

# Sea Mail

## **Introduction - A Brief History of Overseas Postal Services to 1874**

**(Taken from an unpublished manuscript by Geoffrey H. Manning titled Glenelg - 1836-1936,  
A Social History - copy in State Library.)**

If a jetty was built at Glenelg a steamer's mail could be delivered in Adelaide within three hours after she came within sight of the signalman at Glenelg and the mail of an outward-bound vessel could remain open in Adelaide to within the hour of her leaving. Under the existing system if a steamer was advertised to [be at] the Lighthouse at 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening her mails would have closed at 11 or 12 o'clock in the morning of that day. Frequently it was necessary to wait until the next day for the mails of a steamer signalled on the previous one, and one or more steamship companies refused to send their boats to Port Adelaide.

(Observer, 20 August 1853, p. 6)

In the early days the service was maintained by sailing ships and among the best known were the clippers of Captain Angel and Messrs Elder, Younghusband and Levi, but there were many others that made occasional trips. The origin of the coastal mail service must certainly be placed to the credit of Glenelg, where Mr Anthony landed ship mails in a whaleboat and, later when steamers took part in mail transport, the service was shifted to Semaphore and conducted from year to year in whaleboats under government supervision. The bags were brought up to the city by road. In 1844 a regular line of sailing packets having been established between Sydney and London, the bulk of the mail matter was, for several years, forwarded by this route and the average time occupied was 158 days.

The first regular steam communication was established in 1852 via the Cape of Good Hope when two steamers maintained a two-monthly service, the contract time from Plymouth to Adelaide being 68 days. The first mail, consisting of 1,799 letters and 3,618 papers, arrived by the Australasian on 29 August. The service was terminated by failure of the company and sailing vessels were again resorted to, until in 1853 when contracts were entered into with the P&O Company for a mail every two months via Singapore.

In 1855 the steamers of this line, and those of the General Screw Steamship Company, with which an arrangement had been made, were taken off in order to convey troops to the Crimean War. Thus, once again colonists were made dependent upon sailing clippers for their letters which were forwarded to Melbourne twice a month. Even when a few years later the British government made a contract with a steamship company, Melbourne was made the distributing centre.

In November 1857, by way of an experiment, Mr Monteith asked a Melbourne correspondent to put a private bag on an outgoing steamer from Melbourne and upon its arrival in St Vincent Gulf a boat was dispatched from Glenelg to intercept it. It was subsequently calculated that a considerable time saving in respect of mail delivery to Adelaide would be effected if they were landed at Glenelg and:

When the jetty is completed the time to be saved will be greater... the mails would be at the GPO three hours sooner... than if taken round by way of the Port... The question... deserves careful consideration at the hands of the mercantile public...

Late in 1857 a contract between the home authorities and the European and Australian Royal Mail Company was discussed to provide for steamers to call at Nepean Bay on Kangaroo Island on the condition that telegraphic communication be established at once with Melbourne, and this was to be effected by laying a cable across Backstairs Passage, thence connecting with the overland telegraph.

This latter venture was not to see the light of day at the time although it was discussed at the highest level within South Australia. Mr M. Symonds Clark recalled:

A little steamer, Corio, met the ships in Nepean Bay and in December 1859 I went to Kangaroo Island with Messrs Sinnett and Flood, who were acting for rival papers in Melbourne, and there was a race to be the first to get the news telegraphed and I recall that racehorses were waiting at Glenelg to take on their despatches to Adelaide. Mr Sinnett had wrapped his writing in waterproof material and attached it to a string and he threw it overboard to expedite it reaching the boat. I do not remember which boat first reached the shore, but Mr Flood's despatch got first to the telegraph office in Adelaide.

The first P&O steamer to come to South Australia was the Chusan, a steam packet of 699 tons and she came up the Port River on 18 September 1858 and created a sensation at the time. During 1860 the P&O Company again appeared as a contractor and kept up a monthly connection between England and the colonies, South Australian bags being delivered at Kangaroo Island. A few years later the route was changed and Adelaide as a port of call was ignored, thus leading the government to establish a branch service between King George Sound, in Western Australia, and Adelaide and this service was maintained for a decade or more at a net cost of £12,000 per annum and "it [was] unnecessary to dwell upon the fact that the eastern colonies received telegraphic European news 40 hours earlier than they would have obtained it had not South Australia established such branch service."

At the International Conference in March 1867, when all Australian governments were represented, it was resolved that "the Adelaide mails by the Suez steamers... be delivered at Kangaroo Island and conveyed from that island to Port Adelaide by a branch steamer."

In 1872 Glenelg was duly initiated as one of the calling places for P&O steamers when the Bangalore arrived on 18 February. Twelve years had elapsed since the smoke of a Company steamer had been seen in the gulf and the last packet to carry a mail direct from the colony to Great Britain was the Malta which left Nepean Bay about the middle of June 1860 and the news that brought about the abandonment of Kangaroo Island as a calling station was the Salsette which arrived on 4 July.

In 1874 a new system was entered upon, the home government carrying the mails as far as Galle, and Victoria maintaining a monthly line between Ceylon and Melbourne at an annual subsidy of £35,000. South Australia had to pay £5,000 per year for the steamers to call at Glenelg. Coincidentally, it was the Bangalore which heralded Glenelg becoming the colony's second port when she was sighted at 5.55 am on 6 February 1874 'and brought up to the hulk, Beatrice.' As for later events a Glenelg citizen asked whether he could be informed as to:

Who has charge of the English mail on its arrival at Glenelg. I noticed this morning that the mail bags lay for a long time on the truck at the end of the jetty, while the railway van was waiting alongside ready to convey them to Adelaide. Alas, no one had authority to touch the precious cargo which had cost so much in its conveyance and in consequence the train, which had already been delayed about ten minutes, was sent away without.

### **Activities at Glenelg - 1874 to 1888**

There was a certain amount of romance, no little danger, and a great deal of exciting experience in connection with the early years of the ocean mail service in the days when the telegraphic and boarding arrangements were, to say the least, primitive. The men engaged in boarding steamers often had lively experiences of what wind and weather could do to make the duties difficult and dangerous, even in the comparatively sheltered waters of Holdfast Bay.

By the mid-1870s the vagaries of the elements were more effectively met by superior facilities for communicating between the city and the roadstead and the risk being less, the romance, what there was of it, had disappeared under the practical hand of progress. Old Adelaideans could remember the time when the Rangatira and other vessels belonging to the Australian Steam Navigation Company brought the mail every month from King George Sound and, to ensure the utmost promptitude, the proprietors of the Argus and Sydney Morning Herald arranged through the Register to charter a fast-rowing boat to meet the steamers on arrival. "Tom Shepherd (sic -Shepard)", a master mariner, had charge of the boat and he was never known to fail in the discharge of his duties.' When safely ashore they were taken to the telegraph office and initialled by the Stationmaster as a guarantee that, on arrival, the messages had precedence over all others.

Then came the road work - there was no railway at the time - and relays of horses were provided along the road for the speedy conveyance of news, as the old-fashioned coaches were not up to the express rates of travelling. The horses were hired from an old identity, John MacDonald, and a smart light-weighted lad who revelled in horseflesh, covered the distance to Adelaide in seventeen minutes - quicker time than the train did when it arrived on the scene.

One horse went to the Halfway House, where a relief horse finished the trip and an onlooker remembered that upon arrival in Adelaide they were "dripping lather and almost ready to drop", while, invariably, there was a small crowd outside to witness the arrival of the express courier charged with world-wide despatches for the newspapers, which spared no trouble or expense to secure the latest English news at the earliest possible moment. The telegraph office for part of the time was at Green's Old Exchange and great was the bustle when the mail arrived, it being thronged with eager pressmen.

The boarding officials were rarely caught napping for, in nautical parlance, they always kept an "eye lifting" and often a false alarm on a dark and stormy night kept them on the quiver. David Shepard recalls:

As the landing of the mails was done by contract for a specified time, different boatmen secured the contract as it was tendered for. Harry Pinnington secured it most times. The landing of the Despatch was not by contract; it was a permanent job for my father. The 'Despatch' was written papers containing the most important news from of England and Europe - such as cablegrams we get now. In those days the submarine cable was not laid to our shores, hence the necessity for news to be carried by steamboats, which had to be watched, day and night, for a whole week before it was due. As a young boy I had to do more than my share of the watching and, if sighted, whatever hour of the night, run for my life from one end of Glenelg to the other to call up those of the boats' crews that preferred their beds to watching. I can say without contradiction that each time the mail steamer was sighted at night, it was I that sighted her ten times out of twelve.

The old hands told of many a wild night at sea and many a jolly evening's vigil in the Pier Hotel kept by the genial Henry Moseley, one of the old pioneers and a veteran of 1836. There were no special Custom officials and press representatives present in the early days and, consequently, the whole party put up at the Pier or watched on the jetty.

The steam launch, Fairy, a smart little sea boat, but not equal to the hard work of facing heavy weather when cautious captains anchored their vessels well out, was next used for boarding work; although a reliable boat, but too small for passenger service, she was succeeded by the Mermaid, a larger and stronger vessel. Bitter were the complaints of overseas passengers or their friends from the shore who made the trip, especially when they had to be slung aboard in chairs.

For passengers landing at Glenelg, it is always a disagreeable and often dangerous business. When the weather is stormy, they have to be swung from the steamer to the launch in chairs and they seldom escaped a ducking on their way to the jetty. While the lightship remained, the steamers could anchor at least a mile and a half nearer to the jetty than they will be able to do in safety now.

On one occasion in bad weather a fond mother was lowered down into the launch without her baby and a sympathetic press man undertook to restore the infant to its mother's arms. He was duly installed in the sling chair and the sailors, out of devilment, ran him right up to the yard arm and, in lowering the precious freight, the leg of the chair went into the Fairy's funnel, but fortunately she was on a subsiding swell and the world was still the richer by a reporter and a baby.

The monthly mail service was followed by fortnightly, and a small fleet of launches attended upon the huge steamers laid on by the P&O Company. South Australia always complained that it was shorn of the advantages of its geographical position and, before January 1874, did not appear to be of sufficient importance in the eyes of the powers that be for the small steamers to deviate. Indeed, the Government had to pay heavily for a branch steamer to meet the mail boat at King George Sound. However, after that date a new arrangement came into force and Melbourne was made the terminus, while Glenelg was the port of call for the delivery of mails.

The Government provided the hulk, Beatrice, in Holdfast Bay at a cost of about £300 per annum and put a light on the jetty, which was afterwards replaced by a lighthouse. The first outward bound steamer to call at Glenelg under the new scheme was the Pera, 2,118 tons, and the occasion of her arrival at the Bay was made a holiday.

The want of arrangements was first seen on a Saturday evening in January 1875 when it was expected that the Ceylon would turn up during the afternoon and there was an unusually large number of passengers from the colony to sail by her. Most of them reached Glenelg with their heavy luggage before 6 o'clock, when their chattels were placed on trucks and taken to the end of the jetty, where they remained. The weary hours wore away and there was no appearance of the steamer.

The passengers wandered about the jetty keeping an eye on their luggage, utterly at a loss to know whether it would be safe to return to the city, or whether they should stay for the night at the Bay. At length the passengers gave up hope of the steamer's arrival, and some returned to town, while others sought indifferent accommodation as the Bay afforded:

The arrangements for allowing passengers to come ashore and spend a few hours are exceedingly defective. The charge for a passage by the Fairy is absurdly unreasonable... The idea which some of our neighbours have of us is that we are a slow 'one horse' colony, and that idea would be confirmed by our reception of the Ceylon and her passengers on Sunday.

In the late 1870s, with the establishment of the railway to Glenelg, there was some antipathy within the colony as to its benefit to the general economy and, in respect of the Bay's ongoing efficacy as a port of call for mail steamers, it was admitted there was ample justification for the government to construct a parallel line without giving compensation to the railway company that had so 'shamefully humbugged the public, damaged the colony in the eyes of visitors and furnished arguments that, in our next negotiations for an ocean postal contract, may be employed against the calling of the English mail steamer at Glenelg.'

The Carthage was the last of the mail steamers to call at Glenelg and from 1888 the P&O Company passed what the Glenelg people called the front door of the colony and called at what they considered the side entrance, namely, Semaphore. The steamers had called regularly for some 14 years and in later years their arrival could be calculated almost to the hour.

### **The Lighthouse Hulk, 'Beatrice'**

In 1874 the Beatrice was placed at Glenelg as a receiving vessel for cargo, etc., 'for which purpose it was seldom used and had never, in the usual acceptance of the term, been a lightship.' A decade later the residents of Glenelg were much troubled with two threatened misfortunes for it was proposed to remove her from Glenelg in February 1886, and it appeared possible that a contract, about to be entered into for the conveyance of mails from Europe to Australia, could alter the port of arrival and departure from Glenelg to the Semaphore.

The determination to remove the Beatrice was the result of the retrenchment policy adopted by the House of Assembly in the reduction of the vote under the head 'Marine'. The cost of maintaining the ship at Glenelg was about £300 per annum, so that the saving to be effected was not very considerable. The convenience which the lightship had been to P&O steamers calling at Glenelg had been acknowledged by nearly all their commanders and much time was admitted to have been saved by the facilities that existed for the picking up of an anchorage as near the shore as practicable and safe.

Naturally, the residents of Glenelg and Largs Bay/Semaphore had divergent opinions on the proposal:

The P&O steamers brought visitors from all parts of the world and it was not in the interests of the colony that they should have to creep and crawl along to an anchorage in entering the front door, as they would have to do if the light was abolished. Captain Stead of the P&O Line ha[s] written a letter to the Mayor stating that the Beatrice was of the greatest use at night in picking up a berth close in, and its removal would entail considerable delay as well as anxiety in choosing an anchorage as near the pier as possible with safety...

The curse of this colony is deputations, or government by deputation, and I am sorry to say the good people of Glenelg have a very fair share of this malady. What rot to say the Beatrice's removal will retard [our] progress... Every desirable facility for shipping is to be obtained at the front door... i.e., Largs Bay... It is saying very little for Glenelg as an anchorage for ocean steamers when it is blazoned abroad that a jetty light is not sufficient to guide mariners to the anchorage, and if Glenelg will not mind me saying so I would advise them to say nothing about the removal of the Beatrice, or if they want an ornament for their front door they had better borrow Noah's Ark.

And here lay the great argument why the Beatrice should not be removed; indeed, to do so would have been a breach of faith and it was difficult to understand why the Treasurer, Mr S. Newland, for the sake of a paltry saving to be effected, persisted in his decision, despite representations made to him:

Mr Newland has paid deputations the compliment of listening - not always patiently... and he has with ill-concealed reluctance consented from time to time to give further consideration to the subject... Had the fate of nations depended upon his remaining true to his first purpose he could not have been more resolute than he has been... We feel bound to protest against the cavalier manner in which he has treated some of the communications...

Certainly the Beatrice should have remained until the current mail contract expired and this was no sentimental view of the case:

The people of Glenelg may be as fond of their Beatrice as Dante was of his, and the country might fairly say, 'We cannot afford to pander to your love for her', but when the honour of the colony was at stake it was another matter and the most pronounced economist would hardly have ventured to argue that it would have been wise to risk so much for the sake of so little.

From correspondence interchanged between the government, the Corporation of Glenelg and shipping companies it was proved clearly that the removal of the vessel would cause great

inconvenience not only to the P&O Company, but also to the public, 'seeing that the majority of steamers will deem it necessary to take up their quarters further from the jetty, where there is a greater risk of rough water.' It was further shown that the action of the Treasurer was tantamount to a breach of faith, for the company had had reason to assume that the Beatrice would, in the future, as in the past, be 'kept within the waters of Holdfast Bay as a beacon to show steamers how near to the shore it was safe for them to go... It is only proper that Glenelg should have fair play...'

Indeed, either the light could be safely dispensed with or it could not. If its removal would have materially increased the danger to vessels approaching Glenelg, then by all means it should have been retained:

It has been suggested that a gas buoy should be substituted for the hulk which has for so long done duty in this bay, but it would appear from a report emanating from the Marine Board that the adoption of this alternative would entail a heavier expense than would be justified. The experiment of using gas in the Port stream was not such an unqualified success as to encourage further outlay in a similar direction. The further suggestion that the people of Glenelg should bear the cost of keeping up the light is not a reasonable one... In this instance notice was given some time ago that the light should be removed. It has not been removed and its retention, although not likely to lead to disaster, may prove misleading to sea captains who, having been informed of the intention to discontinue it, have had no means of learning that a reprieve has been granted it...

Members of the Marine Board contended that in 'ordinary fair weather the jetty light could be seen 3 or 4 miles outside [that of] the Beatrice', while one of its members, Mr Neill, said he had come up the gulf without seeing the Beatrice light and declared, 'She was never intended as a lightship and the reason for her carrying two lights [was] to distinguish her from any other ordinary vessel or hulk. As a lightship she is useless.'

At a meeting of the corporation the action of the government, in refusing to reconsider their determination, was the subject of warm criticism. So necessary was it considered that provision be made for the proper lighting of the harbour that, at a public meeting at Glenelg, Mr J.W. Billiatt moved that the Corporation of Glenelg take immediate steps to maintain under their supervision a fixed light at the anchorage and to open a public subscription list, while in a letter to the Marine Board permission was sought to allow the vessel to remain and the 'light to be exhibited only on the nights when mail was expected from London and Melbourne.' From this activity a voluntary subscription list to defray cost of the vessel was started and about £150 guaranteed by local citizens. But there were other opinions abroad:

It must be admitted that the hulk is not without its uses, but will anyone pretend that it gives value for the £700 a year spent on it? Nothing of the sort. It was originally placed there for a special purpose; that purpose it has never fulfilled and although it, no doubt, does on the rare occasion when the P & O Company's boats have to approach Glenelg on a dark night act as a guide to them.... It is certain that they would be able to take up their positions without its aid... By means of the jetty light and the Port lighthouse the captains will be able to tell where they are with the utmost nicety... We hope that a time is not distant when the steamers will have a more convenient and comfortable place to lie in rough weather than the open roadstead at Holdfast Bay.

In February 1886 the Beatrice was removed from Holdfast Bay and taken to Port Adelaide for repairs and, following an act of contrition by the government, the steamer, Lady Diana, towed the ketch Sailor Prince to Glenelg where 'she was to show the light as usual.' At a later date 'the government ordered the vessel to Glenelg again' after repairs were completed and the Marine Board commented that 'they were pleased that she could be repaired for so small an amount.'

Glenelg versus Semaphore and Largs Bay

In 1876 the commander of the P&O ship, Sumatra, was ordered by his superiors to examine the Semaphore anchorage and decide if that place would be better adapted for the transshipment of mails.

Later, he called on the Premier and informed him that 'he could see no reason for going to the Semaphore in preference but saw many for not doing so.'

An ardent 'Glenelgite', working himself into a sense of excitement over the difficulties in landing the mails, especially as exemplified in the Sumatra's visit in June 1876, sent the following poem to 'Geoffrey Crabthorn' of the Observer, who added that, 'perhaps Mr Wigley will act on our hint':

I don't go for squaring the circle,  
By Euclid I'm euchred and done;  
No problem I ever can work 'll  
Give rightly the height of the sun.  
I never was tutored at college  
The stars with a glass to explore;  
And of practical things I've no knowledge  
Save what I pick up on the shore.

But although no subtracter or adder  
I can reckon up things as they go,  
And manage to see through a ladder  
As well as most folks that I know.

I can see that Glenelg has small shelter  
For vessels if storms will arise;  
And if waves roll ashore helter-skelter  
I do not give way to surprise.

The wind has a fanciful notion  
Of playing up games with the sea,  
And when waves are in mighty commotion  
No boating, I thank you, for me.

I can see that when P&O steamers  
Drop anchor some three miles away  
In a storm, there's a chance of some screamers  
In getting on board from the Bay.

Yet it's little that people need suffer  
If the steamers would come within reach,  
For e'en at Glenelg its much rougher  
Outside than close to the beach.

Full half of the Fairy's disasters  
Are due, I believe, to the fact  
That the P&O company's masters  
Are wanting in smartness and tact.

They pretend to dispute the existence  
Of good anchorage close to the Bay;  
But if they would come half the distance  
They'd find things areas we say.

Of such offerings we well may be wearied,  
When the Pearl anchored inside the hulk  
Within half a mile of the pier head -  
A feat for a craft of her bulk.

Then let Wigley get up a memorial,  
And pray the Pearl's course they will follow!  
If not Glenelg's nascent glory 'll  
Vanish in storm with the swallow.

In defence of Semaphore as a mailing station a biased resident of that district reminded the citizenry of a happening at Glenelg in September 1876 when:

The great difficulty of landing English mail and passengers from the P&O Company's steamer, China, the impossibility of landing cargo, and even passengers' baggage which has been taken on to Melbourne, and the danger to life and limb, all might have been avoided if the mail steamer had been snugly berthed under the shelter of Wonga Shoal. Our friend, Captain Jagoe, was cruising off the Semaphore in an open boat in the same weather, far outside the bell buoy... Our prestige must seriously suffer by such occurrence... We have no business to incur such risks...

In July 1877 Mr Sinclair, a former Mayor of Port Adelaide, moved in the House of Assembly for the removal of the English mail steamer from Glenelg to the Semaphore. Taking umbrage at this turn of events a public meeting was held in the Pier Hotel, where the Mayor, Mr W.R. Wigley, said that such a move would delay mails by up to three hours and suggested that 'in rough weather the steamer would not get within five miles of the Semaphore jetty.'

The reason for the proposed transfer was that some merchants of Adelaide had difficulty in getting their goods through Glenelg; however, the public 'thought it more important that they should get their letters [as early as possible]'. Another caustic comment from Glenelg was that 'when overseas visitors stepped off the jetty at Semaphore there was nothing to be seen but a desert of sand... whereas at Glenelg there was a fine hotel that would do credit to London, a fine Institute and other conveniences for those who had to wait for a train...'

At the meeting, the local member, Mr William Townsend, MP, said that at a conference on 21 June 1869 he moved that the mails be landed at some place in South Australia and on 23 February 1873, at conference held in Sydney on the same subject, Sir Henry Ayers, as Chief Secretary of South Australia, got a clause inserted into the postal contract that the mail should be landed at Glenelg, and he 'meant to enquire in Parliament why he had changed his opinion since he went... to Sydney.'

The pro-Glenelg brigade won the day and there the matter rested for over twelve years when, in 1885, an agreement was entered into that mail boats, other than the P&O line which was contracted to utilise Glenelg, should call at the Semaphore, but subsequent representations by the government to Home authorities said that the paragraph in the mail contract naming Semaphore as the landing place 'might be required by the colony to be altered ... to Glenelg...' Accordingly, a public meeting was held in the Semaphore Institute on 16 October 1885 with respect of landing mails and passengers from ocean steamers:

The good people of Semaphore have good reason to complain of the obstructions that have been placed in the way of giving effect to their reasonable request for improved arrangements for the landing of mails from their jetty.

In a report in September 1886 the Marine Board stated that it was unnecessary to maintain the two mail stations manned at that time. Further, the board contended that Semaphore as a port of embarkation and disembarkation was inconvenient and caused serious delays during squally weather because the railway could not run to the end of the jetty. The choice, therefore, lay between Glenelg

and Largs Bay and, having carried out several exercises with different ships, recommended Largs Bay. At about this time a landing of passengers at Semaphore was described by an opponent of the proposed change:

The night was a caution to fair weather sailors... A steam cutter was afloat to land the pilot and others from the Catterthum. To get lines fast was one thing, but to land people quite another, as the cutter was hauled round and breasted up to the landing stage. She rolled and pitched furiously, and the people had to make a kind of flying leap over another cutter before reaching the stage. This was very risky, especially when one person of more portly form had to balance on the top of the gunwale for a second or so before taking the final leap...

Negotiations continued into 1887 with the government all but committed to landing mail at Largs Bay but, being unable to come to satisfactory terms with the directors of the private railway company operating the line, the decision was taken to land 'the mails at Semaphore as heretofore.'

Following further representations, early in 1888 it was determined that mail steamers should call at the Semaphore anchorage on and after 2 April 1888 and for it to be optional whether the mails were landed at Largs Bay or Semaphore. This was the death knell for Glenelg and one of its avid defenders, Samuel Tomkinson, castigated his fellow 'Glenegites' in February 1888:

I know that the Hon. Treasurer believes the change will be in the interests of the economy, that a savings will be made in customs, in maintaining the Beatrice, in throwing the traffic upon the Government railways, and in working the Largs line, now losing £1,500 a year... I am astonished at the apathy of the Glenelg people; neither the railway directors, the corporation, the tradesman nor working men and property owners have lifted hand or voice to prevent what is to them an act of spoliation. They must have forgotten the exertions which were made thirty years ago by J.B. Neales, R.B. Colley, A. Scott, F.C. Singleton and, I think, Mr Wigley, to obtain a supplementary mail for the ocean steamer.

The latter gentleman has evidently collapsed under the Patawalonga fiasco, but I remember that in 1859 when a north-west gale prevented the Corio embarking the mail at Glenelg they manned a cutter and pursued me to near Kangaroo Island under a mistaken belief that I was the cause. The boat had to turn back with the mails, but the attempt showed the superior pluck of the 'old Glenelgs'. I am quite sure that the commanders of the P&O fleet will find that a change has been made for the worse.

The transfer of venue being effected a controversy arose between the two 'camps' at Semaphore and Largs Bay:

When the German steamer arrived the mails were brought up to Semaphore, but were not allowed to be landed and had to be taken over to Largs Bay. The train was missed, and the mails delayed... The Cuxo's passengers were brought over to the Semaphore jetty to meet their friends and they were not allowed to land but were taken to Largs Bay and had to walk back.

Incensed at this ridiculous state of affairs a public meeting was held in the Semaphore Institute following which a deputation waited upon the Treasurer and asked that that all ocean mails be handled at Semaphore, thereby 'concentrating business on the Government jetty and railway.' Subsequently, the rails were altered on the Semaphore jetty to an increased width for the accommodation of the carriages. These were drawn by horses from the jetty and then hooked onto an engine at the site of the Semaphore station.

Finally, it was reported that the landing of mails at Semaphore instead of at Largs Bay was a thing of the near future and that 'the residents in the vicinity are in high spirits over the proposed change.' The mail contract came up for renewal in 1890 and, once again, following lobbying from various interests, the government decided to return operations to Glenelg, but there were other opinions being put abroad:

The sale of the Largs Bay Company by auction is to take place on 17 December 1890 and it will be for the government to decide whether they will become the purchasers of the jetty and railway and thus be enabled to continue landing and embarking of mails as heretofore, or run the risk of having this avenue of traffic closed before they have provided for another... It is considered the wisest policy to adopt the Semaphore with its disadvantages as the future place of transfer for the mails.

Vacillating again, and with a change of government, a Commission, consisting entirely of politicians, was appointed to inspect the Semaphore, Glenelg and Largs Bay jetties and to 'enquire into the best means for making the provision for the landing and embarking of mails for Europe.' The commission reported that 'it was shown that there were fairly sufficient facilities provided at Largs Bay jetty for the landing the ocean mails as well as for enabling passengers to come ashore.'

A more misleading, if not a more absolutely incorrect, statement could not have been made. If it was based on the evidence taken it was more than certain that the Commission was deceived and the fact that the body consisted of politicians having no special knowledge under enquiry, did not exonerate it from the charges levelled against it.

If the members had relied less on hearsay testimony and the opinions of interested persons and had gone to the trouble of making personal inspections and instituting a little private enquiry, the results of their labours would have been less open to objection. They never saw the actual landing or embarking of a single passenger or the handling of the mails. Indeed, if they had done so no misrepresentations would have been found in their report:

Practically, the mails are handled on the same principle that Noah adopted in getting his valuable cargo aboard the Ark. There is a difference, however, Noah's system was more expeditious. The men who carry the mailbags walk in a well-measured funeral step and do not go in pairs...

Finally, having accepted the recommendations emanating from the Commission the Government committed itself to purchase the jetty and railway belonging to the Largs Bay Company:

It is satisfactory to know that a jetty which at first should not have been constructed by private enterprise but by the government has become the property of the State. Its situation ensures its being an important feature in any future outer harbour arrangements...

Of interest was the fact that the contract to deliver mails, at what was known as 'Adelaide Semaphore', provided that the mails be delivered at either Semaphore or Largs Bay jetty and, in its wisdom, the government opted for the latter as the main landing place because 'the evidence showed that the Semaphore jetty for a similar service was insufficient.'

However, the sins and transgressions of the Commission were evident when a newspaper report revealed that at Largs Bay:

There is absolutely no shelter provided for the passengers and they are exposed to all weathers and, more inconvenient still, they are obliged to produce their luggage for examination by the customs officers on the open jetty. There are only two landing stages provided for the launches, one facing north, and the other running east and west. The former during northerly and westerly gales is absolutely useless... It is not an uncommon sight to see a crowd of passengers compelled to struggle over one, two, or perhaps three launches in order to reach the jetty... The present facilities are disgraceful in the extreme... We are informed that owing to inadequate facilities at Largs the German Line steamer did their work from the Semaphore.

The contract with the P&O Company concluded on 31 January 1895 and, prior to its renewal, it was said that 'as far as the delivery of the mails and in respect of passenger traffic Glenelg, would be the nearest and quickest.' However, the ocean mail steamship companies took into grave consideration in tendering for mail services the extent of the cargo carrying trade and any interference with that would have had the effect of at once raising the cost of the postal service. As Glenelg could not be so economically handled on account of increased cost of lighterage as compared with the Semaphore anchorage, no changes were forthcoming.

And so, the saga continued with Largs Bay remaining as the venue for the anchorage, while on occasions gangways continued to be smashed by heaving launches and passengers transferred by the less dignified but decidedly safer means of baskets. There was many a drenching with spray.

Before it was decided to construct an Outer Harbour at Light's Passage there were many people who conscientiously believed that the better site could be found in the vicinity of Marino. However, this suggestion was strongly condemned by leading authorities on harbour work administration.

'No more is the front door of South Australia a wicker basket. Thank God that reproach is now removed', were the remarks of the Engineer-in-Chief, Mr A.B. Mais, the designer, and director of the Outer Harbour works when, on 16 January 1906, the new harbour was officially declared open for the accommodation of large overseas vessels by the Governor of South Australia, Sir George LeHunte. The first mail steamer to berth was the Orient liner, Oruba.

Thus, the long-contemplated chief essential to a first-class port - an up-to-date harbour accommodation for the large ocean-going vessels - had been provided and in order to attract more tourists the Marine Drive was commenced, while at the same time sundry combatants at Glenelg, Semaphore and Largs Bay laid down their arms and turned their attention to less mundane subjects such as 'mixed bathing' on beaches.

#### General Notes

"Old Time Memories - Early English Mail Services" is in the Register, 18 April 1916, page 7a.

"The New [Overseas] Mail Contract - The Old and the New" is in the Observer, 5 February 1898, page 15a.

"The Ocean Postal Service" is in the Observer, 9 August 1856, page 5g,

"The Steam Postal Question"

20 and 27 June 1857, pages 3a (supp.) and 4g; also see

24 October 1857, page 6f,

28 November 1857, page 6f,

26 December 1857, page 6c,

2 and 16 January 1858, pages 5c and 5c,

6 February 1858, page 5f,

5 and 19 June 1858, pages 6c and 6b,

3 July 1858, page 5e,

7 and 28 August 1858, pages 1b (supp.) and 7c,

2 and 23 October 1858, pages 6c and 6e,

5 March 1859, page 6d,

21 July 1860, pages 5e-6a,

10 and 31 May 1862, pages 6c and 5d.

"The Landing of the Mails" is in the Observer, 14 November 1857, page 1d (supp.),

9 April 1859, pages 4f-1e (supp.).

"The Ocean Postal Service" is in the Observer,

8 March 1873, page 13a,

"Ocean Mail Contracts" on

21 June 1873, page 12f,  
"Boarding the Mail Steamers" on  
13 June 1874, page 8b,  
"Ocean Mail Contract" in the Express,  
23 October 1878, page 3b.  
Also see Express,  
11 February 1891, page 4f and under Place Names - Largs and Semaphore.

"The Ocean Mail Service" is in the Register,  
15 April 1884, page 4d,  
"The Ocean Mail Service and the Orient Company" on  
16 August 1884, pages 4h-1b (supp.); also see  
8 September 1885, pages 4h-6e,  
8 and 27 October 1885, pages 4g-7b and 6c (history of ocean mails),  
6 January 1886, page 5a,  
3 February 1886, page 5a,  
18 and 20 May 1886, pages 4e and 4h,  
18 June 1886, page 5h,  
10 September 1886, page 4f,  
18 December 1886, page 4e.

Information on sea-mail contracts is in the Register,  
27 October 1885, page 6c.

"An Ocean Mail Port" is in the Register,  
9 February 1886, page 4g.

Also see Register,  
5 February 1887, page 4d,  
26 and 31 March 1887, pages 4f and 4e,  
9 and 21 April 1887, pages 4g and 4f,  
6 May 1887, page 4f,  
4 and 24 June 1887, pages 5a-6a and 4g,  
15 August 1887, page 4f,  
19 September 1887, page 4e,  
5 November 1887, page 4f,  
6 and 12 January 1888, pages 4h and 4h-6a,  
2 February 1888, page 5b,  
9 July 1888, page 4g,  
18 April 1890, pages 4e-6d.

"The Australian Mails - The Old and the New" is in the Register,  
2 February 1898, page 6d,  
"HM Mails - Liners 50 Years Ago and Now" on  
12 February 1910, page 6d,  
"Old-Time Memories - Early English Mail Services" in the ,  
18 and 22 April 1916, pages 7a and 6c,  
Observer,  
29 April 1916, page 44c.