

Australia in Depth (Article #65)

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'KGV 4½d Die 2'

The origin of mint stamps, the imprint pair and other aspects of the history of this unissued stamp

With the unique mint imprint pair in unmounted mint condition resurfacing recently, and its sale in the Premier Philately auction of 20th July 2002, the resurgent trend in exceptionally strong prices for rare quality specialist Australian material continues. This gives us an opportune time to take a look at the story behind the unissued KGV 4½d Die 2, and the interest that it has generated.

Recent sale

Having been reduced from an imprint block of four to an imprint pair some time between 1978 and 1981, this item has just sold for a total price of \$AU62,260, including buyers premium plus GST on the premium. There was no GST on the hammer price as the item was exported from Australia.

As we will see, this price compares with the realisation of \$3,100 as a block in 1977 when the imprint as a block was apparently first auctioned. Adjusting the latter price back to that of a pair in accordance with the historical pricing for this item, this translates to the equivalent of \$1,722 had it then been a pair. Accordingly, the most recent price is just over 36 times the comparable price of 25 years ago, resulting in an overall return of 15.4% per annum.



This new price is among the most significant increases that we have seen on the recent market to date. Yet, for a unique item of this importance, it is not totally unexpected given the current direction of the market. This item is without doubt the most important KGV *imprint* piece. It should be rated inside the top 10 items of the entire KGV series and is a very significant item of Australian Commonwealth philately.

Whilst offered on the market several times through the 1980's and 1990's, anyone who has considered buying it and didn't buy it this time should not hold their breath for another opportunity! It has now left our shores, and probably will not be on the market for many years to come.

Printed on Small Multiple watermark paper, perf 13½x12½, from *Plate 3*, this 'JOHN ASH' imprint pair, carries a certificate of genuineness from the Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria, dated 14th November 1991.

Condition: This pair, is in unmounted mint condition and looks magnificent from the front. However, it is somewhat aged on the reverse, and slightly more than many of the Die 2 stamps are, even including those that were sold in the Australia Post 'Archival' sales back in 1987. Both stamps are centred inwards, yet this is as good as you could have expected for this piece. For one of the stamps to be well centred, the other would have to be set well into the perforations. However, as this is the only example of such an item in private hands, such considerations are of an academic nature.

Background

The current KGV edition of the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue (ACSC), published in 2001 provides useful information on the 4½d Die 2, some of which I have *drawn* on, and some of which I have *added* to.

In contrast to the ordinary Die 1 version of this stamp, the Die 2, printed from new steel plates prepared in 1930 is primarily recognised by two means. Both the numerals and letters of value are more solid, and there are white vertical lines that clearly join the horizontal shading at each end of the central value tablet. In addition, it is noticeable that the horizontal shading lines throughout the design, and particularly in the lower areas are more clearly defined. To those with an eye for KGV shades, the bright shade of the Die 2 stamps is also quite distinct from any of those found in the Die 1 printings. If you still have any doubts, another easy means of comparison is to put an ordinary 4½d Die 1 stamp beside an example of the plentiful 'FIVE PENCE' on 4½d surcharge, as the latter were all overprinted on Die 2 stamps. The differences should immediately be apparent.

As noted in the ACSC, for the 4½d Die 2: 'Archival records indicate the single printing comprised 2,400,000 stamps. Of this quantity, only 200 sheets (24,000 stamps) were sent to the Post Office. The number of stamps sold in collectors' sets is uncertain, since the quantity remaindered and subsequently destroyed is not known'. It is believed that Australia Post still hold the equivalent of about *five sheets*, from which a total of ten stamps were sold in the 1987 'Archival' sales.

Due to an increase in the combined letter/registration rate from 4½d to 5d in 1930, most of the printing was overprinted 'FIVEPENCE'. The 4½d Die 2 stamp was never available for general sale in mint condition, so it should be regarded as being of '*unissued*' status in this form. This issue does not have a separate listing in the Stanley Gibbons British Commonwealth catalogue for this reason. It is relegated to a footnote below the surcharges, with a price of £2,000 (now £2,250 in the 2004 edition) for unused, and £45 for cancelled to order (CTO), the form in which it normally comes.

The classic Robson Lowe Encyclopedia *Volume IV* (1962) refers to this stamp as being 'Prepared for use, but not issued uncanceled'. They price it mint at £8 (compared to £7 for a mint £1 Grey CofA watermark and £5 for a mint 5/- Bridge!). They state that CTO stamps originate from 'residual sheets that were handed over to the Postal Department to be included in the sets of stamps cancelled to order which were on sale in certain Australian post offices'. They go on to say that a few mint and one or two *used* examples are known, being 'specimens that for some reason did not receive a cto cancellation'. Stanley Gibbons, and Rosenblum in his 'Stamps of the Commonwealth of Australia' also mention the possibility of used examples, however I am not aware of

any direct record of a *postally* used example, and remain to be convinced that any such example does in fact exist.

Sources of mint 4½d Die 2 stamps

The earliest reference in print of a mint 4½d Die 2 stamp appears to in the 1955 *Australian Stamp Monthly*, based on an example offered by the Myer Philatelic Department, operated by Phil Downie during that period. It also appears to have been priced in the ACSC for the first time that year, as referred to below.

Mint stamps have become available through *four* means that I am aware of:

(1) The S. & M. Miller Brothers stamp dealers of Melbourne (referred to as 'Miller Brothers' from hereon), who prepared large quantities of the Specimen/CTO 'collector sets' for sale, were inadvertently supplied one uncanceled sheet among a quantity of CTO sheets. *This is the sheet from which the mint imprint block came.* It is uncertain as to when the first examples from this sheet came onto the market, however, it is known that a number of these stamps were sold for about \$30 each during 1970 and 1971. It is believed that the imprint block was first sold at about this time. The *lower-right* corner block, showing the so-called 'Plate dot/colour bar' also appears to have first been sold around this time, and was later sold by Harmers (Sydney), fetching \$2,300 at their 14th May 1976 auction. It is now known that this block has been broken up, as the 'Plate dot/colour bar' *single* was auctioned in Melbourne in January 2003, fetching a total of \$9,056. No other blocks appear to have been put onto the market to date.

It is believed that at least some stamps from this sheet are privately held and yet to come onto the market. Given the rarity of the Die 2 stamp in mint condition, it may also be possible that some of the stamps from this sheet have been lost to the philatelic market over the years.

(2) A small number of special 'Telegraph Conference' presentation sets of *mint* stamps to £2 included the 4½d Die 2. I have seen *three* examples of these over the last twenty years, and in each case, the stamps are hinged to the folder. In contrast to the traditional explanations for the existence of mint stamps, such sets would most likely have been the main historical source of the mounted mint 4½d Die 2 stamps in the early years.

The most recent known sales of folders of this type were two examples of the 1942 'Souvenir of Commonwealth Telegraph Conference' folder, both with the cover in royal-blue. Stanley Gibbons (Melbourne) sold both sets, fetching total prices of \$4,510 and \$8,040 at their auctions of 5th December 1992 and 28th July 2001 respectively.

Two of the three 4½d Die 2 stamps in these folders are centred somewhat significantly to the left, with the exception being the most recently offered example above, where the stamp is pretty well centred. Several of the mint singles showing similar hinges that have been on the market over the years are also centred significantly towards the left. These almost certainly originate from further folders of this type, as it is now believed that specialist collectors desiring an example for their collection in the early days would have had no other general means of acquiring them.

(3) Australia Post 'Archival' sales of 12 February and 26 November 1987: A total of ten examples were sold, comprising three pairs and four singles. In the first of these sales, the pairs sold for \$6,100 and \$5,100 respectively, whilst the single sold for \$4,000, or

an average of \$3,040 per stamp. In the second sale, the pair sold for \$6,675, with the singles fetching \$3,006, \$4,260 and \$2,760 respectively, or an average of \$3,340 per stamp. These prices reflected the variable condition, with an overall average of \$3,190 per stamp being a fair reflection of the market value at that time.

Underlining the difficulty that this stamp presents with regard to condition, at least four of these had small to significant gum bends, and most showed the typical signs of aging that this stamp is rather prone to. It is worth noting that even the plentiful *surcharged* stamps mentioned are comparatively difficult to obtain with the clean white gum that is normally available and expected in most other KGV issues.

(4) The CTO stamps were available in ordinary versions of the 'collector sets', and it is *possible* that a small number of these packs inadvertently contained mint stamps. Speaking to well known Melbourne dealer Richard Juzwin the day before the auction of the mint imprint pair, he was able to confirm that he had in fact found an unmounted mint example in a collector 'Specimen' set in the late 1970's. He reflected that this was his first major find and that it generated much excitement at the time. Whilst it is possible that there were others like this, it is difficult to confirm any other examples, and it is generally believed that the earlier reports of this stamp in mint condition relate to those originating from source number (2) above, rather than these sets.

Estimate of total mint stamps known

Assuming the complete survival of the examples from the Miller Brothers sheet, many of which do not appear to have come on to the market yet, we start with a possible 120. Australia Post sold 10, there may be about 15 to 20 or so (*my estimate*) deriving from the special presentation folders, and one confirmed example from a normal collector 'Specimen' set. This would result in a total of approximately 150 stamps that could possibly be available to collectors in private hands.

The overall rarity of this stamp on today's market indicates that either a number of the 150 are yet to come onto the general market, or that some have been lost to philately, or a combination of the two. There is no doubt that *fewer* mint examples of the 4½d Die 2 are seen on the market than the popular 1908-09 Postage Due 20/- with stroke, of which about 50 to 60 are generally estimated to have survived in mint condition.

It is also important to note that caution should be exercised with mint examples, as the cancellation on examples from the collectors sets is sometimes very light, and attempts have been made to fraudulently remove the cancellation from genuine CTO stamps. Careful examination should reveal surface rubbing, however, if any doubt is present, it is wise to obtain a recognised *certificate* of authenticity for mint examples.

Cancelled to order blocks and imprint pieces

CTO blocks and imprint pieces are also known to originate from the Miller Brothers sheets. Blocks of four are scarce, with larger blocks being very rare indeed. A block of sixteen without imprint was offered in the P. J. Downie (Melbourne) sale number 29 of 1966 and it is not known whether this still remains intact.

Three blocks of eight may well be the largest multiples extant. One of these, from the *top-right* corner of the sheet, having graced the H. F. McNess collection was sold by Harmers (Sydney) in their sale of 21-22 June 1979. It was later sold in the P. J. Downie auction of 24th April 1980 for \$550. Another, without margins was sold at a Rodney A. Perry auction (Melbourne) on 3rd July 1980 for \$462. The *top-left* corner block of the

right pane of the sheet from the 'Williamson' collection was sold by Sotheby's (London) on 18th September 1980 for £308 (approximately \$585 at the time). The 'Williamson' block resurfaced recently to be sold at the Philas (Sydney) auction on 13th July 2002 for \$1045, a price that I believe to be very reasonable on today's market. A lower-right corner block of six is also known.

CTO *imprint* blocks are very rare, with a combined total of about six from Plates 2 and 3 recorded, including one in the 'Chapman collection' held by Australia Post. This leaves a possible five available in private hands, without doubt making it one of the rarer KGV imprints.

It is believed that Bill Holbeach acquired a *lower-plate* imprint block of eight directly from the Miller Brothers. The famous 'Kilfoyle' collection, auctioned by Harmers (London) on 17th October 1961 included a CTO imprint block of 16 (most likely reduced to a smaller block since then). Estimated at £20 to £25, the latter item failed to sell at the time, as did quite a number of the now highly sought-after specialist items in that sale. How things have changed since the early 1960's!

A CTO imprint block of four cancelled 'GPO MELBOURNE/16 JY 37', was sold in the 'Nette' auction held by Harmers (Sydney) on 27th August 1971. This fetched \$200 compared to \$25 for a block of four and a single offered as one lot in the same sale. This block was later offered by Harmers (London), in the 'Stothard' collection, sold on 8th June 1983 for £350 (approximately \$560 at the time). The 'Chapman' collection, now held by Australia Post includes another block of four, noted as being from the 'Abramovich' collection, which was dispersed in the early 1970's. Another block was also sold in 1974.

These imprint pieces deserve more importance than they have previously been attributed, particularly since the unique mint imprint block has been reduced to a pair. Imprint pieces of any kind and even a mint single have often been missing from well-known collections formed over the years. With a current catalogue value of \$1500 for a CTO imprint block of four, I believe that this would make very good buying, if you can find one!

History of the mint imprint

(A) As an imprint block of four

As referred to above, the mint unhinged imprint block is believed to have first come onto the market in the very early 1970's, when it was sold privately for an unknown amount. The first time it hit the auction room was at the Harmers (Sydney) auction of 16-18th March 1977. Offered as lot number 448, and described as 'gum somewhat toned', it was knocked down for \$3,100, or just under half of the then current catalogue value for four stamps!

It next appeared in the exceptional Rodney A. Perry (Melbourne) '*Rarity*' sale held on 26 October 1978. Still as a block of four, offered as lot 148, it sold for \$6,600 including buyer's commission.



First offered as a block of four and now reduced to a pair
 Sold for \$3,100 as a block in 1977 and \$62,260 as a pair in 2002

(B) As an imprint pair

It is known that the block was reduced to a *pair* within two and a half years of the latter sale above, as the *upper-right* single from the block, with half of the margin still intact was sold at the Perry auction (Melbourne) on 26th March 1981 for \$1,265. To date I have no record of the *upper-left* single from the block resurfacing.

The imprint pair was offered in the Status (Sydney) auction of 16th March 1983, estimated at \$7,500, it opened and finished at \$6,500. It then resurfaced in the Perry auction (Melbourne) of 26th October 1983. On this occasion it was estimated at \$5,000 to \$7,500 and remained unsold.

Having changed hands privately at least twice in the interim, the imprint pair was then offered as Lot 428 in the 'Grierson-Smith' sale of specialised KGV issues held by Robin Linke (Perth) on 14 May 1995. It was sold after the auction, apparently for a total of \$12,480 including the 4% buyer's commission.

It is known to have changed hands privately at least twice again since 1995, leading to the most recent appearance, now selling for a total of \$62,260 as detailed above. It has now left our shores, and probably for quite some time!

Richard Juzwin was able to confirm that he has been fortunate to handle this unique imprint pair on no less than *three* occasions during the last twelve years or so.

ACSC prices

Prices in the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue (ACSC) are noted below for mint single stamps and the imprint piece. Note that the 4½d Die 2 was priced mint (hinged) only until the 1982 edition. Since then it has also been priced in unmounted mint condition. ACSC prices are shown every five years from 1950 to 1980, together with those that show a significant price movement. To get a true indication of exactly how the prices have moved in modern times, I have listed the

prices in every ACSC edition published since 1982, when the imprint block was first priced. In that edition it was priced incorrectly as a hinged block, and was listed at 4½ times the price of a single stamp. Ironically, my research noted above has proven that it had already been reduced to a *pair* by the time that catalogue was published.

| Year | Single price MUH (mint) | Imprint block/pair price |
|---|-------------------------|---|
| | | |
| Early editions | Unpriced | |
| 1950 | Unpriced | |
| 1960 | (£10) | |
| 1965 | (£10) | |
| 1970 | (\$35) | |
| 1974 | (250) | |
| 1975 | (1,000) | |
| 1977 | (1,750) | |
| 1978 | (2,000) | |
| 1979 | (3,000) | |
| 1980 | (3,000) | |
| 1982 (From this point, every update is noted in this table) | 2,750 (2,000) | 9,000 (block - priced as hinged for this year only) |
| 1988 | 5,000 (3,000) | 12,500 (pair) |
| 1994 | 6,000 (4,500) | 15,000 (pair) |
| 2001 | 7,000 (5,000) | 17,500 (pair) |
| | | |
| 2002: Auction realisation | | 62,260 (pair) |

It is interesting to note that due to the overall rarity of this stamp, and relative dominance of mint unhinged examples, that the premium for this condition (or discount for hinged as some might put it) is not as much as is generally expected for other rare items. By way of comparison, unmounted examples of the high value kangaroos are generally about 2 to 3 times the hinged price, with some higher. To balance this, it should also be recognised that the extent of this premium is often diminished on the rarer varieties or errors when compared to the regular stamps. The hardest aspect of this issue with regard to condition is to find an example that does not show any of the typical signs of aging. They are almost non-existent!

Finally, it is interesting to take a look at the *ratio of prices* for the imprint block (pair) as a proportion of the MUH single price. Bearing in mind that it was first *incorrectly* priced as a hinged imprint block, in all of the ACSC listings above, the *premium* for the imprint piece has been exactly *half* a stamp. As we have seen with the escalation in prices of Kangaroo and KGV monograms and the rarer imprints in recent times, such marginal markings on particular issues have become considerably more important than the stamps themselves in determining the value of an item, this item being no exception.

With a current ACSC price of \$7,000 for a single, we now have a situation where a mint unhinged stamp in similar (somewhat toned) condition to those of the imprint pair should sell for about \$5,000 each. The latest price for the imprint pair has leapt from 2½ times the stamp price to over *six* times. Put another way, at this price, the premium value for the imprint has gone from half a stamp to the equivalent just over ten stamps, or a twenty-fold increase in relative significance! This represents a quantum leap, the extent of which I am sure no one would have predicted even two years ago.

The price paid for the 3rd watermark £1 brown and blue 'JBC' monogram with inverted watermark at the *Evans* sale (May 9 2001), of which at least two are known makes an interesting comparison. That sale included 8 normal £1 brown and blue singles in varying mint condition, averaging \$1,485 excluding GST on the hammer price. The monogram, having been exported, fetched an equivalent price of \$39,960. This represents a premium of about 26 stamps above the single stamp price. Taking into account the fact that the monogram stamp shows inverted watermark, that premium factor would effectively come back to something slightly under 20 at the time of the auction.

The previous time an equivalent monogram was offered, by Rodney A. Perry at the Ausipex auction on 27 September 1984, it was passed in at \$1,980 compared to a price of \$908 for a regular stamp at that same auction. This represented a premium of slightly over one stamp. Taking into account an increased value for the inverted watermark on the monogram stamp, the premium for the monogram would effectively be *less* than the value of one additional stamp.

Putting this together, the premium for the 4½d imprint has moved from an addition half a stamp to about ten, or increased by a factor of twenty. The premium for the £1 monogram has moved from slightly under one to slightly under twenty, also an increase by a factor of about twenty. From this it can be concluded that the relative prices of the 4½d imprint pair and the £1 monogram are roughly in line. The only unresolved question then is whether they are *both* in line with the real market or whether they are both too high. Only time will answer that question.

These prices are indicative of the current direction in the market for the rarer *specialised* items and as the market continues to evolve, I look forward to the next step in this process.

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