The Australian Arms Series of 1948-1964

Commencing in 1948, the Arms set of 4 stamps was issued to replace the Robes high-value definitives (in use since 1938). It also re-introduced the £2 value, which had previously been discontinued from general sale in 1939.
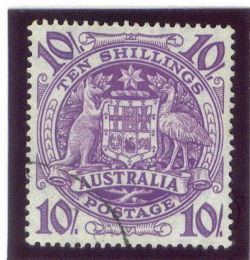
The stamps were designed, and the dies engraved, by Frank Manley, and printed at the Note Printing Branch, Melbourne on paper watermarked "C of A". They were printed using the rotary recess method from plates of 180, and issued in sheets of 60 (5 rows of 12). Perforations were 14½ x 13½.

The stamps remained on issue until replaced by the 5/- Cattle in 1961, and the Navigator series in 1964.

Usage was predominantly for parcels, telegrams and bulk postage receipts, with limited scope for use on individual letters. The 5/- is found on cover, generally paying towards the airmail charge for triple the base ½oz rate, and other denominations can sometimes be found on large business envelopes.

Issued   11 Apr 49
Replaced 26 Jul 61
Mintage 31,255,920

Issued   28 Nov 49
Replaced 26 Feb 64
Mintage   7,417,160

Issued   3 Oct 49
Replaced 26 Feb 64
Mintage 10,617,890

Issued   16 Jan 50
Replaced 26 Aug 64
Mintage 3,925,410

Designer Frank Manley at work on the die for the £1 value
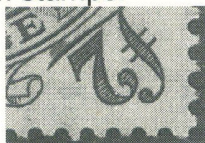
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In 1951 a small printing of the 5/- stamp was made on thin paper (0.096mm instead of the usual 0.109mm thickness).

All denominations exist with state perfins from NSW, Victoria and Tasmania, with this representative example being the G/NSW puncture.

The best-known variety in the series is the "Roller Flaw" on the £2 stamp. The flaw was present in sheet positions 4/1 and 5/1 before being retouched. This positional piece shows the flaw on both stamps.

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Roller flaw detail

This example of parcel use was sent from Melbourne on 8 May 1958, destination unknown. The heavy-duty wrapping paper and the total payment of £3/18/- suggests a heavy parcel sent by air.

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When originally issued, each sheet carried the "By Authority" imprint at bottom left. The imprint was discontinued from the beginning of 1953.

While mint examples are easily obtained, used examples of imprints, or positional pieces showing the absence of an imprint, are very scarce, as the selvedge was normally removed prior to the stamps being used.

Used multiples, particularly of the lower denominations, are often encountered, as it was common practice for small Post Offices not to carry significant stocks of the very high values, so any large requirement was made up by using multiples of the lower values.

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An example of the use of the Arms stamps to pay for a telegram, in this case a 22-word telegram costing £1/7/6, sent from Devonport in 1951. The higher-value stamps on the telegram form were perforated with a telegraph puncture to render them worthless to collectors.

A 1959 letter using the 5/- value towards the cost of a 1½ oz letter from Burwood (NSW) to Massachusetts

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Specimen stamps were produced and sold in the PO presentation sets during the period the stamps were on issue. This representative example was inadvertently postmarked with a CTO cancel and dated 6 OC 5_ (in the top right corner). ACSC records only a single set of the three specimen stamps so postmarked.

Eight contemporary die proofs were produced in the issued colours.

Subsequently, Australia Post issued a number of posthumous proofs, printed from the original dies in a range of colours.

The first came in 1990, when Stamp Replica Card No. 17 was produced, with sales proceeds going to the APF.

In 1999, the £1 was issued in black, and in 2001 the 10/- in pale blue, as part of a set of four volumes of proofs produced from the original engraved dies.