

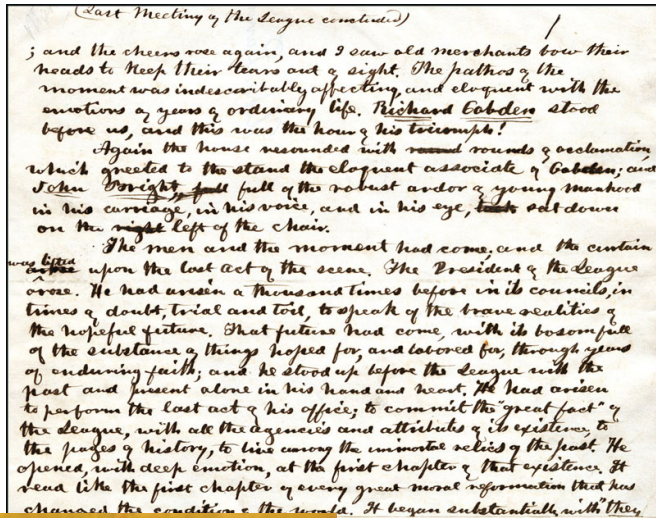
100 Years Ago in Mekeel's:

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 1

by W. Ward (From Mekeel's Weekly, February 10, 1917)

INTRODUCTION

The first country in the world to issue adhesive postage stamps, a short history of the cause and origin of prepaid postage would be most opportune. The then as now great commercial interchange between Britain and America at about the same period of Rowland Hill's great initiation of Postal Reform, was one of the causes of Elihu Burritts' scheme for universal penny postage—only as yet advanced between the English speaking peoples.



Above, handwritten document by Elihu Burritt, who was a vigorous advocate of the Ocean Penny Postage and who urged the use of illustrated propoganda envelopes to promote the idea. The document details a speech by Englishman Richard Cobden MP

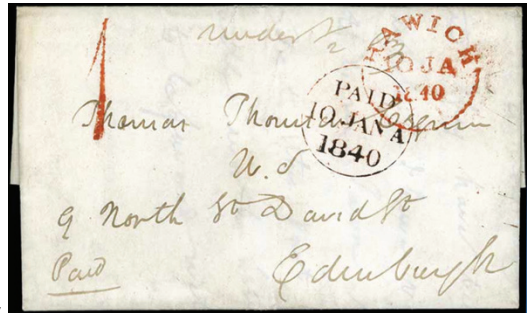
Left, Elihu Burritt, the "learned blacksmith" of New Britain, Connecticut. Late in 1848 he issued a

pamphlet setting forth his views on the subject. Exactly fifty years later Imperial Penny Postage was inaugurated though it was on a much broader and more liberal basis than Burritt had dared to hope.

An 1851 J. Valentine Ocean Penny Postage propoganda cover, from New Brunswick to New York. The center of the movement was Great Britain, where this envelope was manufactured and nearly all the propoganda covers were used; so a usage from Canada to the U.S. is extremely rare.

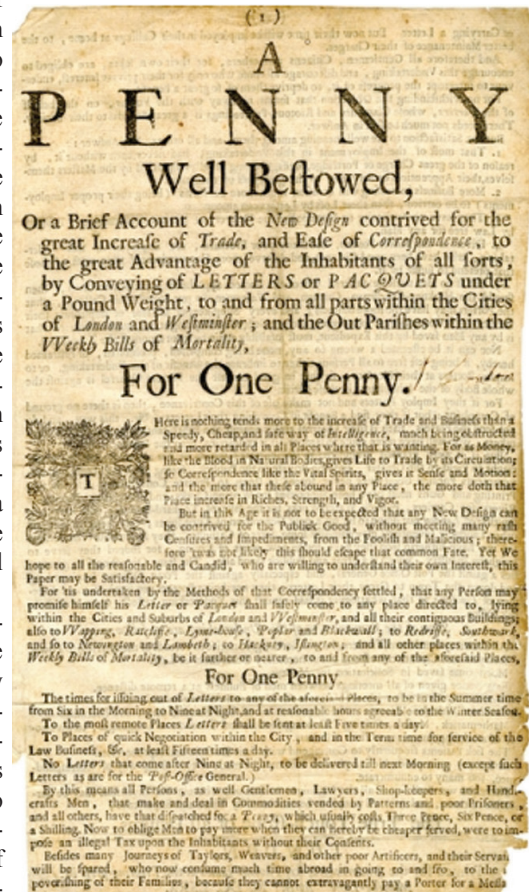


January 10, 1840 prepaid entire letter from Hawick to Edinburgh, endorsed "under 1/2 oz" and with handstruck "1" in red and "HAWICK/10JA/1840" and Edinburgh "PAID/10 JAN A/1840" circular date-stamps—the First Day of Uniform One Penny Postage:



Some of the best known references to the early correspondence between England and the then American Colonies are found in the works of De-foe and Tobias Smollet. The fight for postal reform in Britain ranges from William Dockwra (1680) to the advent of Hill (1840).

Many attempts were made partly under the Postmaster Generals as well as privately to found a regular system of cheap conveyance of correspondence—but the system wanting to make anyone a success was that of Hill's prepayment by means of adhesive labels. Rowland Hill first attempted his scheme by means of stamped wrappers and covers—now known to the collectors as "Mulready" envelopes—from their designer.



Page 1 of "A Penny Well Bestowed" broadsheet of 1680 advertising William Dockwra's London Penny Post. Online subscribers, for a closer look, please use your pdf magnifier tool.

A rare combination usage of the Penny Black and the Mulready envelope used on May 6, 1840, the official first day of use for both. The stamp is tied by a red Maltese Cross cancel, and the reverse of the Mulready entire (not shown) has a "C MY-6, 1840" backstamp. The William Gross Collection included a stamp on a Mulready, dated and used May 2, which was before the official May 6 first day of use, but which nevertheless is the earliest known example of both entering the mails.



Few reforms—not excepting railroads, gas lighting or automobiles—ever suffered such a campaign of ridicule as the “Mulready” envelope and the “Penny Black.” It is strange in these days to read of prominent persons writing to the press protesting against the insults to the Monarch by “common people spitting on the Queen’s Effigy!” But that proved to be the most dangerous criticism that Rowland Hill suffered. To gauge the minds of those days, it is interesting to note that the real “Wait and See” Select Committee of the British House of Commons took, as the *Quarterly Review* of October, 1839 says, “one of the most inconsiderate jumps in the dark”, after two years consideration, and three heavy reports, to try Hill’s Postal Reform.

One of the many caricatures of the Mulready envelope, this one by Thomas White.



The first postage stamps very nearly became “classed” first, second and third—for rich man, middle man and poor man—for a Mr. Brewin of the Society of Fields argued that a gentleman of \$5000 per annum might pay 12¢ for a letter—but that would represent a third of a poor laborer’s daily wage and the former should surely pay a postal tax in proportion to his income!

The argument that seemed to carry most power was that cheap postage would “advance the spread of religion and promote charitable objects”—though one back-biting comment stated that it would in all likelihood spread a counter of “disaffection, irreligion and faction!” And of course the danger of forgery was hinted at.

However, Rowland Hill had consent of Parliament—and before six months passed the adhesive stamp was on as secure a foundation as it is today—despite mailing machines.

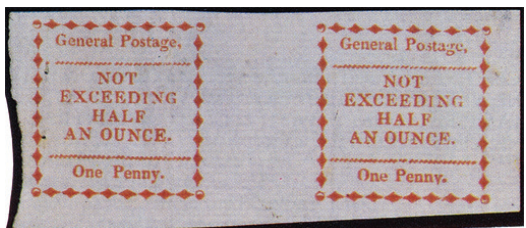
Unlike the postal emissions of the United States—until 1880 [in England] no regular system of issuing postage stamps in sets of values took place, the values being issued as required without any uniformity. Thus the present day collector finds the early British issues “all over the track”—and if he follows the routine of mounting his British stamps according to the order of the catalogue, I am afraid he will not find the arrangement present “a thing of beauty and JOY forever.”

The collector of British must first decide whether he will collect the plate numbers to be found on all issues from 1862 to 1881—for if so, then he is strongly advised to mount in a separate volume apart from the standard varieties. If he attempts to mix standard varieties with the series of plate numbers he will create a labyrinth that will need a philatelic Theseus to unravel. He would better arrange into six sections of (1) Line Engraved; (2) Embossed; (3) Surface printed issues up to 1880; (4) the semi-unified Victorian issues from 1880 to 1901; (5) The Edwardian Issues and (6) the Georgian series—and it is in this order that I shall deal with the Postage Stamps of Great Britain. A subsequent treatise of British Official, Telegraphic and Postage Due Stamps will shortly appear.

1. Line Engraved

In the Fall of 1839, the Lords of the Treasury advertised in the *Times*, *The Scotsman* and other important journals that they would be prepared to receive suggestions for dealing with the new postal reform. It is said that of over 2600 “ideas” received that only fifty dealt with an adhesive prepaid label.

Treasury Competition Essays: right, James Chalmers General Postage Essay 1d. in red on gummed laid paper, large-margined horizontal pair.



annoted "22799/39" in manuscript and "Used/Dundee/Oct 7 1839" black obliteration.



The matter was referred for conference with the Officials of the Royal Academy, and it was decided to follow the example of the coinage by a label difficult to imitate but easy of obliteration.

Charles Heath used as his model the City of London Coronation Medal designed by the sculptor, W. Wyon, for the head of the Queen, the background being what is now known as engine turned. About this period a Jacob Perkins had invented a process of transferring an engraved die of hardened steel to one of soft steel—which permitted itself to be afterwards hardened without damage to the image. Rowland Hill strongly advocated the new stamps—and the contract was given to the firm of Perkins, Bacon & Co.

On November 9, 1837, Lord Mayor's Day, the young Queen Victoria visited London for the first time since her accession to the throne, on June 20 of that year. For Lord Mayor's Day and the visit of the Queen a medal was struck bearing on one side (shown) a portrait of Victoria at the age of 15, before her accession to the throne. This portrait and medal was done by William Wyon, the chief engraver of the mint.

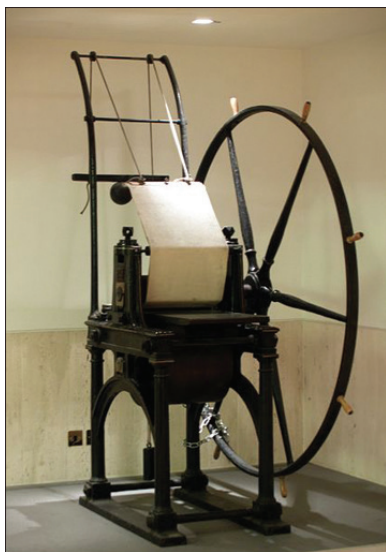


To Be Continued

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 2

by W. Ward (*From Mekeel's Weekly, February 10, 1917*)

1. Line Engraved, Continued from May 19, 2017



Above, the surprisingly small and simple Jacob Perkins' press that printed the Penny Black;

About this period a Jacob Perkins had invented a process of transferring an engraved die of hardened steel to one of soft steel—which permitted itself to be afterwards hardened without damage to the image. Rowland Hill strongly advocated the new stamps—and the contract was given to the firm of Perkins, Bacon & Co.

Now we arrive at one of the greatest controversies of the philatelic world. Several eminent authorities quote Frederick Heath as the actual engraver of the first die of the first postage stamp. Even the firm of Perkins, Bacon & Co. from their records credit Frederick Heath—due entirely to a signature for payment. From evidence of a parliament committee in 1852 and the authority of Joshua B. Bacon, a prominent member of the firm—the contract was given to and the die engraved by Charles Heath. On 7th April, 1840, Frederick Heath received payment on behalf of his father from Per-

kins, Bacon & Co., duly signing for same—so it will easily be seen how in later years reference to the origin of the “Penny Black” was credited to the son instead of the father.

The lower corners of the die were left blank (see die proofs, previous column)—and then 240 Impressions were taken on a sheet of the patented softened steel in twenty horizontal rows of twelve designs. Workmen then with steel lettered punches inserted the well known corner letters

A-A; A-B; A-C; up to A-T
B-A; B-B; B-C;
and so on down to the last line
L-A; L-B; L-C; to L-T.

To demonstrate the corner lettering sequence of the Penny Black stamps, we see an IJ/JK block of four. The lower left letter designates the horizontal row, the lower right letter the vertical column. The sheets were 20 rows by 12 columns, for a total of 240 stamps. This block would come from the I and J (9th and 10th) rows and the J and K (10th and 11th columns).



This was done to minimise forgery especially in the case of unobliterated portions of stamps being skillfully stuck together to form a whole—where in the later issues of the 1d reds the lettering was also inserted in reverse ratio in the upper corners.

After the insertion of the corner letters a proof was taken in black ink on plain white paper from the yet “softened” plate—and carefully scrutinised for flaws and errors of lettering. When passed the final inscriptions round the plate were engraved—and the steel hardened.

The inscription itself is worthy of note—for on each side of the sheet—one was informed that the stamps were “Price 1d per label. 1sh per row of 12. £1 per sheet. Place the labels above the address and towards the Right Hand Side of the Letter. In wetting the back be careful not to remove the Cement.” (See page 13.)

This “Cement” was in the main a composition of gum arabic and potato starch, but there is no doubt more than one formula was tried. The catalogues for some reason do not classify the Penny Black on blued paper as a standard variety—but more probably because it was caused by the action of one of the trial “cements”—and quite unlike the cause of the blued paper of the red stamps.



This penny red block, Sc. 3, shows the reverse lettering pattern, with one of the 20 vertical columns in the lower left and one of the 12 horizontal rows in the lower right.



Left, a March 1840 die proof in black on India paper taken after the top and bottom labels had been engraved, but with the four corners blank. Right, an approved Perkins Bacon die proof with the top corner ornaments and “I / OLD ORIGINAL” engraved below, in black on wove paper.



There were in all eleven plates of the penny black registered—but a little doubt exists whether plate 9 was used for the black—though it was used for the red stamps.



Plate 9 was used, this stamp being an example

A half sheet of plate 9 came on the market some ten years ago—the writer possessing a framed photo processed reproduction of it in black—but of course, the originals were in red.

The 2p blue was made from the original die of the penny black with the substitution of the value label. It is supposed that plate 1 of the 2p stamp was accidentally used without going through the hardening process—for plate 1 specimens are fairly easy to identify by reason of their “flatness” and rather “blotchy”

A part sheet showing a portion of the instructions for use of the stamps.
 The paper was specially made by the firm of Wise & Company, Rush Mills, Northampton. It was hand made, originally grayish in tone—though time has in most cases seared it yellowish. The weight of the paper had to average 11 lbs. per ream—but owing to the irregularity of weight of hand made paper sheets varied in thickness—some lighter, some heavier, in order to correctly make up the count and weight, but no very thin sheets were ever used. Stamps that appear to be on almost pelure paper are most likely evenly thinned specimens of the thickest paper.

The Post Office for time immemorial had used a special red ink—or as it was then called, paint—for the marking and stamping of mail matter. With that conservativeness of British officialism, they matched their shirt to the button and the first stamp was black in order to contrast the red obliteration. (Left stamp)



It was soon found that firstly in the case of badly cancelled stamps, or in cases where the ink on the pad had become dry (center) that such specimens were easily cleaned by a little manipulation. Secondly, many small country offices were not supplied with the official cancelling ink but made or provided their own under the terms of their agency. Thus in the latter case we find every shade from yellow to pink has been used to obliterate the first stamp—due no doubt due to opinions as to the meaning of the color red in different parts of the country and color blindness. Experiments proved that good old black printing ink was the best and safest method of cancelling besides being permanent—so the order was reversed in 1841—the stamp to be red and the cancellation black (right stamp).

appearance. There is no doubt that both plates of the 2p were in use together from July 1840, from date to be found on original letters. The watermark of the original black stamps is always the small crown, and fairly common inverted—but the unused large crown variety is really a government imitation made for Prince Consort Albert from a “die II” plate.



Left, plate 1; right, plate 2

It would be difficult to assess the value of both these early stamps, since many thousands exist in the hands of British Collectors in the form of remade plates and sheets. Just previous to the fashion to re-plate, the penny black was almost a drug on the market and the finest specimens could be procured at two cents each. Probably, however, they will never depreciate below from 35¢ to 50¢ each. It is worthy of note that the Maltese Cross obliteration was first used in June 1840.

A few indistinct double corner letters will be found in the penny black issue, but the only variety is the letter D over the letter I. The so-called “guide” or “hair” lines are really due to scratches on the plate in the former instance and a foreign substance between the ink and the paper in the latter.

The check list of standard varieties therefore stands: May 1840.

- Handmade grayish paper; watermarked small crown.
- 1d full black, sharp impression.
- 1d sombre black.
- 1d sombre black, smudgy impression.
- 1d gray black, smudgy impression.
- 1d full black on bluish paper.
- 2d full blue, plate 1.
- 2d purplish blue, plate 1.
- 2d full blue, plate II, very sharp impression.
- 2d blue, plate II, medium impression.
- 2d pale blue (plate doubtful).

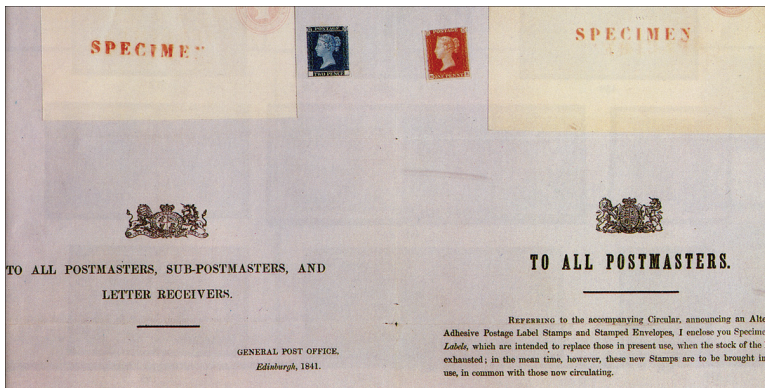
(Both values occur with watermark inverted.)

To Be Continued

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 3

by W. Ward (From Mekeel's Weekly, February 24, 1917)

As mentioned earlier, the advisability of the changes on the inks of the stamps and obliterations, and also to further safe-guard against cleaning—shortly after the penny stamp had been printed in a reddish-brown—a chemically prepared ink was used—the secret of Messrs. Perkins, Bacon & Co., the printers. Apart from its partly fugitive qualities, it had a strange action on the paper—probably more pronounced by the dampness necessary during the printing—that coloured the paper blue.



The official notice to Postmasters, announcing the availability of the 1841 1p red and 2p blue, with Specimens attached.



Sc. 8 in an orange brown block and pale rose single



Sc. 3

A variety is found called the "ivory head", showing the profile of the Queen's head at the back in white against a blue background—this would probably be due to the dryness of the paper during printing and the wear of the plate.

Both penny and two penny are greatly subject



Two examples of the Ivory Head, Sc. 4e



to de-oxidisation—but immersion in a little peroxide of hydrogen and water—half and half—will restore to their original colours. Part sheet of 1854 1p, Sc. 8 showing oxidation

During their long existence—practically forty years in perforate and imperforate states, it is remarkable how few varieties of shades and colours made their appearance—a contrast to these days of innumerable shades for short-lived issues. Now and again one comes across a really fine rich orange brown in the early imperforate stamps—probably the furthest shade away from the standard colours.

The gum of the unused and often still remaining on the used, is the thick heavy yellow "cement" which remained in use until 1855, when it was displaced by a lighter colored adhesive containing a proportion of gelatine. Similar slips of the corner lettering exist, as in the penny blacks—and also a fairly common error of an inverted S. A variety with a sort of heavy frame exists—due probably to the "leaning" during the transfer from the die to the plate.



Sc. 3, left the correct S, right, inverted

In March, 1841, the two penny value made its appearance with white lines below the word postage and over the words of value—very probably to prevent confusion in artificial light with the penny black—if the reader has ever compared stamps by the light of candles he will appreciate the difficulty that would be experienced in the days of tallow candles.



Left, Sc. 2; right Sc. 4 with white line below Postage

In comparison with the catalogue values of other stamps of the period, this value seems very much under-rated in comparison to its

scarcity—especially as it is much less in evidence than the penny black.



1d red-brown, Sc. 3, with experimental "Treasury Roulette" and London numeral "17" cancel



Archer Roulette on piece, image darkened to show the roulette

Long before any official step was taken to provide easier means of separation of the stamps, individuals had their varied methods of division. One of the most popular was to lay a flat ruler on the sheet and tear the stamps away upwards. Others used "rouletted" or marking wheels.

The writer has handled several penny blacks undoubtedly separated by this process—and which coming from the grave of an attorney's office were no doubt in the same state as the day they did postal duty. There is no doubt, however, that Henry Archer was the first to suggest before a committee of the House of Commons in 1852 the movement to provide a method of separation. Archer had five years previously, however, invented a machine for rouletting, and had permission from the Post Office to use it.

It was found that the knife edges wore quickly and was not altogether the success it first appeared. Archer then turned his attention to severance by a series of holes—evidently suggested by the tracing wheel. In this he met with success and patented his invention in 1850. Many stamps perforated 16 may be found postmarked from London so early as November, 1850, over three years before the stamps were issued perforate. The Committee of 1852 granted Archer \$20,000 for his perforating machine.

Reference might be made to an essay of the penny red brown imperforate printed on the silk-thread, or Dickinson safety paper of the 10 pence and 1 shilling embossed stamps—but which was never an official issue.



The first stamps to be perforated were the Revenue Receipt stamps of 1853 (left), but as these were not authorized for postage until 1881, they cannot be considered postage stamps before the latter date.

To Be Continued



1d Rose-Red plate 48 AA/GL mint o.g. block of 84 from the top of the sheet, showing full inscription at top with plate numbers.



Unique "Prince Consort" Essay showing Archer perforations, perf 16



Silk thread can be seen as a vertical line, arrow

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