

Berühmte Australische Philatelisten

Ken Baker 24.03.1912–17.01.2016

Der Sammlerring-Australia dankt Glen Stephens für die Genehmigung zur Wiedergabe seines Artikels "The World's oldest stamp dealer"¹⁾. Der Artikel wurde geringfügig gekürzt.

The World's oldest stamp dealer

"An historic philatelic milestone took place in February, 2012, the day I typed this article. I am typing this from Moss Vale NSW, in the Southern Highlands, attending the 100th Birthday Party lunch for legendary stamp dealer Ken Baker.

Ken gave me his Birth Certificate to scan for readers, and as can be seen he was born on February 8, 1912, entry number 182 of Bromley Kent, UK.

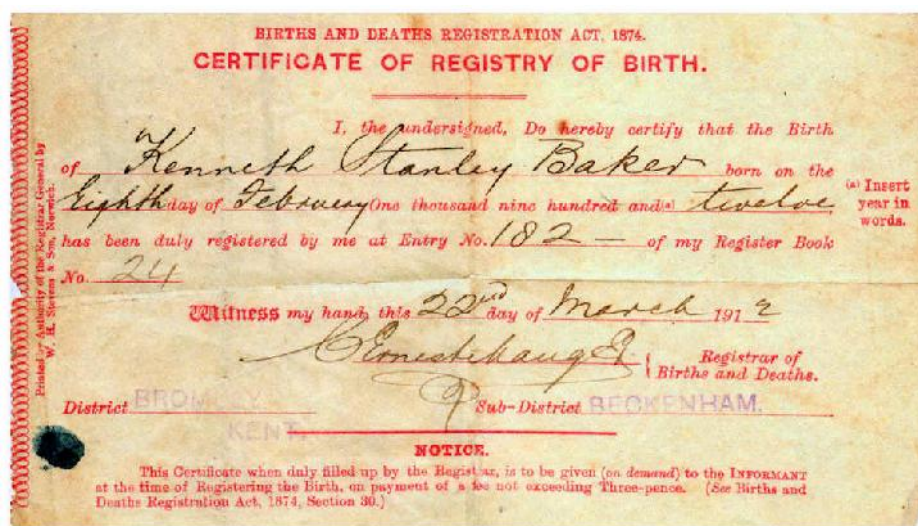


Abb. 1: Ken Baker -100 years young

I am unaware of any other stamp dealer – anywhere in the world, reaching the “Century” milestone, and I am sure all readers will join with me in congratulating Ken on his long and fruitful life.

Australian dealers seem to have the longevity gene – Bill Hornadge is mid 90s, and Max Stern is 90 – and plays a game of soccer each week, he told me today. I have known Ken for decades, and for the latter part of that time, his eye had been firmly focused on reaching 100, and getting “The Queen’s Telegram”.

Well as we all know, telegrams of any kind have not existed for some years now.

The Queen's NON Telegram!

HOWEVER, Buckingham Palace does write to all Centenarians they are aware of, and a photo is nearby I took today, of Ken with his cherished letter from the Queen!

A really fancy folder with photo, sealed with a crested ER "From The Queen" foiled wafer!
Ken commented: "very nice stationary that Her Majesty uses."

There were similar cards and messages from the Governor General of Australia, Quentin Bryce - plus the Prime Minister, Federal Opposition Leader, State Premier, local MPs, etc.

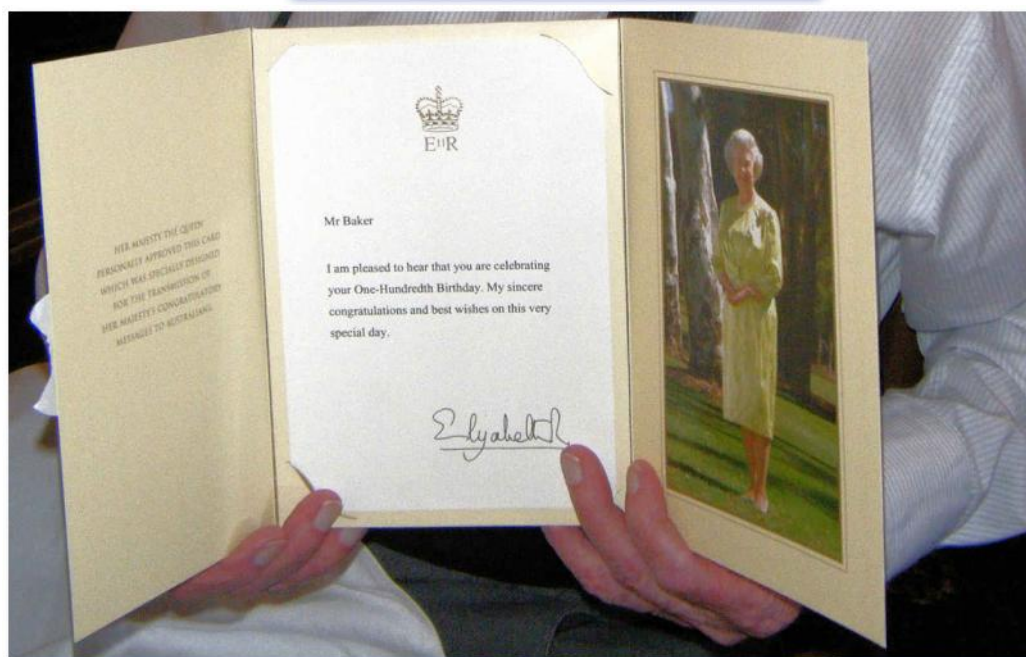
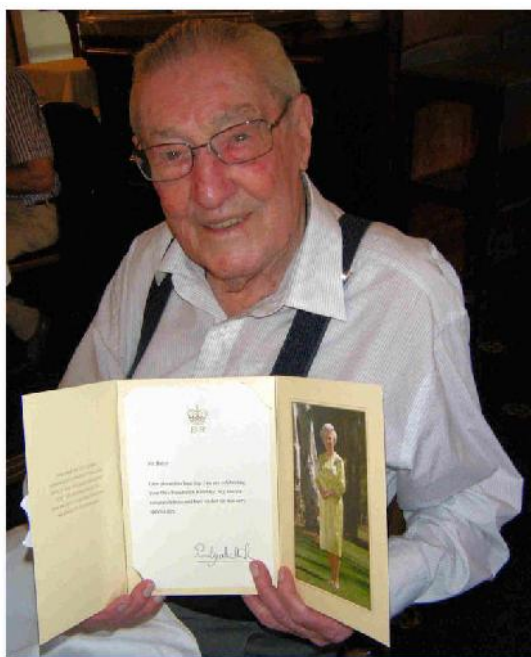


Abb. 2: "The Queen's Telegram"

The gathering at Moss Vale was mainly an extended family affair of about 100, but I was delighted to be invited to attend, along with his close dealer friends Kevin Duffy AO, and Max Stern AM. Max and Kevin presented Ken with a special plaque on behalf of his fellow stamp trade colleagues – I took a photo of them all - shown nearby.

Both of whom were literally dealing with Ken before I was born. In Kevin's case, a decade before. Max worked out that the 3 of them have 271 years of age between them.

All the table place name cards for all guests, were festooned with Mint Australian stamps, that Ken jokingly said had used up the last of his stamp stock.



Abb. 3: "The last of Ken's stamp stock"

Ken Baker has handled more of the major rarities of Australian philately than any other dealer. He and wife Mona lived for a few years in the UK, and he is still well known to many of the stamp trade there.

Ken kindly passed onto me a couple of years back, all his stamp related files and notes, so they can be on the public record.

His pivotal involvement in buying the entire and outstanding "T. E. Field" collection in 1948, for major client Jack Kilfoyle, and ensuring the Harmer auction of it was cancelled, still ranks as the "Stamp Coup Of The 20th Century". For just £7,500 they secured many of the major rarities of the Australian Commonwealth philately, all in one original collection.

The cables, telegrams, notes, invoices, sale catalogue and letters etc. re that coup, and the subsequent sale in 1961 of the massive Kilfoyle collection, make for fascinating reading, and makes me wish I was born a decade earlier!

Ken is in great shape for 100, and told me today he walks 1 kilometre a day “weather permitting” from his front door to front gate and back, in Robertson, NSW where he now lives. He was able to update me on the data below, and this is his story you see following, in his own words.

His daughter Margaret told me he daily checks his share prices on a computer, and he must surely be the only Centenarian on EARTH who uses a computer? Wife Mona of 46 years had not been in good health for some time, and very sadly, passed away tragically a week or so short of Ken’s milestone.

Dealer for 90 Years

He must be the only person on EARTH to have sold stamps for around 90 years!

Ken, who turned 100 today is as sharp as a tack. His eyesight is not as good as it once was, but neither is mine. (Editor's note – Some years back we gave Ken a free lifetime subscription, and hope we will need to mail them to him for MANY years yet!)

I had a long chat with Ken, and with Kevin Duffy AO, before this went to press. Kevin is a Castlecrag neighbour, and was able to add a few more details to the original data I had.



Abb. 4: Max Stern, Ken Baker and Kevin Duffy. 271 years among them.

Duffy told me his sole dream as a schoolboy was to emulate those stamp dealers in the Royal Arcade in Sydney - like Ken Baker.

Kevin Duffy became Federal President of ASDA on 3 separate occasions, spaced a decade apart - being 1964, 1974 and 1984. He later received the second highest award conferred in the country, an Officer in the Order of Australia (AO) - broadly equivalent to a Knighthood in the old system.

Max Sterns' AM award ranks higher than an OBE (Order Of The British Empire) from the previous awards. (An OBE of course ranked higher than the more plentifully awarded MBE under that system).

Selling his Seven Seas Stamps business in 1980 to Reader's Digest for \$4 million, Kevin would have made ALL those Royal Arcade dealers gasp in wonderment I imagine!

Seven Seas Stamps changed hands many years later, for a fraction of that sum.

Ken Baker is a wonderful gentleman - in the true meaning of that word, and there is not much that has occurred in this business since 1930 that he was not a part of in some way.

Ken and late wife Mona have attended many industry dinners, and they attended several of my dealer Melbourne Cup lunches here at Castlecrag. Ken's long Rolls Royce poked out a full metre from my garage!



Abb. 5: Ken and Mona Baker

So here we go - a remarkable story - in Ken Baker's own words from here onwards:"

Selling for about 90 Years

“I was born in London on February 8, 1912 during the reign of KEVII, in Shoe Lane off Fleet Street - literally within the sound of the Bow Bells. I helped my father in his part time packet-making business whilst very young.

Father used to supply newsagents with cheap stamp packets, a business he commenced before I was born. So from a very early age, I was directly involved with the stamp business. It is very true to say: "I was never without stamps".

When the family migrated to Melbourne in 1923 on a £10 a family new migrant package deal, my father continued in the same line in Australia until his death in 1951. My brother and I took over £400 of debts from this business, and soon learnt there was no profit in stamp packet-making.

My First Stamp Shop - 1928

In 1928 I got a job in a rare book shop in Little Collins Street near the Stanley Gibbons Melbourne premises, which existed there until recently. After a while I was allowed to put some stamps in the window.

Most other dealers in Australia at that time had upstairs shops. The business grew and I later bought the book business. Though I had little knowledge, I needed to make a quick turnover and knew all the stamp collectors of the day who used to meet in my shop.

One day in 1930 I was tipped off by veteran dealer Alf Campe senior that one of my customers was a thief.

I then spread the word, and promptly received a writ for slander demanding £500 (about \$5 million today, I suppose). Imagine being an 18 year old about to lose his business.

Fortunately for me, the legendary collector and legal man Bill Purves sent me to the best barrister in Melbourne. King's Counsel Eugene Gorman (later Sir Eugene) was his name.

I was terrified of the money this would cost, but later learnt that Purves' firm had taken care of it as they retained him on many other briefs. Fortunately that matter was settled out of court the day before it was to go before the judge, for £15 damages and £20 costs.

That was my one and only brush with the law in my lifetime.

In 1930 I also took ads in the very first year of publication of the venerable "Australian Stamp Monthly".

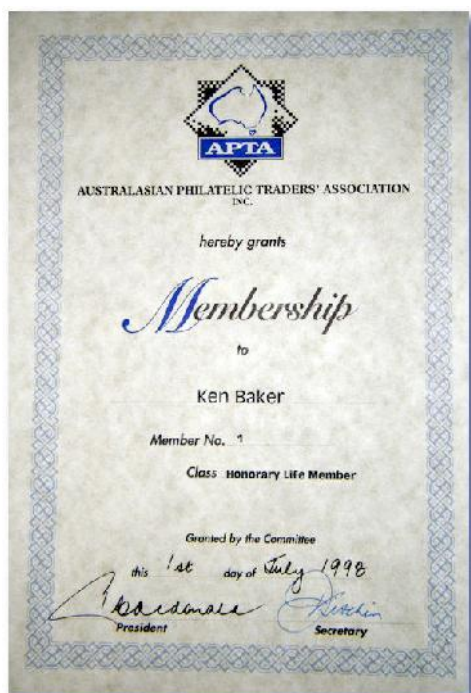


Abb. 6: "Member Number One"

I am proud of my Member Number "1" plaque from the Australasian Stamp Dealers' Association - now known as APTA. I formed that Trade Association in 1948 with Phil Downie and Max Cohen.

Saved By Peanut Butter

In 1933 I drifted away from stamps, but by 1936 was back in Sydney at the back of another bookshop in Bathurst Street - and once again with little money. Luckily it happened to be the year of the ETA Peanut Butter promotion - free stamps with their product.

(ETA war der Name der neuen Erdnussbutter. *red.*)

The album with the Spanish Galleon on the cover was available for sale at all newsagents for 6d. Millions of stamps were given away. This started a boom here that lasted a year or two. Battered childhood ETA albums still turn up all the time, even today. I made annual trips to the UK via the USA buying and selling.



Abb. 7: A battered ETA album.

In 1937 I moved to the (old) Royal Arcade in Sydney and was the first stamp dealer there. Others soon followed including Max Cohen, John Shaiak, Otto Kugel and A.W.Townsend. Alf Campe senior was then operating in the Sydney Arcade, and was one of the biggest dealers in Australia (and I don't only mean weight-wise!) Campe followed us into the Royal Arcade in 1941.

A Mr Moore followed, as did others. The Royal Arcade in those days was truly the "Nassau Street" of Australian stamp dealing, with 6 well stocked dealers all located in one small arcade. The Sydney Hilton Hotel now occupies this once famous site that ran from Pitt to George Streets.

Alf Campe senior used to accuse me of price cutting which I'm sure was true. One day he said that he'd put me out of business in three weeks. Alf then promptly took a shop in the Royal Arcade. Well, Alf Campe senior died 55 years ago, and I'm still here!

Amy Vickery

I remember Miss Amy Vickery who formed the finest collection existing of NSW "Sydney Views" - now residing in the Powerhouse Museum. The Vickery family had immense wealth.

I acquired a large selection of "Views" from a dealer one day, rang her, and was cordially invited to her grand family mansion in Strathfield.

Miss Vickery looked at them for a time, then said politely that she could not buy them as they were her rejects and "lesser copies", that she had recently given to Campe to sell!

I departed from there very downhearted, and got "stuck" with that collection for quite a time. Later I found out that she only dealt with Alf Campe. Alf Campe junior, a well-known Sydney dealer to this day, says "Miss Vickery always believed he had been named in her honour as her middle name was Alfreda, and this greatly pleased her."

I first met Kevin Duffy in the 1940s when he was a schoolboy at Christian Brothers College, Waverley. He had a stall in the playground after school, and he knew then he was always destined to be a stamp dealer. Kevin later moved to a kiosk in the Dalwood Arcade, and afterwards purchased Seven Seas Stamps from Bill Hornadge in 1971. At one time Kevin and I ran a successful stamp auction in Sydney, in the late 1960s.

This was styled "Baker and Duffy Auctions" and was located in Castlereagh Street opposite the location of what was later the Piccadilly Arcade. We later sold this to Phil Downie for a nice profit. Kevin went on to run large and successful Stamp Auctions through the local magazines.

His later sale of 'Seven Seas Stamps' to Reader's Digest in 1980 for around \$A4 million was the biggest transaction in Australian stamp dealing history. Then or now, we still keep in regular touch, and had lunch only last week.

Dubious Bulolo Airmails.

I would source my material from all over the globe. Melbourne dealer Rodney Perry in recent times showed me an envelope with my handwriting, I posted to the PO at Gilbert and Ellice Islands, ordering £4 of current stamps in 1940. The boat carrying that cover was the "Triona". She was sunk by the German Navy. A few pieces of sodden mail were recovered and marked with: "sunk by raider and recovered". Rod tells me he sells these pieces today for \$1,000's. That is a lot more than the face value of £4 of Gilberts new issues I was ordering!

By the way, many months later my order for those New Issues was filled by the PO, as the mail was forwarded on, even in the midst of World War 2.



Abb. 8: Large numbers stolen ex PO

I served three years in the Army (two years in the Torres Strait) during which time my shop was managed by Elsie Bell. I was discharged bearing the rank of Staff Sergeant.

I returned in 1944 and married her in 1945. At this time there was a large quantity of mint £1, £2 and £5 New Guinea Bulolo airmail stamps in the Australian market. It transpired that they had never been near New Guinea, but emanated from stocks which were supposed to be destroyed in Melbourne. A prosecution was launched, but it fizzled out. These are very valuable stamps today, but could be obtained in the trade around that time for below face value.

Stamps were really booming at this time. One Saturday morning the cash register rang up 400 sales! In fact we sometimes had to close the door while we served customers already in the shop. In 1948 I took on Sydney solicitor Bernie Moloney as a partner, forming the Baker & Moloney dealership that flourished for 20 years.

Bernie, Leo Rose and I also ran an auction, "DKL King & Co" for some years. We later sold this to Harmers. They wanted us off the auction scene! In the early 1970s I moved to Norfolk Island for a few years to take advantage of the attractive tax concessions it offered back then.

Best Australian Collection.

I dealt with most of the major collectors as clients, one of whom was wealthy grazier Jack Kilfoyle - who put together arguably the best collection of Australian Commonwealth ever formed. I first met Jack in 1947. Kilfoyle didn't think much of the £50 collection I initially showed him, but I knew John Shaiak next door had a far better one for £4,000 on consignment.

This was the wonderful "Kitson" collection of Australia. The owner Kitson was a Victorian MLC, the Parliamentary member for Ballarat as I recall. When the sale was clinched Shaiak insisted on cash, so I accompanied Jack to the bank to seal the deal.

This was a truly vast sum 60 years ago, especially being all in cash! This transaction started a long and successful client/dealer relationship with Kilfoyle. In 1948 Harmers of London offered the "T.E. Field" collection at auction and I promptly showed Kilfoyle the thick sale catalogue.

There were pages of high value mint Kangaroos in blocks of 4 (or often much larger) including blocks of the £2 in every watermark, and many more £1 Kangaroo bi-colours in blocks, imprints, and monograms etc. Also featured were very extensive die proofs and essays, including all the key Kangaroo issues, and even complete sheets of KGV proofs.

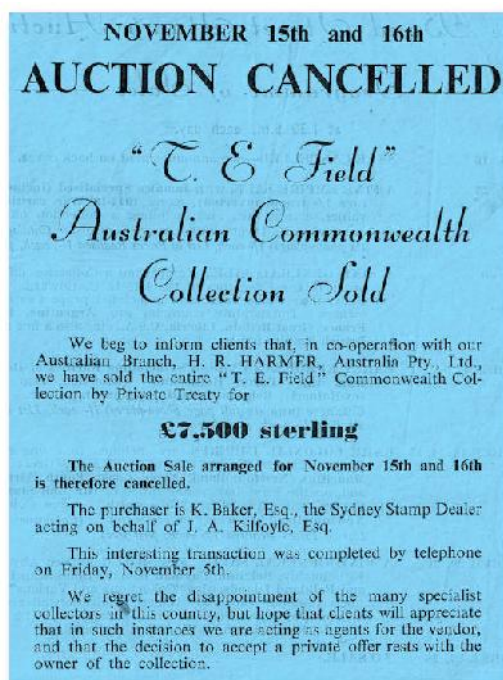


Abb. 9 "Stamp Coup Of The 20th Century".

Field also owned most of the known printing errors and rarities of Australian stamps at that time. I said: "there are some rather nice pieces in here Jack, some of which may interest you". He simply replied: "Yes Ken, but I'd actually like to own the entire auction book - just buy them for me please". Kilfoyle was a very wealthy man! It was then decided that we should make an immediate offer by telegram of £7,500 for the entire auction sale - which was accepted by the family.

When I made the offer Harmers were holding almost no postal bids, and were more than a trifle nervous the sale would not be a success. This was the only stamp auction ever cancelled by Harmers of London, and this caused quite a stir at the time. The bid forms came flooding in by the hundreds from keen collectors after I had secured the lot by telegram. There were no faxes or email then, and phone calls were horrendously expensive to Europe. The rudimentary "air mail" on the 10,000 mile journey to England was rather slow by today's standards.

We beat the wad of Australian based collector bid sheets by several days. Had the auction proceeded, Harmers said it would have grossed a great deal more than £7,500. That same collection today would sell for many millions.

I would describe Kilfoyle as a stamp collector rather than a philatelist, but his collection was worth seeing, nevertheless. Some 64 years on, I still have all the letters and telegrams to and from Harmers confirming the Field sale. And I kept the printed leaflet they sent to very irate collectors advising we had purchased the entire auction intact. All these files I have given to Glen Stephens for safe-keeping.

Sold Tête-Bêche Pair for £250

I bought other choice pieces for Kilfoyle such as the 1928 Kookaburra mini sheet imperforate. Today this is catalogued by the ACSC at \$200,000. However, it fetched only £105 at the Kilfoyle sale in 1961. I bought it back.



Abb. 10 "Sold for 205£ - Twice".

I also sold on two separate occasions the unique KGV head 2d Tête-Bêche pair for £250 each time. I really should have kept it.... today the ACSC lists it at \$A250,000. Who says there is no money in stamps?!

The same comment applies to items such as the 1920 Ross Smith vignette sheets which I have sold for a minute fraction of today's retail levels.

For instance, a Mint block 4 of the First Watermark 1913 £2 Roo with plate varieties sold for only £185, on an estimate of £200 in the 1961 Harmers sale of the Kilfoyle material.

That was just £46 apiece. A single MUH example of that stamp sold for \$A22,500 at the Arthur Gray auction in 2007.

In the late 1940s I bought a large collection of Kangaroos, exclusively values 5/- and up. There were about 400 of the £2 values alone, many mint, with imprints and monograms. It cost me £3,000, a great deal of money in the early post war years. Today it easily would fill an entire major auction catalogue broken down into suitable lots. Jack Kilfoyle purchased it intact off me. When Kilfoyle retired to London his collection comprised some 300 stamp albums.

Kilfoyle's collection was offered by Robson Lowe in early 1961 by Private Treaty, via a Deluxe colour brochure for £35,000, but did not sell.



Abb. 11: \$800,000 dollar back cover

Glen has my original copy of that 4 page colour brochure, and the photo highlights of the collection are mind-boggling. The offered collection was in 130 volumes plus 149 full sheets and 85 panes. 27 volumes were strictly Kangaroos with a myriad of Essays, Proofs and Blamire Young's Die Proofs etc.

The Kilfoyle collection had won 9 Gold Medals - 8 at International Level. There were over 500 x £2 Kangaroos alone offered – many mint and imprint and monograms and blocks. The KGV heads were in 54 volumes. This included Plate proofs, die proofs, essays and original drawings.

Value today of that unsold £35,000 collection would be very many millions – probably way over \$10 million. Who said there is no money in stamps? It was then sold at Public Auction lotted up normally, on 16/17 October 1961 by Harmers London, and I was able to buy back many of the items at less than what he paid.

Glen now has my sale catalogue and all the original invoices, and prices have certainly increased substantially. (Glen's note - the BACK cover alone has pieces Cat about \$800,000!) Just two lots that cost me £345 together at that sale are today in the ACSC at \$A450,000.

H. R. HARMER LTD.
PHILATELIC AUCTIONEERS AND VALUERS
41, NEW BOND ST. LONDON, W.1.

SALE 16/17th October 1961

PURCHASED BY

Mr. K. Baker,
"Myall," Kildare Road,
Doonside, N.S.W.,
Australia.

Kangaroo II-577-34

TERMS	FRONT	NETT	CASH	NO. OF	PRICE	PER	WT.
✓	✓	✓	✓	377	50	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	386	36	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	342	20	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	344	17	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	351	20	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	382	11	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	383	250	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	386	31	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	426	9	10	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	461	42	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	470	240	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	471	15	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	475	5	15	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	479	26	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	486	30	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	501	4	10	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	512	62	10	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	514	72	10	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	518	105	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	523	30	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	530	3	15	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	532	44	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	534	67	10	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	536	5	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	539	22	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	539	42	-	-
✓	✓	✓	✓	565	4	10	-
TOTAL				0/2nd	3782	5	-

E. & C. E. 22/11/56

Abb. 12 #470 & 518 alone, now cat \$A450,000

Kilfoyle had owned a large property called "Rosewood" of nearly one million acres in Western Australia. We do things big in Australia. Many years later my wife and I were on holidays in the Northern Territory and W.A. and drove out to this property, but there was nothing left of the homestead.

Pane of £2 Kangaroos

From 1958 to 1970 I dealt in stamps from Sydney. I lived first at Doonside and later at Darling Point. I met many collectors there, including the young Stewart Wright from Ballarat, now owner of Status International Auctions, and a national string of large numismatic outlets.

I also had a shop at the top of King Street near Queen's Square for some years. One of the major collections I bought was the Holbeach collection, except for his blocks of "Specimen" Kangaroos. Arthur Gray later secured most of them, and they sold for a fortune in recent years.

Holbeach had probably the third best collection of Australia ever formed, and was later the basis of the Abramovich, Nette and Stuart Hardy collections. Stuart Hardy is still alive and well in Adelaide, and I imagine still has most of the record part sheet of 36 x mint £2 Roos I sold him.

If so, it would almost certainly be the most valuable Australian individual stamp piece in existence. My elderly mother bid on my behalf for a complete MUH pane of sixty £2 Kangaroo at Robson Lowe Auctions in 1961. She told me afterwards Robbie Lowe was: 'very courteous, and even arranged for me a nice cup of tea, and a front row seat in the sale room'. I paid £1,200 for this pane of 60, which at £20 per MUH small multiple watermark £2 Kangaroo, was a good buy I have always thought.

I urged Mother not to exceed £1,500, so was very pleased with her novice bidding skills.



Abb. 13 Sold for \$A142,500

Today these stamps nice uncounted mint sell for about \$A10,000 apiece. In fact an imprint block of 4 sold for \$A142,500 in the Arthur Gray auction in 2007.

Stuart Hardy in Adelaide chose not to buy the complete pane, but offered me £30 each for the lower portion of the multiple. I recall him saying a block of 36 (6 x 6) fitted very neatly onto his album page.

He was clever enough to select the lower block, bearing the part John Ash imprint on the selvedge. I feel sure he now wishes he'd spent the other £720 and bought them all!

‘£30 each was a hard sell’

To tell the truth, selling the balance at £30 each was not easy in the early 1960s. How prices have changed. I do recall selling a block of 12 to Dr Les Abramovich.

I moved to Norfolk Island in 1970 and stayed there for about 2 years, still dealing in many things - including stamps of course. Unfortunately my first wife's Elsie's health deteriorated, and she died soon after we moved back to Cooma in 1974.

The ‘Booni’ Years

I later married Mona in 1976, and we lived in London during the "Boom" years of the late 1970s. These were very busy times, there were sometimes two large auctions on the same day - luckily there were two of us to bid!



Abb. 14 Owned a full sheet

I remember some of the big deals I did in those times - sheets of each value of the Great Britain "Seahorses" for £52,000 including the only complete sheet of £1 in existence. A few months later those sheets were worth about five times that sum. Even Royal Mail tried to obtain the £1 as they did not have a full sheet in their archives.

John Curtin of Royale Stamps in London rang me one day to say that an Iranian had sent him a cheque for £250,000, but they were almost out of good stock. Needless to say I helped them out with an array of choice Pacific region material. That was a VERY large sale.

In 1981 I returned to Sydney and I sold much of my stock through Status and Downie Auctions, but kept trading actively. Until a few years back I took out buying ads every day in the Sydney Morning Herald "Stamps and Coins" classified section.

I also enjoyed inspecting many of the lots on offer at the Gibbons and Status Sydney auctions, and located the odd modest bargain.

At one point in this period I purchased Alan Jones' entire stock (who bought the famous M.C.Cohen business and premises) and I traded from his former Sydney shop for some months. During my dealing lifetime I must have bought out dozens of dealers, and many very important complete collections.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my stamp dealing career spanning over 90 years, and the good relationships formed with collectors and dealers around the world.

We are all involved in what is truly the "King Of Hobbies".

Ken Baker

R.I.P. Stamp Dealer Ken Baker. 1912-2016

"Ken's daughter Margaret phoned me January 18, with the sad news her father passed away peacefully in his sleep the evening before, just days short of his 104th Birthday. As Margaret said - "103 years, 11 months and 9 days". Very sad to hear, and he still must have set a record for longevity for any stamp dealer anywhere in the world?"

One of the TRUE old-school Gentlemen of this business, I was honoured to have known Ken for 37 years, and many of the readers of this magazine will have dealt with him for many decades longer than that!

Glen Stephens

Quellenverzeichnis:

- 1) <https://www.glenstephens.com/snmatch12.htm>
- 2) <http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/6532767>The Australasian Stamp Catalogue

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