

THE HISTORY OF THE CUSTOMS UNIFORM

1. INTRODUCTION

The Customs uniform has an interesting history, spanning the time before Federation, to the present day. The history of the uniform is somewhat chequered - from its elaborate colonial beginnings, to a minimal presence, and then to the formulation of a full Customs uniform in the later half of the twentieth century.

The research in the document is intended to give an insight into the history of the Customs uniform, giving the reader an opportunity to not only learn of what was worn by Customs officers, but the background behind the uniform – from procedures and policy, to correspondence and consultation. It is by no means exhaustive; rather, it is a working document.

2. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The research was completed from March until June 1999.

The document focused on two significant areas of the Customs uniform – the uniform itself and Customs badges.

The research involved examining primary material – such as archival documents, Customs documents, speaking with people working within the Australian Customs Service, speaking with people outside of the organisation and examining photographs. It also involved examining secondary material, such as books and articles.

The research deliberately concentrated on earlier periods of the Customs uniform, as changes that are more recent are well documented. It is important to note the pieces of the uniform mentioned throughout the report, as this will not only help to identify pieces of the Customs uniform already in the possession of the organisation, but will help to further research and collection of such items.

The research is presented in a chronological manner.

The research was conducted as thoroughly as resources and time permitted. As such, it should be noted that parts of research missing may appear to be missing. This was an unavoidable consequence of researching the area, given that not all information on the Customs uniform was documented, and some material is missing. This factor should be kept in mind while reading the report.

3. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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4. FINDINGS

There were several findings from the research. They are listed below:

- The Customs uniform went through several stages
 - Pre Federation it was developed by each colony and was known to be elaborate
 - The pre Federation information available on the Customs uniform was surprisingly well documented
 - Photographic evidence of colonial Customs officers was very useful
 - Although evident in photographs, no real information could be found on the Customs badges prior to Federation
 - Information was unearthed on some of the more unusual Customs badges
 - From Federation, the Commonwealth did not supply the uniform, except in limited circumstances
 - There were inconsistencies in the supply of the Customs uniform.
 - The Customs uniform post Federation was rudimentary until the development of a national policy
 - Much correspondence and even legal involvement ensured that the procedure to develop a full national uniform took nearly fifty years after Federation
 - The Customs uniform has recently changed
- There was limited reference to the Customs uniform in written material. The most fruitful research was through examining file documents supplied by the Western Australian Customs History officer. As such, there are numerous references to proposed pieces for the Customs uniform, which are only referred to the once. This is due to missing file documentation.
- Previous titles for Customs officer positions were referred to throughout the research
- There are areas for future research:
 - Port Adelaide Maritime Museum (some material was sent there fifteen years ago)
 - Other retired Customs officers, history officers, and their associations
 - A nationwide call for information from within the organisation (through emails requesting further information)
 - State based National Archives
 - State Museums and Archives
- The information available in this report should be used to identify current pieces of the uniform in the possession of the organisation, and to further research other uniform pieces.

5. BEFORE FEDERATION

Before Federation in 1901, the Australian colonies had maintained their own Customs uniforms. The Customs uniform varied according to each colony, with dress code dependant upon colonial influences. This is clearly demonstrated when comparing New South Wales and Western Australian practices before Federation, and the photographs taken before Federation (see later in the report).

New South Wales

In 1827, several cases of assault were reported when Customs officers tried to assert their authority. This was attributed, in part, to a lack of a uniform to identify Customs officers. The *Sydney Gazette* suggested that in order to prevent confusion, Customs officers should wear some identifying insignia. The paper added that the lack of identification could enable strangers to masquerade as 'Customs-House officers'.

From this statement it can be assumed that Customs officers wore little or no identifying, or easily identifiable insignia or uniform. No further reference was made whether the comments from the *Sydney Gazette* were acted upon.

In 1829 the Collector of Customs for New South Wales, Michael Cotton, requested Governor Darling to enlist convicts to act as revenue men, in an attempt to curb smuggling. Cotton suggested that the men wear:

- A blue jacket
- Duck trousers
- White shirt and duck frock
- Black handkerchief
- Straw hat
- Shoes

Two sets of the uniform were to be issued. He also suggested that a crown and the word 'Customs' be marked on the left arm to signal their role as revenue men. The proposal for a new cutter was initially rejected, but on appeal to London, Cotton was successful¹. No further mention was made of what was worn by the crew. It could be surmised that the proposed uniform was adopted.

It could also be surmised that the proposed uniform was based on other pieces of the Customs uniform worn by Customs officers of the day. The suggestion to mark a crown and Customs on each officer suggests that other non-convict Customs officers may have worn similar markings or badges.

In 1859, the Collector of Customs, William Duncan, had required officers to be in uniform whilst on duty. No mention was made of what was worn, however, by 1882 the new Collector James Powell reiterated the Tide Surveyors of Duncan's 1859 instruction. In order to achieve compliance, Powell advised the Tide Surveyors

"That the wearing of the Customs button on coats and waistcoats may be considered sufficient provided that a cap with band and crown be worn by officers when on duty."² (That instruction was reiterated in 1882 due to salary capping which had led to low morale)

The comments by Powell show that hat and badge were important parts of the Customs uniform. This is a common theme throughout history of the Customs uniform.

There is photographic evidence of New South Wales Customs officers in uniform taken around this period. Please see photo appendix.

In 1899 the New South Wales Customs boatmen wore

"A serge jumper, a pair of trousers and an overcoat, topped off with a Panama hat and ribbon emblazoned with 'HM Customs'"³

Standards in uniform continued to fall, as by January 1900 the Tide Surveyor complained that the Tide Waiters lacked uniformity in their dress. As there was no prescribed uniform, the Tide Surveyor suggested to the Collector of Customs, Nicholas Lockyer that the Tide Waiters' uniform ought consist of:

"A blue serge suit with double breasted coat having 4 Customs buttons on each side, the waistcoat to have small sized Customs buttons, cape [sic] of a selected pattern with badge and a helmet for summer wear."⁴

No further information was available on this point, however, the clothing suggested may have been based on pieces already in existence, particularly the cap and badges.

In summary, New South Wales Customs officers, did eventually have a uniform to wear, although they were sometimes sanctioned for failing to the uniform correctly. The evidence shows that different levels of officers wore different uniforms, and that the uniform consisted of numerous pieces, and identifying insignia.

Western Australia

In January 1879, Sir Harry Ord, the Governor of Western Australia, suggested that Customs officers should wear a uniform, as part of an overall organisation of the department. The Collector of Customs at Fremantle, Leonard Clifton, only agreed to the Landing Waiters at Albany, Fremantle and Champion Bay wearing 'an inexpensive distinguishing dress'.

In April 1879, a uniform was adopted for the Landing Waiters at the three ports. It consisted of:

" A blue cloth (serge) and single breasted frock coat with 4 or 5 brass buttons inscribed with 'Customs WA'. The Hat - a white helmet in summer and a blue cloth cap in winter surrounded with a black ribbon bearing in gold 'HM Customs WA'."⁵

The description shows how the Customs uniform reflected the colony represented.

Although little written documentation was uncovered on the uniform of Western Australian Customs officers, there is valuable photographic evidence for this period. Please see photo appendix

The unique characteristics of the uniform in colonial Western Australia are also evident in Appendix A.

Tasmania

Although no written material was unearthed, a photograph of Customs staff in uniform was taken in Launceston in 1888. Please see photo appendix.

South Australia

Again, no written material could be found on the Customs uniform in South Australia. There is however photographic evidence that shows Customs officers in Port Adelaide in 1888. Please see photo appendix

Port Darwin

No written research could be found, although a photograph is evidence of a tropical Customs uniform. Please see photo appendix.

6. FEDERATION AND BEYOND

The Federation of the Australian colonies in 1901 meant that the Commonwealth was now responsible for the administration of Customs, under the auspices of the Department of Trade and Customs.

The Early Twentieth Century

There is very little mentioned about the uniform in the first few years of Federation. The earliest reference to uniforms in the twentieth century was the 1909 General Orders. In that edition, the new Commonwealth prescribed that:

" Where it was the practice prior to Federation to provide uniform [sic] for certain boatmen and officers of similar grade, such practice may continue, but new appointees must provide uniform at their own expense."

Furthermore, the General Orders stipulated that

"Officers who are required to wear the official badge must do so on the hat or cap. The practice of wearing the badge on the coat or vest is not permitted."

There is also a reference to the clothes worn by officers doing searchers' duty. The General Orders stated that

" Suits of overall clothing (dungaree jumpers and trousers) may be kept available at the Head-quarters in each State, to be used as required by officers doing searchers' duty."

Obviously a cap and hat, and vests and coats made up part of the uniform, but no mention was made whether the vests or coats were officially or unofficially part of the uniform.

The 1909 policy of the Department of Trade and Customs (that employees were to supply their uniforms at their expense) was very different to the policy of the colonies. The colonies had supplied the uniform to Customs officers, and had done so without cost to the employee (evident from further documentation referred to later). Financial reasons would undoubtedly have been the reason for the policy - a policy that caused many problems for the Commonwealth over the years.

The policy to continue to supply uniforms to some previous state employees and not others or new appointees, led some to lobby the Comptroller-General to change the policy. In 1913, a Minute Paper was sent to the Comptroller-General from the Collector of Customs in Queensland, petitioning for the supply of uniforms for Engine Driver Key, Coxswain Kelly and Boatman Sheehan who had had their uniforms supplied before Federation. The Collector asked that the Commonwealth continue to supply the uniforms of the mentioned gentlemen ("without unfairly discriminating between this and other states" he added), due to their small salaries and the perceived hardship.⁶ The decision to stop supplying the uniform to previous state employees led one boatman (J or I Thurnan) to personally lobby the Queensland Collector of Customs.⁷

In response to state lobbying, the Comptroller-General sought advice from other Commonwealth agencies on their practice to supply uniforms to their officers. No further mention was made.⁸

The South Australian Collector of Customs also wrote to the Comptroller-General, supporting requests made by the Customs and Excise Association. The Association requested that Customs Assistants and Boarding Officers have their caps supplied by the Department as Customs officers were required to display their badges but were compelled to buy their own caps. The Collector added that "both uniforms and caps are understood to be supplied to Boarding Officers in Melbourne", and that the supply of uniforms was "done in state days".⁹ The statement reflected the inconsistencies in the Commonwealth policy on the supply of *some* parts of the uniform to *some* officers in *some* states.

The Reason for dispensing with the colonial uniform on Federation

A 1914 Minute Paper from the Comptroller-General to the South Australian Collector of Customs stated that the decision to dispense with all uniforms worn by Customs officers (except the hat bands or ribands which were allowed by Waterside Officers) at Federation was influenced by the elaborate uniforms worn in some states. Presumably the financial cost to supply the uniform, would have been a drain on the finances of the Commonwealth.

The Comptroller-General also stated that the hat bands were retained for the Waterside Officers because of their contact with the public. The Comptroller-General said that in the future, Waterside Officers needed some further official mark, and he recommended that all Waterside Officers dealing with the public also be issued with caps.¹⁰

The 1914 General Orders

The 1914 General Orders showed that the 1909 policy of supplying uniforms to certain boatmen and officers, was still in force. The General Orders also stipulated that

"Boarding Officers and other Waterside Officers are required to wear the official badge on the cap (which is to be supplied by the Department). The wearing of the badge on the coat or vest is not permitted".

Interestingly, the General Orders omitted the reference to the hat - only referring to the cap. It could be assumed that the hat was no longer part of the uniform.

The 1914 General Orders also referred to clothing for certain officers. It stated that:

"(1) Suits of overall clothing (dungaree jumpers and trousers) may be kept available for use as required by officers doing searchers' duty
(2) Searchers and Watchmen, Assistant Searchers and Watchmen, and Launch crews are to be supplied with oilskin overcoats".

From the 1914 General Orders, it could be assumed that new pieces of the uniform had been introduced since 1909. Furthermore, it could be interpreted that the Department was beginning to supply some pieces of the uniform to officers other than those eligible under the 1900 General Orders. Although this is an assumption, subsequent General Orders, which were similarly worded, may support the assumption (see the 1927 General Orders).

Petition for peaked caps

In July 1915, there was a call for the introduction of peaked caps for Customs officers working on the Customs launch. The Secretary of the Port Adelaide district of the Trades and Labor Council, Mr Frank Condon, wrote to the Minister of Trade and Customs, Mr Frank Tudor, to request that peaked caps be provided for the said officers, primarily to protect the face. Interestingly, the writer added that the officers would be prepared to supply their own caps if expense was a problem.¹¹ The Comptroller-General responded, stating that

"...Coxswains shall be supplied with peaked caps and badges, Drivers with peaked caps only, and the rest of the crew with caps worn by 'Blue Jackets' (round naval caps) in winter, and straw hats in summer".¹²

The Minute Paper regarding the wearing of peaked caps stipulated that the peaked caps were issued to the Coxswains, and round naval caps were issued to the rest of the crews. In addition, a ribbon bearing the words 'Australian Customs' was also supplied for use on both classes of caps. The title 'Australian Customs' was different to the previous title of 'HM Customs'.¹³ Interestingly, the reference to 'HM Customs' reappeared on the Customs badges in later years.

Petitioning for a uniform supplied by the Department continues

The New South Wales branch of the General Division Officers' Union of the Department of Trade and Customs of Australia also petitioned the Collector of New South Wales for uniforms to be supplied to the Customs launch crews. Reference was made to some officers in Newcastle being provided with "serge jumpers and trousers and a Panama hat", as a privilege carried over from their transfer to the Commonwealth. The writer also referred to dungaree suits being supplied to officers when engaged in searching duties.¹⁴

A memo from the Boarding Inspector of New South Wales to the New South Wales Collector of Customs, examined the financial expense to supply a uniform that consisted of a jumper, a pair of trousers and a cap. In October of 1915, the Collector of Customs in Queensland wrote to the Comptroller-General, who stated that the cost to supply a blue serge patrol jacket, two pairs of trousers and a cap for four men and two boys would be £25/4/-.¹⁵ The financial expense was a concern to the Commonwealth, which is demonstrated in quite negative file correspondence from the Commonwealth to the states.

The wheels begin to turn

In late October, 1915 the Comptroller-General asked that a photo be taken of the uniformed officers at Newcastle, to determine the suitability for crews of Customs launches. In a memo from the Acting Collector of Customs in Victoria to the Comptroller-General, the Comptroller-General was sent photos of the uniformed Newcastle officers. The photographs were accompanied with a suggestion that the Coxswain's coat and vest might be brass buttoned (anchor pattern sewn on); that a straw hat be worn in summer ("similar to that worn in the navy"), and that a black handkerchief be supplied.

The Comptroller-General agreed that the Newcastle uniform ought to be adopted, except for the Panama hat, which was to be replaced by a peak cap with metal lettering.¹⁶ Research from the file documents suggests that the Panama hat be replaced by a peaked cap with metal lettering and that hats, ribbons, serge trousers and jumpers were to be part of the uniform for the crews of the Customs launches.¹⁷

In late 1915, the Collector of Customs in Victoria was sent information about the supply of uniforms. The letter referred to a Seamen's uniform; supply from the company in question was to consist of¹⁸ -

- Caps without ribbon
- Collar
- Shirt
- Jumper
- Trousers

The supply of the Petty Officers' uniform was quoted based on -
Cap without badge

Suit single breasted, rough serge, plain buttons
Suit double breasted, rough serge, plain buttons
Suit single breasted, twill, plain buttons
Suit double breasted, twill, plain buttons

In late November 1916, the General Division Officers' Union of the Department of Trade and Customs petitioned the Comptroller-General to supply uniforms for Launch crews. They demanded that:

"All officers of Launches to be supplied with uniforms.
Coxswains to be supplied each year with a cap, badge, oilskin coat, sou-westerns, sea-boots and two uniforms.
Boatmen, deckhands and boys on launches to each be supplied each year with a cap, badge, oilskin suit, sea-boots and 2 or 3 suits of uniform.
Engine drivers to be supplied with a cap, badge, 2 suits, overalls and one blue suit.
Launch crews to be supplied with overhauls [sic] when required for searching duties.
Searchers and Watchmen to be supplied each year with cap, badge, oilskin coat for 2 years, overhauls when required.
Quarantine Officers engaged in launch duties to be supplied with oilskins, sou-westerns and sea-boots.¹⁹

This information showed that there were many Customs officers involved in operational positions. The reference to Quarantine officers also shows that such officers were once the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Customs.

In a subsequent Minute Paper, reference was made to the Customs General Orders. The General Orders re-iterated the policy that the supply of the uniform for certain boatmen and officers would continue. According to the General Orders, the Department supplied some pieces of the Customs uniform. This included:

- Coxswains in South Australia would be supplied with peaked caps and badges, like their Victorian counter-parts (as of 1915).
- Launch crews were to be supplied with oilskin coats; caps worn by blue-jackets in winter and straw hats in summer, and peaked caps for Engine Drivers were to be supplied in South Australia and Victoria only.
- Searchers, Watchmen, and their Assistants were to be supplied with oilskins.
- Waterside Officers were to be supplied with the official badge, and as of the 21 September 1915, those dealing with the public were to be supplied with caps (in Queensland ports north of Rockhampton with helmets) in addition to bands and ribands.
- Officers on Quarantine launches were not to be supplied with oilskins (except Western Australia), sou-westerns or sea-boots.²⁰

In 1918, the General Division Officers' Union took the Department of Trade and Customs to the Arbitration Court. The Memorandum to the Comptroller-General from the Acting Secretary, stated that there was no uniform for Coxswains other than the

cap and badge, but more importantly stated that the supply of uniforms was not a "constitutional right brought over by officers from the state services". The supply of uniforms to some officers was to cease.²¹

In response, the Comptroller-General requested "the number of General Division Officers required to wear uniforms, the positions held by such officers and the annual expense of providing uniforms".²² This request was also prompted by paragraph 26 of the recent award to the General Division Officers' Union, which stated that officers required to wear uniforms were to be supplied by the Government at its expense".²³

The finding by the Arbitration Court prompted the Western Australian Acting Collector of Customs, to write to the Comptroller-General in July 1918. The facts of interest in relation to the Customs uniform and those who wore it included:

1. That no Customs General Division Officer in Western Australia was required to wear a uniform.
2. Waterside Officers were required to wear caps that were supplied by the Department.
3. The Department also supplied suits of overall clothing and oilskin overcoats to Searchers and Watchmen.
4. Expressed concern at the high cost to supply uniforms²⁴

The above points of interest, coupled with the Comptroller-General's request to establish the numbers of officers required to wear uniforms and the related expense, are indicative of a Department that had and continued to grapple with an inconsistent policy on the supply of the Customs uniform. The finding of the Arbitration Court, coupled with the paragraph 26 of the recent award to the General Officers' Union, reflected an acknowledgment that there needed to be a consistent policy on the supply of the Customs uniform - an acknowledgment that had taken more than 18 years to reach.

In October of that year, a report was released. It revealed that each state wore a different uniform, and that only the quarantine staff and the boat crews were supplied with full uniforms, whereas other outdoor officers were lucky to receive a cap and badge. Although there was an acknowledgment that there had been inconsistencies in the supply of the Customs uniform, the report was unable to convince policy makers that a full Customs uniform was needed, as it was believed that a cap and badge was sufficient for outdoor officers to assert their authority.²⁵

By 1919, there was a recommendation to implement a policy on appearance whilst in the uniform. The recommendation stated that all men in uniform were to look tidy and clean, and those shabby or worn-out uniforms should be reported and a new uniform reissued, subject to a yearly maximum.²⁶ Although only a recommendation, it was an unrealistic recommendation as employees supplied many parts of the Customs uniform.

The practice in New South Wales

A 1919 Minute Paper written by the New South Wales Collector detailed the uniform of General Division Officers. The practice was -

1. To supply uniforms to a few boatmen and coxswains, and to certain Quarantine and Lighthouse Officers who had been in receipt of uniforms before Federation.
2. To supply caps and badges to all Waterside Officers (helmet instead of caps in Northern Queensland ports).
3. To supply overalls for searching duty.
4. To supply oilcoats to searchers and watchmen and launch crews.

The Collector mentioned that the supply of uniforms was not a constitutional right, and that under the General Division Officers' award, the uniform was to be supplied at the Commonwealth's expense. It was also mentioned that the Collectors of New South Wales and Victoria thought that crews of the Customs launches ought be in uniform (as crews of other government launches were uniformed) and "that it makes the officers more presentable and that is a factor in maintaining discipline".²⁷ The latter statement was also evident in other earlier correspondence and was part of the ongoing petition to have Customs officers in full uniform.

The Lighthouse Officers

Some lighthouse officers were required to wear a uniform. Different ranks were supplied with different pieces of uniform (although it appears from the file document that no one was supplied with a complete uniform).²⁸ The pieces of uniform supplied to different officers included:²⁹

- Blue serge suit
- White shirt
- Cap
- Badge
- Shoulder straps
- Cap cover (white in colour)
- Cooks cap
- Dungaree trousers
- Round cap with ribbon
- Straw sun hat

The Comptroller-General Robert Oakley, had requested the numbers of Quarantine and Lighthouse officers that were required to wear a uniform. One Minute Paper recorded that there were 75 lighthouse officers who served on the vessels 'Governor Musgrave', 'Karuah and 'Lady Loch', who were supplied a uniform (for a breakdown of officer titles see Appendix 25). This information again clearly shows the inconsistencies in the supply of a uniform within the Department.

States supply or non-supply of pieces of uniform for Customs officers

In New South Wales in 1918, only the Engine Driver and Coxswain of the Customs Launch at Newcastle (who had served with the state before Federation) were supplied

with a serge suit and a Panama hat. The crews of Launches, Searchers and Watchmen were supplied with dungaree suits when required on duty.³⁰ This, in part, prompted the New South Wales Collector of Customs, to lobby the Department for a standard uniform to be issued for the sake of uniformity and “presentable appearance”. The Collector's plea personifies the impractical and difficult nature of the policy.

In Western Australia in 1918, uniforms were only supplied to Searchers and Watchmen. The uniform supplied to these positions included:

- Oilskin overcoat (supplied every three years)
- Cap (supplied every three years)
- Overall, suit (two issued per annum per officer)

No officers were required to wear a uniform in Tasmania.³¹

In 1920, the Acting Comptroller-General issued a Minute Paper on the supply of uniforms to officers of the Department of Trade and Customs. The most important statements of the document are mentioned below:³²

1. Prior to Federation the question of the supply of uniforms entered into the remuneration of officers for their services
2. Subsequent to the establishment of the Commonwealth, the value of officers' services were classified at their value in salary regardless of uniforms – consequently, salaries increased and the claim for uniform allowance was no longer a matter of right.
3. Uniforms were only to be supplied by the Government when officers were required to wear a uniform in the exercise of their duty.
4. The Boarding and Landing Services of Customs wore uniforms because of their contact with the public, however, after much consideration, only caps and ribbands with badges were to be supplied to the officers of the Boarding and Landing staff (this was decided on the basis that a full uniform was not essential for the exercise of authority in dealing with the public, which contradicted earlier statements that a uniform appearance would demand respect and ensure control).
5. The Comptroller-General was of the opinion that there was no position where it was essential for an officer to be supplied with a full uniform. The supply of caps and badges by the Department was to continue and to all branches of the Department where it was considered necessary.

There is no documentary evidence available about the reaction by the Collectors of Customs in the regions on the above points. There was one letter to the Collector of Customs in Victoria from a Victorian Coxswain, who pleaded for the Commonwealth to continue to supply his uniform.³³ There was also a letter from the Director of Quarantine that pleaded with the Comptroller-General for the continued supply of uniforms to Quarantine Officers because of contact with the public.³⁴

The 1920's

Only a relatively few items of uniform were supplied to some officers by 1923. This is evident from a letter from the Comptroller-General to the Postmaster-General's Department. The items listed in the letter were:³⁵

1. Caps with badges
 - supplied to Waterside Officers (Searchers, Watchmen, Customs Assistants, Examining Officers and Boarding Officers)
 - Customs Launch crews (Engine drivers, Coxswains and Launch boys)
 - Officers of Lighthouse Vessels (Masters, Mates and Engineers)
(helmets were supplied North Queensland ports instead of caps)
2. Oilcoats
 - supplied to Searchers and Watchmen, and Launch crews (Engine drivers, Coxswains and Launch boys)
3. Overalls
 - only supplied for searching duty

In 1927, the Customs General Orders mentioned pieces of the Customs uniform of the day. The General Orders stated that:

1. When required to search ships, officers may wear berets and suits of protective clothing (ie dungarees)
2. Non-uniformed Waterside Officers were required to wear the official cap with badge attached during work hours. The official badge was to be worn on the cap only and was not to be worn on any other article of officer's clothing.
3. All articles of clothing (until replaced with a subsequent issue), badges and shoulder (or lapel) flashes were to remain the property of the department. Upon resignation, death, retirement or transfer, all items were to be returned. In such cases the officer may be given the opportunity to purchase wearing apparel, not including raincoats.

The General Orders mentioned directly above replaced the 1927 General Orders mentioned below:

1. Uniforms to be supplied by the Department:
 - (a) To members of Customs Launch crews, Searchers and Watchmen, and Assistant Searchers and Watchmen
 - a cap, badge and oilskin overcoat
 - (b) To Boarding Officers and other Waterside Officers
 - cap and badge
 - (c) To Officers of Lighthouse vessels (Masters, mates and Engineers)
 - cap and badge
2. Boarding Officers and other Waterside Officers were to wear the official badge on the cap, and not on the vest or coat.
3. Suits of overall clothing (ie dungaree jumpers and trousers) may be kept for uses as required by officers doing searchers' duty.

Interestingly, the 1927 General Orders that superseded the *earlier* 1927 General Orders show that the Department had narrowed its policy and tightened its expenditure on the supply of pieces of the Customs uniform. The reason for the change was not known.

The 1940's – the need for identification

By 1940, Customs officers still wore a rudimentary uniform. Some officers were still required to purchase their own pieces of uniform, and sometimes purchased uniform pieces from other professions, such as a 'Trammies' hat.³⁶ Obviously, no national policy on the supply of uniforms had been implemented.

In 1943, an ex-Boarding Inspector wrote to the Secretary of the Department of Interior, proposing that officers boarding ships for Immigration, Passports and Customs work be supplied with a full uniform, rather than merely the cap and badge. His proposal was prompted by suggestions that officers were often mistaken for baggage agents or porters, all of whom wore blue cloth caps with a badge. Passengers, Masters and Officers of vessels paid little attention to Customs officers because they were not easily identifiable as Customs officers (there was a note that the letter was forwarded to the Comptroller-General for his consideration).

In April 1945, a policy was implemented whereby those Customs officers who normally wore civilian clothes, were to be supplied with khaki uniforms with Customs badges to help assert their authority.³⁷ This policy was a dramatic turnaround from earlier policy. Although there was now a recognised connection between asserting authority and the wearing of a uniform, by 1948, no nationally identifiable law enforcement uniform for Customs officers existed. Customs officers on baggage examination duty simply wore a grey dustcoat and or blue cap with a Customs badge on the latter, or an armband with a white 'HMC' (see Badges section) Other Customs officers wore former post office uniforms without the identifying badges, while others patrolled the wharf in civilian clothes with a Customs cap.³⁸ These examples reiterated the need for a full national Customs uniform, and one that was supplied to all Customs officers.

In 1946, the Comptroller-General agreed to the manufacture of jackets, trousers and a cap (possibly of blue twill material) to be issued to Boarding Officers. The agreement was the result of several years of discussion between the Director of the Rationing Commission and the Comptroller-General. There was also a proposal for a summer uniform to be made of khaki drill and for raincoats to be available. The correspondence also indicated a proposal for the redemption of coupons for other uniform pieces, although nothing further was mentioned about the proposal.³⁹

The 1950's and 1960's – the return to a full Customs uniform

The 1954 General Orders reiterated the 1927 General Orders – where a select group of officers were supplied with pieces of the Customs uniform.

In April 1955, Customs officers were returned to wearing full uniforms - the first time since pre-Federation days. The full uniform consisted of –

- Navy trousers
- Navy coat
- Blue Shirt
- Blue tie
- Peaked cap with Customs insignia
- Royal blue enamel lapel badges ⁴⁰

The uniform made a big impact in Newcastle, where the 29 April edition of the newspaper *Newcastle Herald*, reported that many whistles and cooees were heard when the officers turned out on the Newcastle wharves that morning.⁴¹

During the 1950s and until the early 1960s the only uniformed officers were Boarding Officers and Preventive Officers.

The Boarding Officers wore –

“A smart naval-type uniform which consisted of a black double-breasted jacket with gold buttons, trousers, white shirt and black tie, white topped peaked cap with gold-braided-embroidered Customs badge. Rank was denoted by gold braid band on jacket sleeve (viz. one band - boarding officer, 2 bands - senior boarding officer, 3 bands - boarding inspector). In the summertime the jacket was discarded and epaulettes bearing gold braid bands for rank were worn on the white shirts - always with ties.”

The Preventive Officers wore - ⁴²

“Initially, those Preventive Officers who patrolled the wharves and guarded the gangways of ships were **not** uniformed. Those working at the airport or engaged in ship's search (the latter wearing overalls and protective gear as a rule) were issued with a light blue-grey shirt with epaulettes, navy blue or black trousers and caps **without the** white top cover. The Customs cap badge was a simple enamelled one (see badges section). Preventive Officers also wore elliptical enamelled Customs badges on their epaulettes in summer dress; these badges were worn on the jacket lapels during the cooler period of the year. There was no real rank structure for Preventive Officers at this time so no rank insignia.”

“Previously, some years earlier, Preventive Officers had no uniform but were issued with a navy blue peaked cap which had an enamelled metal badge consisting of gold oak leaves surrounding the words "H.M. Customs" in gold on a royal blue background, surmounted by a gold crown (see Badges section) If Preventive Officers were doing baggage or patrol work they would also usually wear an armband with the words "H.M. Customs" on it.”⁴³

Some time in the early to mid-1960s wharf examining and assistant wharf examining officers (as well as similar officers at the airport) were issued with uniforms. The

uniforms were an extension of those already on issue to boarding branch officers - as described above - with comparable badges of rank.⁴⁴ A uniform for female Customs officers at Sydney and Melbourne airports and sea terminals was introduced towards the end of the 1968 financial year – see appendix 33.

Further changes were made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when a rank structure was brought in for Preventive staff and with it comparable insignia (gold braid bars on sleeves or epaulettes), which was one eighth of an inch narrower than the 3rd division braid. With Inspection in 1983 the old 3rd and 4th Division structures were abolished and the Banded Customs Officer structure came in with new badges of rank essentially unchanged until now.⁴⁵ The insignia, introduced in 1965, was part of a review of the issue and design of the Customs uniform by the Comptroller-General. A detailed description of the changes is provided at Appendix 34.

Until the very early 1970s (possibly 1973-74) when a new uniform was introduced that lasted until 1996-7, there were different uniforms for the 3rd and 4th Divisions. The 3rd Division officers wore a uniform the same as Boarding Officers mentioned above. Fourth Division Officers wore a uniform the same as Preventive Officers and Launch crews as mentioned above.⁴⁶ A detailed description is also provided at Appendix 34.

Recent changes

There have been some recent changes to the Customs uniform. The 1994 Conroy Report recommended that “the trend towards officers being in uniform be reversed, that the uniform be redesigned without rank insignia and be worn only by officers involved in border management and then only where appropriate for identification in their operational roles”. Nowadays, the uniform has tended to be worn by officers involved with Border divisions. There has also been the recent introduction of the Customs Corporate uniform.

7. CONCLUSION:

The Customs uniform has covered many years of Australian history. The development of the organisation is reflected in the evolution of the uniform – from colonial to Commonwealth responsibility. The uniform has consisted of different pieces of attire over the years, and has changed according to the period of history and the policy within the organisation. The Customs uniform represents the organisation and the organisation is represented by its’ uniform – a uniform that has an extremely interesting and important history.

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- ¹ David Day, *Smugglers and Sailors*, p180.
- ² *Smugglers and Sailors*, p403
- ³ *Smugglers and Sailors*, p403
- ⁴ *Smugglers and Sailors*, p403
- ⁵ *Smugglers and Sailors*, p350-351
- ⁶ See Appendix 1
- ⁷ See Appendix 2
- ⁸ See Appendix 3
- ⁹ See Appendix 4
- ¹⁰ See Appendix 5
- ¹¹ See Appendix 6
- ¹² See Appendix 7
- ¹³ See Appendix 8. Enquires by the Collector of Customs in South Australia revealed that the Customs Coxswains in Victoria were supplied with peaked caps and badges, the Drivers with peaked caps only, and the rest of the crew with caps as worn by 'Blue Jackets' in winter and straw hats in summer.
- ¹⁴ See Appendix 9
- ¹⁵ See Appendix 10 and 11. The memo's tone is negative as it focuses on the financial cost to the Department of supplying the uniforms.
- ¹⁶ See Appendix 12
- ¹⁷ See Appendix 13
- ¹⁸ See Appendix 14
- ¹⁹ See Appendix 15
- ²⁰ See Appendix 16
- ²¹ See Appendix 17. Due to other state practices ceasing upon the Commonwealth's acquisition of those duties.
- ²² See Appendix 18
- ²³ See Appendix 18
- ²⁴ See Appendix 20
- ²⁵ David Day, *Contraband and Controversy* p 154
- ²⁶ See Appendix 21
- ²⁷ See Appendix 23
- ²⁸ See Appendix 24
- ²⁹ See Appendix 24 part b
- ³⁰ See Appendix 26
- ³¹ See Appendix 27
- ³² See Appendix 28
- ³³ See Appendix 29
- ³⁴ See Appendix 30
- ³⁵ See Appendix 31
- ³⁶ *Contraband and Controversy*, p225
- ³⁷ *Contraband and Controversy*, p248
- ³⁸ *Contraband and Controversy*, p 263
- ³⁹ NAA 1945/48
- ⁴⁰ *Contraband and Controversy*, p283
- ⁴¹ *Contraband and Controversy*, p283
- ⁴² See Appendix 32
- ⁴³ Courtesy of Peter Chinn
- ⁴⁴ Courtesy of Peter Chinn
- ⁴⁵ Courtesy of Peter Chinn
- ⁴⁶ Courtesy of Peter Chinn