HANDBOOK – TELEGRAPH FORMS

Background

A comprehensive account of New South Wales telegram forms is given in Hancock (1991) and much of the information below is based on that source. Pre-payment of telegram forms by affixing postage stamps as a receipt for payment commenced in 1883 although for a brief period in 1871 adhesive stamps marked `N. S. Wales Electric Telegraphs' were issued. In 1894 pre-printed telegram forms complete with either 6d or 1/- images of NSW postage stamps became available. The following public announcement, dated 21 February 1894, describes the issue of the stamped telegram forms:

> `His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, having been pleased to approve of the introduction of stamped telegram forms, it is hereby notified, for public information , that telegram forms impressed with a 1s, or 6d, stamp may now be purchased at their face value singly, or in packets of twenty, at the General Post Office, or any telegraph office in the Colony '.

Printing

The 6d and 1/- forms are illustrated in Figures 1 and 2. They were printed on what had become the standard lay-out for NSW Post and Telegraph Transmission Forms used for both colonial and intercolonial destinations. The stamp dies used to produce the electros were those used for 6d and 1/- postage stamps issued in 1872 and 1876 respectively, printing was by typography. The paper for the forms was of the same style as previously used for the unstamped telegram forms. The size of the forms is 189 x 133mm, the printing and the stamps on the 6d form is in red and in black on the 1/- form. The unstamped style of `Transmitted Form' remained in use and after completion and payment by the sender these forms were kept for two years by the Post Office prior to their destruction.

The initial printings in February 1894 were followed by the production 500,000 of the 6d and 1,000,000 of the 1/- forms; at this time some two million telegrams were sent annually in New South Wales. Use of the pre-stamped forms was limited and the following data presents the numbers supplied annually to the Post Office from 1894 to their withdrawal in late 1898.

	Sixpence	One Shilling
1894	8,180	36,900
1895	43,120	171,480
1896	38,140	164,840
1897	30,320	183,900
1898	19,320	115,860
Totals	130,420	757,120

These totals are the numbers supplied by the Government Printer.

The large stock of forms stored at the Government Printing Office alarmed William Applegate Gullick when he was appointed the Government Printer in November 1896. The 2½ tons of forms were stacked on the floor and lacked the security that would normally be given to such items. The archives contain a sequence of requests from Gullick for permission to destroy such large and unwieldy surplus stock. Permission was finally forthcoming and on the 15 January 1898 the bulk of the stored forms was pulped at the Waterloo [Paper] Mills. This form of destruction was used as the normally practice of supervised burning was considered inappropriate for such a large mass of paper! It was then with surprise, and one imagines annoyance, that on 1 February 1898 the Postmaster General ordered 10,000 6d forms and a further 50,000 1/- forms on 7 April. These required reprinting the forms.

TRANSMITTED FORM.

New South Wales Post and Telegraph.

COLONIAL AND INTERCOLONIAL LINES.

St.5466

Office Stamp.

Sent at
h.   m.

Reference No.

No. of Words.

Amount paid
:   :

TELEGRAM to _____ Station,

Addressed to _____

_____

_____

(Forwarded subject to the Printed Conditions of the Department.)

				5
				10
				15
				20
				25
				30
				35

Date _____   (Signed) _____

Time   h.   m.   Address _____

[OVER.]

6d Indicium

Specimen Type B21a

Specimen.

Fig.1. T1 6d Telegraph form

TRANSMITTED FORM.

New South Wales Post and Telegraph.

COLONIAL AND INTERCOLONIAL LINES.

St 627

Office Stamp.	TELEGRAM to .... Station,
Sent at h. m.	Addressed to ....
Reference No.	
No. of Words	
Amount : :	(Forwarded subject to the Printed Regulations of the Department, which may be seen at any Post and Telegraph Office in New South Wales.)

5
10
15
20
25
30
35

Date _____   (Signed) _____

Time ____ h. ____ m.   Address _____

[OVER.]

1/- Indicium

Specimen Type B21a
(in red)

Specimen.

Fig.2. T2   One shilling Telegraph form

The exact date on which the 6d and 1/- forms were no longer available at post offices is not known but was probably in late November 1898. The six electros for printing the forms were formally destroyed on 28 October 1904.

Why were the Prepaid Telegram Forms unpopular?
The lack of use was probably because the pre-paid forms only corresponded to a limited range of services. The 6d form only pre-paid the `suburban' rate which was restricted to a transmission distance of 15 miles and the 1/- paid the inland rate for an upper limit of 10 words. The details of telegram charges were linked to the distance of transmission, the number of words and sundry other charges, for instance there was special rates for press telegrams.

Therefore in many cases even if a stamped form had been purchased it was necessary for the counter clerk to add additional postage stamps to make up the total charge. The post office had originally thought that for commercial businesses already stamped forms would assist with the problems associated with petty cash accounting. This was not to be!
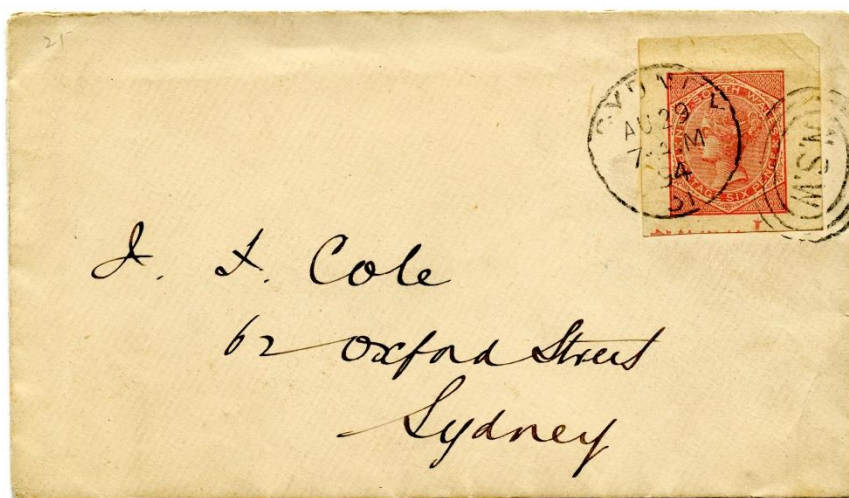
Specimen Overprints
Bell records that 850 of each of the two forms were overprinted `Specimen' in August 1894. The style of overprint was Type B21a, which is distinguished from Type B21 by the addition of a full stop. The 1/- stamped telegram form was printed in black so the specimen overprint was printed in red. This is the only item of NSW postal stationery for which a red specimen was used.
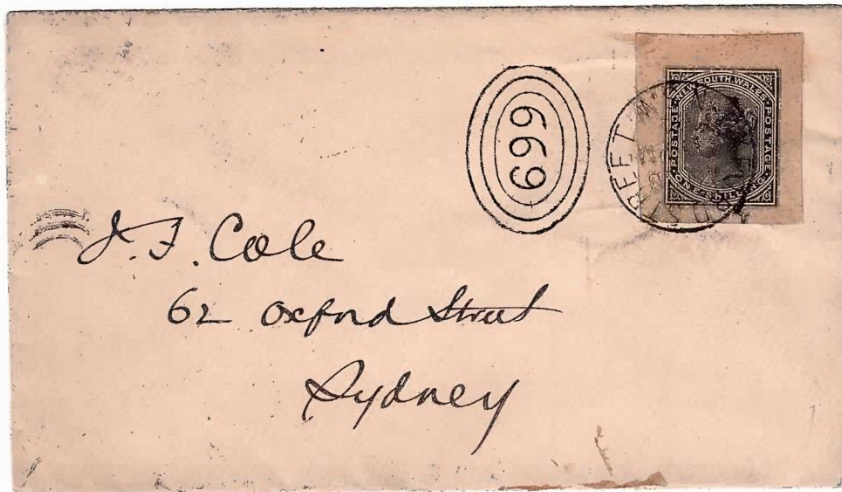
Used Copies
The original transmission forms either with or without impressed stamps were retained by the Post Office. As a result used copies of the 6d and 1/- telegram forms are unknown. Although the forms could be purchased over the counter at post offices with telegraph facilities mint copies are rare. Indeed the most frequently seen examples are those overprinted specimen which at various times were either used as presentation copies or sold to collectors. It is not known how many of the specimen copies were actually `issued'.

Occasionally examples of the 6d or 1/- stamps were cut out from mint telegram forms and used for postal purposes are seen, see Figure 3 a and b. These are illustrated and discussed in Hancock 1991, p.139. They are usually philatelically inspired as neither the 6d nor the 1/- corresponded to the postage rate for a normal letter. J.F Cole, the addressee in figure 3, was a well-known Sydney philatelist

Fig.3a. 6d Cut-out used for postage

Fig.3b. 1/- Cut-out used for postage

Such use was in fact contrary to NSW postal regulations, as demonstrated in the following (undated) extract:

> `The impressed stamps of stamped envelopes, letter-cards, post-cards or newspaper wrappers may not be used for prepayment of postage on other articles. Duty stamps, mutilated postage stamps, postage due stamps, the impressed stamps on telegram forms, or the postage stamps of any other colony or country are not suitable in this Colony for prepayment of postage'.

Information on the development and use of Australian Colonial Telegrams is also available on the web, see Johnstone .

References
Hancock, B.J., 1991. *Australian Telegram Forms & Envelopes. Part 1: Colonial & Early State Period.* Cinderella Stamp Club of Australia. 190p.

Johnstone, J., 2021. *www.telegramsaustralia.com.*