

# The 1913 Kangaroo and Map Stamps—A Controversial ‘Advertisement for Australia’

The Kangaroo and Map stamps were the first uniform stamps issued in Australia following Federation in 1901. Richard Breckon discusses the background events leading to the issue of these politically-charged stamps

**When the six Australian colonies joined in a Federation on 1 January 1901, philatelists looked forward to the imminent release of a single series of Australian Commonwealth stamps. It was not to be. For 12 years after Federation, state stamps continued to be produced and, until October 1910, the stamps were valid only on mail posted in the state concerned. Six colonial postal administrations became one postal authority in 1901, but six separate issues of stamps continued until 1913.**

Section 89 of the Australian Constitution specified that the states (as the former colonies were now called) were to be reimbursed the surplus revenue of the colonial departments transferred at Federation to Commonwealth control. Known as the ‘book-keeping’ arrangement, this meant that each state’s postal system was run independently of the others’, to facilitate the accurate calculation of the surplus revenue. To this end, state stamps were continued for use exclusively by each state. (See ‘Australia’s Federation Era Stamps’, *GSM*, January, March and May 2001.)

## Three key recommendations

The first important step towards ending this state of affairs came with the appointment of a board to report on ‘the best methods to be adopted’ for a future issue of Commonwealth stamps. After deliberating for two weeks in the Melbourne GPO during in October 1907, the Board handed down its report containing three key recommendations:

- Only after the ‘book-keeping’ arrangement had ceased, should a uniform series of Commonwealth stamps be produced for use throughout Australia. (This was in preference to issuing state stamps in common designs as an interim measure.)
- A world-wide competition to obtain designs for the Commonwealth stamps ought to be held. Designs depicting royalty, characteristic features of Australia, and allegorical figures were recommended.
- Australia’s new stamps should be produced ‘at one central location under the supervision of an expert stamp printer’.

The last recommendation touched on an important aspect of planning the uniform stamps. After Federation, the Postmaster General’s Department largely adhered to the colonial arrangements for stamp production: stamps of New South Wales,

Victoria and Queensland were produced by their respective government printing offices; South Australia’s stamps were supplied by a printer attached to the Post Office and, commencing in 1902, stamps of Western Australia and Tasmania were produced by the Victorian Government Printing Office. Consequently, production of Australia’s state stamps was carried out in separate locations in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide.

## Competing claims

Only a single printing establishment could carry out the production of uniform Commonwealth stamps. The competing claims of the existing stamp printers for this role preoccupied the attention of the Commonwealth authorities. Following the 1907 Stamp Board’s report, it was decided that the South Australian Stamp Printer, J B Cooke, (the only stamp printer to be directly employed by the Commonwealth)

would transfer to Melbourne, taking over stamp production from the Victorian Government Printing Office. In March 1909, J B Cooke set up a new Stamp Printing Office in Melbourne under the control of the Federal Treasury. Once the decision was made to proceed with uniform stamps, Cooke’s printing establishment would carry out the work.

The last impediment to uniform stamps was the ‘book-keeping’ arrangement. It remained in force until mid-1910, when it was replaced with a new system of Commonwealth payments to the states. Also that year, the Royal Commission into Postal Services urged the introduction of uniform stamps as soon as practicable, and until this could be arranged, state stamps should be made valid for postal use throughout Australia, irrespective of the state where an article was posted. Interchangeability of state stamps was adopted on 13 October 1910, although the postal authorities continued to distribute state stamps only in the state concerned.

## Competition

Next, the recommendation of the 1907 Stamp Board to stage a public competition was put into effect. Originally, it was

*The building accommodating the Note and Stamp Printing Offices from 1911 to 1924 was called the King’s Warehouse and still stands today in Melbourne*



intended that four designs would be chosen for the full Commonwealth stamp series, but Federal Cabinet discussed the matter and decided that only one design would be adopted. The competition was launched in January 1911 and widely publicised in Australian metropolitan newspapers and selected journals in Great Britain and the United States.

The competition rules specified that the new stamps would be 1.125x0.875 inches (28.6x22.2mm) in size and they could be either horizontal or vertical. The artwork submitted by entrants should not exceed four times stamp size and had to be accompanied by a photographic reduction to stamp size. The designs had to contain 'features characteristic of Australia'. Also, the words 'Australia' and 'Postage' had to be incorporated and the stamp denomination was to be in Arabic figures or in both figures and letters.

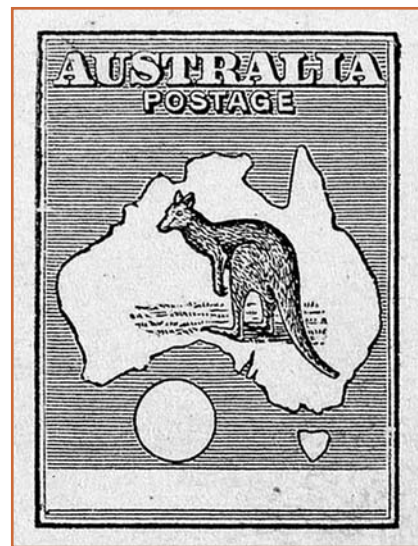
The competition closed on 31 May 1911. The results were announced a few weeks after the adjudicating board had spent three days examining the 1051 designs submitted by 533 participants. The first prize of £100 was awarded to Herman Altmann of St Kilda, a Melbourne suburb. Altmann's elaborate design featured a full-face King George V in military uniform, flanked by a kangaroo, emu, crown and six shields bearing the emblems of the states. The second prize of £50 was divided between two British entrants—Donald Mackay (North Finchley) for a design that featured the Commonwealth coat-of-arms and Edwin Arnold (Annerley) for a design that depicted a standing kangaroo. Arnold's design is of particular significance, because his drawing of a kangaroo was subsequently adopted for the Kangaroo and Map stamps. The public had an opportunity to judge for themselves, as all the competition designs were exhibited at Parliament House, Melbourne.

The competition had been staged under Postmaster General Josiah Thomas, who retained this portfolio until October 1911.

**The equal-second prize winning design in the 1911 Stamp Design Competition was submitted by English artist Edwin Arnold, whose nom de plume of 'Baldy' was applied to the standing kangaroo adopted for the Kangaroo and Map design**  
**Charles Frazer (1880–1913) served as Postmaster General from 1911 to 1913 and was the driving force behind the development of the Kangaroo and Map design**



**An undenominated die proof pulled from the Kangaroo and Map master die is a unique survivor from the estate of Samuel Reading. The die proof is now in the Chapman Collection, owned by Australia Post**  
**Samuel Reading was a private engraver working in Melbourne, who was contracted to engrave the Kangaroo and Map die with its interchangeable denomination plugs**



That month, in a reshuffle of ministers in the Labour Government of Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, Josiah Thomas was replaced as Postmaster General by Charles Frazer. At the age of 31, Frazer was one of the youngest ever Federal ministers in Australia. He already had an opinion about stamps. As an opposition backbencher in 1907, he asked a question in Parliament whether future Commonwealth stamps would 'bear a representation of the King's head or something emblematic of Australia?'

### 'Execrable' portrait

Now that he was Postmaster General, Frazer could make sure that 'something emblematic of Australia' and not the King's head appeared on stamps. He was not pleased with Altmann's winning design at all, which, in his opinion, featured an 'execrable' portrait of the King. Frazer

rejected the design and initiated action to secure an alternative design. The Victorian Artists' Society was asked to nominate an artist. They chose Blamire Young, a noted English watercolourist, who was then living in Melbourne. In December 1911, he submitted a series of ten stamp designs, all of which are believed to have featured scenes enclosed by an outline map of Australia.

None of Blamire Young's designs have survived, but it was recorded that one depicted 'a kangaroo among scrub' enclosed by the map. The exact sequence of events is unclear, but presumably Postmaster General Frazer selected the kangaroo design as the basis for the new stamp. Young is not thought to have played any further role in the development of the Kangaroo and Map design, because he became involved in a dispute with the Post Office about his fee for the ten designs. (Young demanded 10 guineas for each stamp design, but Frazer was only prepared to offer him five guineas each.)

Frazer penned an instruction on his Ministerial notepaper without dating it (the document later passed into private hands):

- 'Memo for Mr Cooke
- Get coastline of Aust.
- Insert Baldy's Roo
- Produce in colours for different denominats.'

'Baldy' was the nom-de-plume used by Edwin Arnold, the equal-second prize winner in the competition. Clearly, it was Frazer's wish that Edwin Arnold's standing kangaroo and the outline map of Australia would be the principal motifs of the new stamp design.

### No Tasmania!

The earliest known version of this design is horizontal featuring 'Baldy's Roo' in an outline map, flanked by draped flags, and enclosed by an ornamental frame. This was rejected in favour of a straightforward,



vertical design in the basic style of the issued stamp. In its first version, the vertical design shows the kangaroo in a map in which Tasmania is omitted! Also, the denomination appears in two circles in the top half of the stamp. Subsequently, the design was amended to include Tasmania and to show one value circle.

The various Kangaroo and Map designs exist as printed stamp essays. They are the work of Rudolph Steel, a private artist and lithographer of Melbourne. Steel was contracted to reproduce each stage of the design as printed essays in different colours and denominations for viewing purposes. They were made by photographically reducing the original artwork to stamp size and etching the images into a metal block (probably zinc), which was used to print the essays. It is quite plausible that Rudolph Steel was the artist responsible for the Kangaroo and Map design, but archival evidence on this point is lacking. Disingenuously, the Post Office issued a public statement that 'the approved design is a combination of ideas, and is not the work of any one person in particular'.

The approved Kangaroo and Map design was released to the public on 2 April 1912. In itself, this was an unusual step. New stamps were generally issued unheralded and the public's first look at the design occurred when the stamps had gone on sale. Frazer was particularly proud of his Kangaroo and Map stamps. He wanted people to see them well in advance, which in this case was nine months ahead of their issue.

### Press criticism

The newspapers mercilessly mocked the design: the absence of the King's head angered monarchists; the choice of the kangaroo as a national symbol was ridiculed; and the design's stark simplicity seemed at odds with the much-embellished stamps typical of that era. The National Library, Canberra, possesses Charles Frazer's political scrapbook of newspaper clippings, only one of which refers to the Kangaroo and Map stamps. It is from the *Adelaide Advertiser* and quotes favourable remarks by a local philatelist, Reuban Sharples. Possibly this single clipping was the only positive comment about his stamp design that Frazer could find!

The sarcasm of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (4 April 1912) was typical—although somewhat restrained—of press reaction to the Kangaroo and Map design: 'Today the Postmaster General, Mr Frazer, had a little surprise for his colleagues when they assembled in Cabinet. He presented each with a copy of the new Commonwealth postage stamp ... The new stamp is simple, decidedly so. The main feature of the design is a map of Australia. This is in

***This newspaper cartoon captures public reaction to the release of the Kangaroo and Map design in April 1912. A man representing 'Australia' greets Postmaster General Charles Frazer with the comment that the stamp design advertises the Seven Years Drought, which affected Australia at the turn of the century***

white, on a background of fine lines running across the stamp. There is no lettering on the map, the bareness of the continent being eliminated by the figure of the kangaroo on a plot of ground. It is not barren country either, for in front of the animal there is a small plant-like substance. Officially it is Kangaroo grass, but the uninitiated might easily take it for an inkpot with two pens sticking up in it. One gentleman who saw it facetiously expressed the remark that it was a rabbit sticking its head out of a burrow.'

Despite the criticism, the Kangaroo and Map design was not abandoned, although some changes were made. The word 'POSTAGE' was inserted, the value circle was moved to below the map, and the tuft of grass ('the rabbit's ears') facing the kangaroo was deleted.

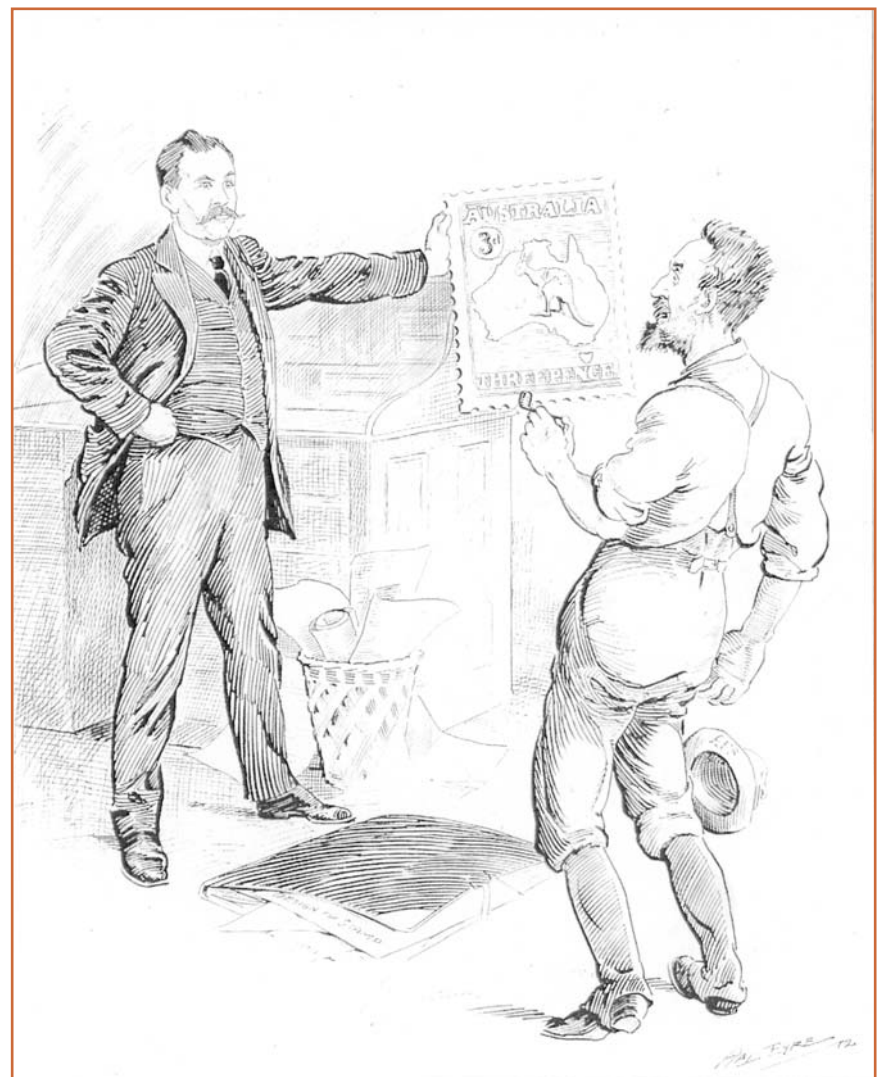
### Faster and cheaper

Following final approval of the stamp design, the next step was to arrange the engraving of a steel die. The method of printing the Kangaroo and Map stamps was letterpress. This process involved cutting away, on the surface of the die, those parts of the design that are uncoloured, leaving the coloured parts standing up in relief. Letterpress was faster and cheaper than most other kinds of printing (including recess), and was the general

method of producing stamps in Australia between the 1860s and the 1930s.

As the Stamp Printing Office had no engraver on its staff, the task of engraving the Kangaroo and Map stamp die was given to Samuel Reading, a private engraver of Melbourne, who had engraved Victorian stamp dies for over 25 years. (Reading engraved the dies of the £1 and £2 Edward VII stamps of 1901–02.) The method adopted by Reading was to engrave a master die incorporating blank areas for the denomination to be inserted, in both figures and words. Reading had used a similar method for engraving a master die for the 1911 Papua Lakatoi series and interchangeable plugs for the ½d. to 2s.6d. denominations. It is a tribute to Samuel Reading's skills that the insertion into the master Kangaroo and Map die of the 'figures and words' plugs fitted perfectly, since otherwise the moulds struck from the die to form electros would exhibit gaps around the plugs.

On 12 August 1912, Cooke reported that the master die had been finished and interchangeable plugs had been completed for two out of the 15 denominations required for the series. This work included the 1d. Kangaroo and Map stamp, for which four printing plates were finished by September 1912. The 1d. plate was 120-on, comprising two panes of 60 arranged



in 10 rows of six. Two plates, each 120-on, were manufactured for the ½d. to 2s. values. As the 1d. denomination served for basic letter postage, it was needed in quantities exceeding all the other denominations combined and priority was given to the production of this stamp.

### UPU rules

The finished 1d. plate was also used to prepare colour trials for submission to Postmaster General Frazer. The purpose of this exercise was to select the colours for the 15 denominations. The colours of the ½d., 1d. and 2½d. Kangaroo and Map stamps were fixed by a rule of the Universal Postal Union. These values were the specified international rates for printed matter, postcards and letters, respectively. The UPU rule specified that the ½d. stamp had to be green, the 1d. stamp red and the 2½d. stamp blue.

The postal authorities were free to select any colours for the other denominations. It was important to choose colours that contrasted adequately, because postal staff might otherwise confuse the stamps in poor lighting. Two colours were used for the four high denomination Kangaroo and Map stamps (5s., 10s., £1 and £2) to facilitate ready identification—one colour was used for the kangaroo motif and the second colour for the rest of the stamp. This format required printing from vignette (kangaroo) plates 120-on and duty plates, also 120-on.

A curious error occurred in the selection of the 15 denominations. Postmaster General Frazer had approved a range of denominations from ½d. to £1, which included all the values comprising the issued series, as well as a 2s.6d. value. However, the Stamp Printing Office inadvertently substituted a £2 value for the 2s.6d, perhaps because Victoria's stamp range included the former, but not the latter value. The error was not noticed until an advanced stage of production and the position was allowed to remain unchanged.

### The promise could not be met

The production of the stamps was delayed by the non-arrival of watermarked stamp paper from England. As the size of the Kangaroo and Map stamps was larger than most of the existing state stamps (which were themselves of varying dimensions), a larger size sheet bearing the 'Crown & A' watermark in a new configuration was needed. (Note that each watermark is



**The master die of the Kangaroo and Map stamps includes interchangeable plugs for the denominations and an electro of the vignette for printing the second colour of the high-value stamps**

arranged so that it is centered within the printed stamp.) The first paper shipment was scheduled to reach Melbourne in the first week of October 1912, but the deadline passed because the paper was rejected by its manufacturers, Joynston & Sons. Frazer had announced that all the Kangaroo and Map stamps would be issued by 1 January 1913. The promise could not be met, so it was now planned to issue as many of the stamp values as possible by this date.

In the event, the shipment of watermarked stamp paper faced further delays and it did not arrive in Melbourne until 30 December 1912. During this difficult period, Stamp Printer J B Cooke had to face the personal tragedy of the death of his wife on 21 December. With only a day to produce an initial supply of 1d. Kangaroo and Map stamps, the first supplies were despatched from the Stamp Printing Office on 31 December.

The first issue of the 1d. stamp is known to have occurred at the Sydney GPO on 2 January 1913. Sydney stamp dealer J H Smyth bought the first full sheet of 1d. stamps sold at the counter of the Sydney GPO and had the postal clerk verify this

with a notation in the sheet's margin. During that first week of January, the 1d. Kangaroo and Map stamp was issued in the other states, except South Australia.

### Issue dates varied widely

By the end of January 1913, the production and dispatch of all denominations in the Kangaroo and Map series had been completed, except for the 4d., 5s., 10s., £1 and £2 values. During the next three months, the Kangaroo and Map stamps in all their denominations were despatched throughout Australia. The actual dates of issue of each denomination varied widely. It was not official policy to co-ordinate the release of new stamps on the same date. It was up to local state administrations to decide when new stamps would be issued, and usually this happened after stocks of the replaced stamps had been used up. However, it would appear that an instruction was sent out that immediately the Kangaroo and Map stamps were placed on sale, state stamps of corresponding denominations were to be withdrawn. It is fairly unusual to find state stamps post-marked after early 1913, when they were progressively superseded.

**Seven values from the Kangaroo and Map series. The high values, 5s., 10s., £1 and £2, were printed in two colours**



The exception was South Australia. In this state, no Kangaroo and Map stamps were issued until April 1913, because substantial stocks of state stamps were on hand. This even included the 1d. base rate, for which the South Australian 1d. stamp remained on sale until April 1913. In May 1914, an instruction was sent to all postmasters throughout Australia to return any remaining stocks of state stamps for destruction. State stamps still in the hands of the public could continue to be used for postage until February 1968, two years after the introduction of decimal currency.

### All change

The Kangaroo and Map stamps almost died in their infancy. A Federal election in June 1913 led to a Conservative government taking office and a new Postmaster General, Agar Wynne, was appointed. Like his predecessor, Agar Wynne held firm opinions about stamps. Almost immediately, Wynne gave instructions that the Kangaroo and Map stamps were to be abolished and be replaced with stamps featuring the winning design in the 1911 competition. Wynne believed that Australia's stamps should follow those of Great Britain and the other Dominions in featuring the King's head.

Within a few days later Wynne was persuaded not to use the winning Altmann design, probably because it was too complicated for engraving at stamp size. Instead, new designs were prepared for 1d. and 2d. stamps. The 1d. design was a close copy of another of Altmann's competition entries. The 2d. stamp was a modified version of the winning design, prepared by Ronald Harrison, an artist in the Stamp Printing Office. Both designs, featuring a new profile of the King, were published in newspapers including the *Age* (Melbourne) on 29 July 1913.

Neither design was ever adopted for an issued stamp, possibly because the King's portrait caused objections. King George V had a personal preference for the sideface portrait adopted for British coinage, which in Australia, was used on gold sovereigns.

The 1d. stamp design now incorporated the coin portrait, although the basic features of the competition winner were retained—the oval frame for the head, the kangaroo and emu at the sides, the crown at top and the value inscriptions at base. An additional feature was the inclusion of wattle, suggested by the Wattle Day League of Australia.

### Recess printing

Agar Wynne was determined that his new stamp would look impressive, and to this end he resolved to use recess printing. The stamp was produced in the Note Printing Office, which had recess printing presses for banknotes. (The Stamp Printing Office was only equipped to print stamps by letterpress.) Although both organisations shared the same building, they were managed separately and each office operated its own equipment.

Wynne had to be content with having only a small quantity of 1d. recess stamps produced (in the event, two million), far short of what was needed to replace the 1d. Kangaroo and Map. During the calendar year 1913, the total quantity of 1d. stamps required was 522 million. The Post Office released the 1d. recess stamp on 9 December 1913 and controlled the supply by imposing a purchase limit of six stamps at a time to any one customer. The former Postmaster General, Charles Frazer, did not live to see this threat to his beloved Kangaroo and Map stamps—he died of pneumonia on 25 November 1913, aged only 33.

If new stamps in frequently-used denominations were to replace the Kangaroo and Map stamps permanently, they would have to be printed letterpress. A proposed replacement plan envisaged five letterpress stamps (½d. to 5d.) and nine recess stamps (2d. and 6d. to £2). Not all the proposed stamps would feature the King's head. Several pictorial stamps were planned, including a 6d. Kookaburra, 9d. Kangaroo and 1s. Black Swan. The planned stamp series did not eventuate. The outbreak of war and another change of government in

August–September 1914 caused the scheme to be abandoned. Only the 6d. Kookaburra stamp was issued.

### King's head stamps issued

Meanwhile, steps were taken to introduce a letterpress version of the 1d. George V stamp. Perkins Bacon & Co were contracted to manufacture the printing plates for this stamp. (The engraving of the letterpress die, which closely followed the design of the recess stamp, was subcontracted to De La Rue.) There was no uniform date of the issue for the 1d. letterpress stamp, but it is recorded that the first release occurred in Sydney on 17 July 1914. The new 1d. George V stamp now replaced the 1d. Kangaroo and Map and production of the latter stamp ceased. Agar Wynne had succeeded in introducing a King's head stamp for basic letter postage within Australia and to British Empire countries. Using 'no value' dies supplied by Perkins Bacon, the Stamp Printing Office produced plates for three George V stamps in ½d., 4d. and 5d. denominations. These stamps were issued at intervals during 1915, replacing the corresponding Kangaroo and Map stamps.

Considering the circumstances, it is ironic that stamps of the Kangaroo and Map and George V series co-existed for a quarter of a century. Following the accession of King George VI, a full series of new definitive stamps was issued in 1937–38. The end had come for the earlier stamps, except that for some reason the 2s. Kangaroo and Map stamp was not replaced. This last survivor of the series lingered on until its eventual withdrawal in 1948.

Perhaps the final word on the Kangaroo and Map design might be left to Charles Frazer, who spoke in the House of Representatives on 21 August 1913 to defend his stamp design in the face of the new Government's decision to replace it: 'A postage stamp is one of the best advertising mediums the country can have. Every letter leaving our shores bears an advertisement of the country on its stamp. Stamps with the King's head in the design are generally regarded as proper to communications from Great Britain. In designing our stamp we put into it an outline of the coast of Australia. The stamp shows a White Australia, indicating the Commonwealth's policy in regard to its population. In the centre of the stamp is a kangaroo, an animal peculiar to Australia, and common to every State of the Union ...'

## The Stamp Printing Office inadvertently substituted a £2 value for the 2s.6d. and the position was allowed to remain unchanged

