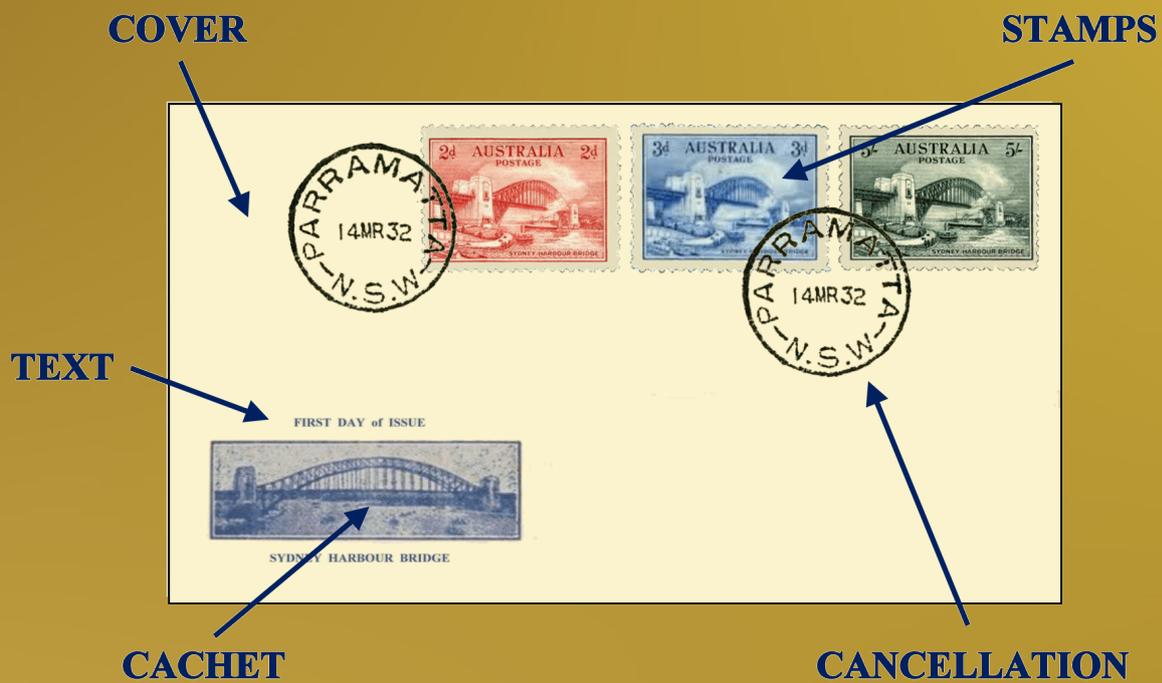


What is a First Day Cover ?



David Mallen

Preface

The main 'elements' of a First Day Cover are:

- Cover** – An envelope or other item attached to or covering an article being posted. FDC envelopes may be empty and unaddressed.
- Stamp** – A postage stamp or stamps or other stamp variations that are valid for postage. Their total value must equal or exceed the minimum postage rate for the article.
- Cancellation** – An 'official' cancel mark applied to the cover by Australia Post (usually over the stamps) with a date corresponding to the 'first day'. (Refer to FDI and OSD, on the next page.) The cancel may or may not have been applied to the cover at the location or on the date shown in the cancellation. If the article was posted the cancel is called a "postmark".
- Cachet** – An optional image or illustration usually related to the stamp or event.
- Text** – Optional words, usually "First Day Cover", "First Day of Issue", "First Day of Use", etc.

The image on the front cover is a mock-up illustrating these 'elements'.

I discuss these in more depth and put FDCs into 3 main categories in the following pages. It is interesting how different postal and philatelic organisations define these 'elements'.

Definitions	
Australia Post	
First Day Cover:	Pictorial envelope with related stamps (gummed or self-adhesive) or a mini-sheet postmarked on the first day of issue. It is valued for postage only on the day of issue, from the post office named on the postmark.
Postmarks:	Postmarks are the official marks put on stamps to stop people re-using them. Postmarks show when and where letters were posted. Special postmarks are created for all stamp issues.
Australian Philatelic Federation	
First Day Cover:	A cover to which stamps have been affixed and postmarked by the issuing Postal Authority on the date of issue of the stamps.
Australian Philatelic Society	
First Day Cover:	An envelope that has stamps affixed and posted on the first day of issue.
Cancellation:	A cancellation (or cancel for short) is a postal marking applied to a postage stamp or postal stationery indicating that the item has been used.
Postmark:	A postal marking made on a letter, package, postcard or the like indicating the (more or less precise) date and time that the item was delivered into the care of the postal service.
British Postal Museum	
Cover:	Envelope
First Day Cover:	Cover bearing a postmark showing that the stamp was used on the first day of issue.
Linns	
First-day Cover:	A cover bearing a stamp tied by a cancellation showing the date of the official first day of issue of that stamp.
Stanley Gibbons	
Cancellation:	Any authorised defacing mark on a stamp.
Cover:	A postally used envelope, letter-sheet or wrapper.
First Day Cover:	A cover bearing stamps postmarked on their day of issue.
Postmark:	Any mark cancelling the stamp and recording an item's passage through the mails.
American Philatelic Society	
First Day Cover:	An envelope with a stamp cancelled on its first day of sale.
Postmark:	A mark indicating when and from where a letter was sent. It may or may not also serve as a cancel.

Clubs

For more information about covers and pictorial cancellations contact these clubs.

- Australian Cover Society: www.austcoversociety.com.au
- Australian PictorMarks: www.ozpictormarks.com
- Australian Airmail Society: www.australian-airmail-society.com

Australia Post's Postmarking Service

Address: Australia Post Sprintpak Retail, Postmarking Department, 15 Enterprise Drive, ROWVILLE VIC 3178

Acknowledgements

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David Mallen

Australian Stamp Variations
www.asv.net.au
<http://issuu.com/asvcat>





What is a First Day Cover?

A summary of modern Australian First Day Covers



Let's first define a "Cover" as this term is not understood by many. It is just an envelope usually empty and sealed. But it can also be other forms of wrapping to 'cover' an item that is posted, including wrappers, air letters, letter cards and postcards. A "blank cover" is an envelope with an illustration or cachet and/or text but no stamps.

The "First Day" means the 'official' first day of issue (FDI) of a stamp as specified by the postal authority. There is only one FDI for a stamp or stamp set. Some stamp variations of the set may be released before or after this FDI date. Reprints may be released years after the FDI. Sometimes variations are released on different days in different parts of the country. The date that stamps and variations are released, on days other than the FDI, is referred to as the On-sale Date (OSD). Sometimes the OSD is prior to the date that the stamps are valid for postage or is well after the FDI. To further complicate things, occasionally a set of stamps of one country may be first issued in another country! This makes obtaining a FDC difficult.

FDI in China
The 50c 2008 Olympic Gold Medallist stamps were first issued in China in August 2008.

First Day Cover

Despite these date complications once the first day of issue has been declared, a "First Day Cover" is simply an envelope + a stamp + a FDI date. Most modern First Day Covers (FDCs) contain the text "First Day of Issue" and this is usually within the cancellation.

There are 3 main types of First Day Covers: 'Authentic', 'Official' and 'Private'.

'Authentic' FDCs

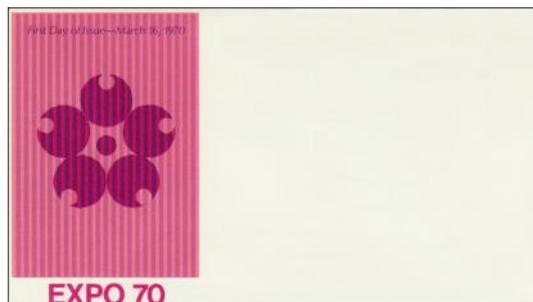
An 'authentic' First Day Cover is one that had been cancelled on the FDI at the post office shown on the cancellation. The cancel may either be a hand cancellation or, if the cover has been posted, it will be a postmark. Some post offices have special hand cancellers with the text "First Day of Issue" followed by the date. If the post office has been selected to be shown on the National Postmark they may also have one of these. The envelope may be either an Australia Post or private cover. 'Authentic' First Day Covers are also referred to as 'genuine' First Day Covers by some collectors.



An 'authentic' FDC hand cancelled at Adelaide on the FDI

'Official' FDCs

The cancelled First Day Covers sold by Australia Post are called 'official' because they are produced by the postal authority in Australia. They first introduced blank covers to their product range in March 1970 for the Expo 1970 issue on 16th March. This virtually wiped-out other suppliers of blank covers. Collectors can use these blank covers to make 'private' first day covers. (See below.)



First Australia Post blank cover – Expo 70 (16th March 1970)

In May 1980 they introduced a National Postmark FDI cancellation for First Day Covers. The post office shown on the National Postmark is usually chosen because of its relationship with the theme of the stamp issue. The National Postmark is available at that post office and from the Philatelic Bureau. To obtain the National Postmark cancellation, collectors may either go to that post office and have their cover hand cancelled, post stamped blank covers to that post office or post blank covers to the Philatelic Bureau. Covers received before or after the first day of issue are cancelled with the National Postmark first day of issue cancel. The first National Postmark was the “Waltzing Matilda, Winton QLD, First Day of Issue, 7 May 1980” cancellation for the Australian Folklore stamp set.

In August 1987 Australia Post began cancelling their ‘official’ First Day Covers by using a machine to apply the National Postmark FDI cancellation to a stamped envelope. The first cancelled FDC produced was the Achievements in Technology FDC that was issued on 19th August 1987. The cancel usually touches the stamp but there have been exceptions! (See World Youth Day Covers, below.) The ‘official’ unaddressed First Day Covers are produced well before the first day of issue, currently at Australia Post’s printing facility in Rowville, an eastern suburb of Melbourne in Victoria. They are available for sale at post offices on the FDI. Their price is the face value of the stamps plus the cost of the blank cover. All ‘official’ FDCs are available for purchase up to one month after the first day of issue.



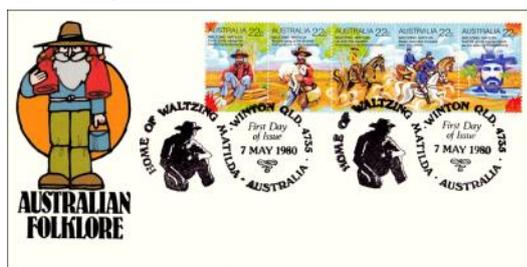
First National Postmark cancellation – Australian Folklore (7th May 1980)



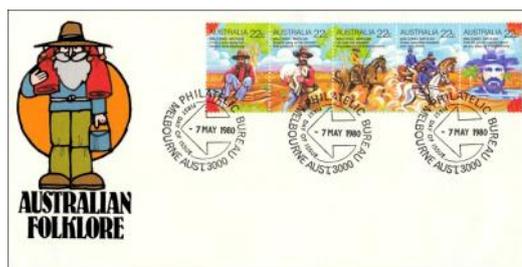
First ‘official’ cancelled FDC sold on the FDI – Achievements in Technology (19th August 1987)

National Postmarks

There is some debate about whether the Winton 7th May 1980 cancellation was the first National Postmark. To be a National Postmark it had to be available at the Winton Post Office and at the Philatelic Bureau. Collectors could then send their ‘private’ covers to these places for cancelling with the special postmark. Australian Folklore FDCs have also been cancelled with the “Philatelic Bureau, Melbourne Aust. 3000” FDI ‘arrow’ cancellation.



National Postmark – Winton, Qld.



Philatelic Bureau, Melbourne “arrow” cancel

Two other FDI cancellations prior to 1980 are claimed to be National Postmarks. The YWCA World Council dated 21st August 1967 and the Australia Day Exhibition dated 26th January 1979. These appear to be Special Event temporary postmarks. It is not known if these were available at the Philatelic Bureau.

National Postmarks were not available for all stamp issues until 19th August 1987 when Australia Post began cancelling ‘official’ FDCs that were for sale on the first day of issue.

World Youth Day Covers

The 50c silver and gold foil WYD stamps were issued on cover on 4th March 2008. Each stamp was mint because the ‘cancellation’ did not touch the stamp. This was the first time a stamp had been issued on a FDC. These foil stamps were not available as single unattached gummed stamps.



‘Private’ FDCs

All First Day Covers not produced by Australia Post are ‘private’ covers. The cancellation may be obtained by posting the cover, by having it hand stamped at a post office or by the APB’s Postmarking Service (see below). Often the cancellation is done by hand at the post office chosen for the National Postmark, as mentioned above. Sometimes collectors can send or take blank covers to this post office and request that they be cancelled with the National Postmark. When these covers are cancelled before or after the FDI they are impossible to distinguish from ‘authentic’ FDCs. If an unaddressed Australia Post blank cover is used for the ‘private’ cover then the only way to distinguish it from an ‘official’ cover is to compare the number and position of the stamps and the cancellation. (Sometimes the National Postmark canceller sent to the post office is slightly different from the one used to cancel the ‘official’ FDCs which makes it easier to tell the difference.)

The FDI date is usually shown as text on the cover or included within the cancellation. Some ‘private’ FDCs do not show the text “First Day of Issue” or “First Day Cover”. ‘Private’ covers initially had to be addressed. They now may be addressed or unaddressed.

Wesley Cover Service	
<p>John Gower ran the Post Office at Largs North in Adelaide, South Australia from 17th June 1947. He produced many ‘private’ covers postmarked at Largs North. The first Wesley cover was produced as a charitable venture for the Wesley Nursing Home in Semaphore Park. It featured the 1st May 1951 ‘Jubilee’ set of 4 stamps. It wasn’t until 1955 that the covers included the WCS logo. WCS covers are one of the most popular collectables. They are still produced in small quantities today. (Source: <i>Stamp News</i>, June 2003)</p>	
	
Wesley Cover Service (1 st May 1951)	Cover with WCS logo (14 th February 1966)

Cancellations

Only cancellations applied by Australia Post are considered acceptable by collectors, irrespective of when or where they were applied. The stamps are cancelled by hand or machine. A cover that is cancelled on the FDI is considered a First Day Cover even if the cancellation does not include the text “First Day of Issue”.

Cancellations are called “postmarks” if the cover has been posted through the mail stream. The majority of FDCs are unaddressed and the cancellations are not postmarks.

Some hand cancellers are also supplied to special post offices, locations and events. (See Other Covers, below.) These non-FDI cancellations are known as Permanent and Temporary Postmarks. (Refer to the list and images on Australia Post’s ‘For Collectors/ Postmarks’ webpage.) Pictorial cancellations on their “First Day of Use” are sought after by collectors of cancellations and postmarks.

APB’s Postmarking Service

The Australian Philatelic Bureau (APB) has a Postmarking Service. They offer a free FDI cancellation service for a few months after the first day of issue. Collectors may submit their ‘private’ covers and request a special cancellation, including the National Postmark. (Initially the National Postmark was not available for use on ‘private’ covers but this policy soon changed following many requests from collectors.) The date shown in the cancellation is the first day of issue not the date that the cancellation was applied to the envelope. The cancellations are applied at the Philatelic Bureau or at Rowville in Melbourne not at the post office location shown on the cancellation. The cancelled covers are returned to the collector in a self-addressed envelope supplied with the order. (The Postmarking Service address is given below.)

As well as FDI cancellations, the Postmarking Service can also supply some Permanent cancellations. It cannot supply the Temporary cancellations listed on the webpage.

Some collectors love this free service as it can make a 'private' cover appear more 'official', particularly if the cancellation is the National Postmark. Other collectors believe the only 'authentic' cancellation is one applied on the date and at the post office shown in the cancellation.



A recent cancellation from the Postmarking Service:
Concession Stamps (valid for postage from 31st March 2014)

Other Covers

There are many other types of covers. The main ones are Special Event Covers and Postal Numismatic Covers (PNCs). Special Event Covers are 'souvenir' covers that contain details of the event and are cancelled on the days of the event. A special type of Special Event Cover is the Flight Cover. It is usually cancelled at the location where the flight begins and ends and sometimes where the aeroplane lands in between.

PNCs are covers that contain coins or medallions. They may be 'official' or 'private' covers produced for a special event or at the same time as the FDI of a stamp or stamp set. In the latter case the cancellation usually contains the text "First Day of Issue" and the FDI date. The coins or medallions may not necessarily be Australian.



Flight Cover (25th September 2001)



SES PNC (4th September 2007)

Value

There are always exceptions to the rule, but the most valuable First Day Covers are 'authentic' covers that have been postally used, particularly if the stamps are cancelled with a FDI postmark. 'Private' covers are usually more valuable than 'official' covers, especially if they have the National Postmark cancellation or are unusual in some way. The most economical way to collect 'official' FDCs is to purchase them from a dealer or at an auction well past the FDI date. You will usually find the price is well below the face value of the stamps. Some collectors buy 'official' FDCs in this way and remove the stamps and add them to their 'fine used' (but not 'postally used') collection.



Designing, making and collecting covers is a very popular and rewarding part of philately



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