper colours than any of the rouletted or perforated stamps, however, some later printings can cause problems.

Further to this section on Australian Colonies, a collector has since shown me an unused example of the Western Australian 1/- Swan in the pale brown shade that was sold via a website on line as a 'pin-perf' version of this issue.



As you can clearly see from the illustration, this so-called perforating is way too 'good' to be true. Fortunately for the buyer, it cost only \$230. With enough space available on all sides, it has since been trimmed in order to restore it to its correct status as an imperforate stamp, with a retail value of about \$400. Such stories do not always have a happy ending, as unsuspecting or naive buyers have been known to pay *vastly inflated* prices for incorrect stamps of this nature.

## **Part 2 - Australian pre decimal items**

Whilst the total number of different Australian pre-decimal issues showing recognised and legitimate imperforate errors is not great, they certainly do provide some of the most spectacular items available to collectors of Australian Commonwealth.

To my mind, the classic imperforate errors are those stamps either imperforate between, or imperforate three sides, and we are fortunate to have some superb examples of these.

The 1914 1d Engraved exists with examples in vertical pairs showing one row of perforations missing and perforated normally around the perimeter. The example below with imperforate margins above and below is known to have come from a sheet that had *all* horizontal rows of perforations omitted. It is important to note that in this instance, the margins at top and base are not large enough to satisfy the *normal* criteria for stamps imperforate one side or at top and/or base. However, with its original format known it can be confirmed as being imperforate at top, between and base. The major portion of the error stamps from this sheet were reduced to *vertical pairs with two straight edges*. Despite this, one vertical block of twelve has been recorded and is believed to remain intact.



There are very few genuine imperforate *three side* errors in Australian Commonwealth. In the entire pre-decimal era there are only five such errors recorded. For the kangaroos there are the first watermark 3d from the top of the sheet and from the base of the sheet, and the third watermark 2/- brown. The KGV issues only have the single watermark 1d violet and 3d ultramarine. In the KGV I there is only the 7½d blue, whilst there are *none* in the QEII pre-decimal issues.



The *Baillie* collection, to be auctioned by *Sotheby's* in Melbourne during July includes examples of most of these, together with other imperforate errors. The results of this sale will be fully reported in a future article.

Two different sheets of the 1927 1½d Canberra showed *vertical* pairs imperforate between; one sheet is centred to base, whilst the second is well centred. Rarer than these are examples of horizontal pairs from another sheet being imperforate between only. It is known that the perforations on the left and right sides of *this* example have been trimmed subsequent to the printing processes. This is most unfortunate, rendering it somewhat inferior to the few known examples that remain imperforate between only.



The next type of errors is those imperforate one side only. As noted previously, these errors are not listed in Stanley Gibbons as a matter of policy. One of the reasons is that it is often difficult to be certain that the stamp is actually imperforate, rather than having a trimmed 'wing margin' or similar anomaly, or jumped perforations. There is no doubt whatsoever as to the imperforate status of the examples such as the KGV 1d red, in dies 1 and 3, 1½d Brown, 1d Engraved and 1½d Canberra shown below. However, stamps with margins of lesser than full width for the position in the sheet they come from will always be in doubt as imperforates, and cannot be correctly described as such.



In contrast to examples such as these, there are the *imposters*, those with lesser margins, usually having had 'jumped' or 'skipped' perfs in varying degrees that have been trimmed subsequent to the perforating process. Watch out for these and do not buy them as imperforates. Yes, they are unusual and generally worth more than a normal stamp; however, imperforate they are not! Yet, I have seen examples similar to those illustrated below bearing certificates of genuineness from at least two internationally recognised and normally esteemed expertising bodies. Such certificates appear to have generally been issued in the 1970's and I would not expect them to be replicated today.



It is actually somewhat unusual to find an example of this nature that has not been cut down, however, the KGV 1½d scarlet illustrated below turned up in a dealers stock in my travels some time ago. Notice how it is from the base of the sheet with plenty of room to create a *false* imperforate looking margin at base. Just to reinforce how the margin should appear on a true imperforate, the stunning and unique KGV 1½d imprint pair from the *Baillie* collection is illustrated below.



The KGV era in particular provides quite a few further examples of stamps with trimmed jumped perforations, often being presented as imperforate. Two such examples are illustrated below and in each case this is clearly not so. The KGV 6½d brown is a wider than usual example of trimmed jumped perfs; however, whilst still a nice variety, it cannot be considered a legitimate imperforate as the margin is considerably short of what is required.



The 2d Postage Due illustrated below provides an interesting example of another genuine imperforate error. It is imperforate between the left stamp of the right pane and the *central* gutter of the sheet. The result is a wide margin with perforations intact at left. It is known that one sheet existed in this format, yielding ten examples, although they may not all have survived. I once handled the unique part imprint example from the base of the sheet. About half of the known examples have had the perfs trimmed off at left, which is unfortunate as the 'pure' variety is certainly preferable to an altered one.



The block of four KGV 1d die 3 and pair of Kingsford Smith 2d are two examples of an error that appears to be imperforate at first glance. However, in each case, the *indentations* of the perforations are present and visible on close inspection, particularly from the reverse under magnification. Both items were first reported in modern times, and although by definition not true imperforates, they are still desirable in their own right. The first recently fetched \$11,500 plus buyer's commission at auction, whilst the second fetched \$3,100 plus buyer's premium some time ago.



Another category of imperforate type errors are what might be termed the 'freaks', more often than not resulting from the paper being folded prior to perforating. In the ½d Kangaroo example shown below, the lower unit is largely imperforate at left and base, and partially imperforate at right. This is probably the best example of such an item that I know of and when last sold fetched in excess of \$10,000! Not bad for a freak! Quite a few lesser examples are known, mainly in the KGVI and QEII eras, and these generally sell in the range of \$500 to \$1,000 depending on how much of the stamp is imperforate.



Finally, there is the 'stolen' material. A variety of items printed in the 1940's are known to have been stolen from the Note Printing Branch prior to perforating, or showing other printing anomalies. These include the KGVI 2½d and Newcastle 2½d items shown above.

Importantly, it is known for certain that they never saw a Post Office counter, and for many years it was actually illegal to own or sell them. Accordingly, they are not given catalogue status in Stanley Gibbons, where they are relegated to a footnote. They are listed in a separate section of the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue, together with a variety of other 'errors' that have the same origin. There are no problems owning them on today's market, and they are increasing in popularity with the passing of each year.

### **Part 3 - Australian decimal items**

The following examples typify the range of imperforate errors found on decimal issues.

A vertical pair of the 1966 4¢ Christmas imperforate at left was found only a few years ago, and these have since been separated into singles, both having fetched fancy prices in recent times. Apart from the QEII 4¢, 6¢ and 7¢ issues, it is one of only a very few such errors recorded in the early decimal period.



The \$5 Mentone imperforate at top is a long time favorite, being a spectacular error on a large and colourful stamp; it is also quite rare.



The 1967 5¢ Christmas imperforate three sides has long been my favorite decimal error. It is certainly spectacular, and with only four pairs known, it is also among the rarest. As previously noted with the earlier eras, there are also surprisingly few errors of this nature in the decimal period.

The 18¢ Hawker and 20¢ Waterfalls are two others that have attracted considerable interest over the years. The later occurring in conjunction with fully imperforate stamps at right; this is best presented in a corner block as shown below.



Whilst on the subject of imperforate three side errors, it is important to note that in order to obtain correct catalogue status as such an item, it should be *completely* imperforate on three sides. The Children's Book series provide examples of errors that fall just short of the mark. In the example below, the left unit has one perforation intact at top and bottom. Whilst this might seem minor, it is important in determining the correct terminology for an error and its catalogue status. In this instance it is best described as *largely* imperforate three sides.

The 22¢ Salvation Army pair illustrated below is a fine example of a relatively small number of completely imperforate errors found on the earlier decimal issues (aside from the peel and stick booklet stamps). The one recorded find of this error yielded a total of sixteen pairs, of which only two blocks of four appear to remain intact.



In a similar manner to the KGV 1d die 3 and Kingsford Smith 2d showing perforation indentations, there are several decimal issues with examples of such errors. The 1971 7¢ Christmas, illustrated below is a fine example of this, and was recently offered for sale by an advertiser in *Stamp News*.

Other examples recorded include the 1967 5¢ Christmas, of which one mint and one used strip of three were found; 8¢ National Development, recorded at left and at right; 50¢ Architecture, imperf between in a vertical pair, and also between stamp and central gutter margin. In each of these cases, there are indentations running *completely* along the stamp and margin.

In the cases of the 1978 National Stamp Week miniature sheet and the 1986 Children's Book stamps, examples are recorded showing a *combination* of true partial imperforates in conjunction with partial indentations. A recently reported example of this combination is the 55¢ Kite as shown below. In this error there are indentations all the way down between the final stamps and right margin, however, horizontally, there are a small number of the horizontal perforations completely missing in seven of the ten stamps.



Finally, the 45¢ Jubilee illustrated below is an example of a *proof* rather than an imperforate error. The paper is quite different to the issued stamp, being glossy, somewhat thicker and without gum. For this reason it will not receive catalogue status in Stanley Gibbons as an imperforate error. However, the ACSC lists it as an imperforate plate proof. It is also worth noting that it is known on two distinctly different papers, one of which was only recently reported for the first time; something that might be recorded in the next edition of the latter catalogue.



This series is not intended as an exhaustive coverage of the imperforate errors of Australia; rather it is an introduction to the different types that occur and some of the pitfalls for the unwary. If you would like any further information or assistance please do not hesitate to [contact me](#) at your convenience.

