

BRITISH PHILATELIC BULLETIN

BRITISH VICTORIAN STAMPS

PUBLICATION N°4



BY JAMES MACKAY

& 6. PENCE



A. Peachey Esq
Salisbury Guard





British Victorian Stamps

BRITISH PHILATELIC BULLETIN

PUBLICATION NUMBER 4

- 3 Genesis: the Treasury essays of 1839
- 5 Line-engraved stamps, 1840-81
- 8 Embossed stamps, 1847-54
- 10 Surface-printed stamps, 1855-87
- 12 High-value stamps, 1867-83
- 13 Jubilee Series, 1887-1900
- 15 The Phillips Collection

Published 1997 by Royal Mail, 22
Finsbury Square, London EC2A 1NL

Designed by Robert Maude. Printed
in England by The Columbian Press,
Tonbridge, Kent

Text © James Mackay 1997

Illustration © Royal Mail: page 3(B).
Illustrations © HM The Queen: pages
4(B), 5(C) and 16(B). Stamps from
the Royal Collection are reproduced
by gracious permission of HM The
Queen. All other illustrations © The
National Postal Museum, London

ISBN 0 946165 93 4

UNIFORM Penny Postage

THE FOLLOWING

PETITION

BY THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS,

To Pass this Important Measure without delay.

Lies here for Signatures.

READER,

Sign the Petition without a moment's delay,

BECAUSE

IT MUST BE PRESENTED BEFORE FRIDAY NEXT, JULY THE 12TH.

To the Honourable the Commons in Parliament assembled.

The humble Petition of the undersigned Inhabitants of Westminster,

Sheweth,

THAT, an Englishman having invented the Uniform Penny Postage Plan, your Petitioners feel that the United Kingdom should not be behind France, and Belgium, and Prussia, and the United States, in getting it; they, therefore, humbly pray your Honourable House to give effect to the Uniform Penny Postage, payable in advance, during the present Session of Parliament.

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

GENESIS: THE TREASURY ESSAYS OF 1839
Although considerable improvements in the postal service were made in the 1820s and early 1830s, notably in the extension of local penny posts, the service as a whole was antiquated, costly to administer and expensive to use. Robert Wallace, MP for Greenock, one of the towns enfranchised as a result of the Reform Act of 1832, led the campaign in Parliament for postal reform. In the country at large, the cam-

campaign was organised by Rowland Hill, an educationalist turned businessman whose pamphlet *Post Office Reform* (1837) led to the appointment of a Parliamentary Select Committee the following November. While the Mercantile Committee kept up the pressure on the government, Hill refined his theories and campaigned incessantly for a uniform system of postal rates based on the weight of a letter, regardless of the number of sheets it comprised or the distance it was conveyed.

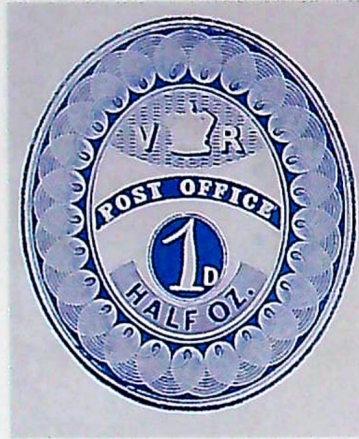
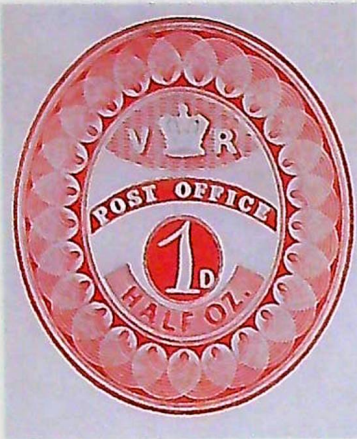
Rowland Hill, engraved by Czeslaw Slania for Royal Mail's Communications stamps, 1995. The intaglio process used to print these stamps was also used to produce the Penny Black in 1840. Above, a poster of the Mercantile Committee for a petition.



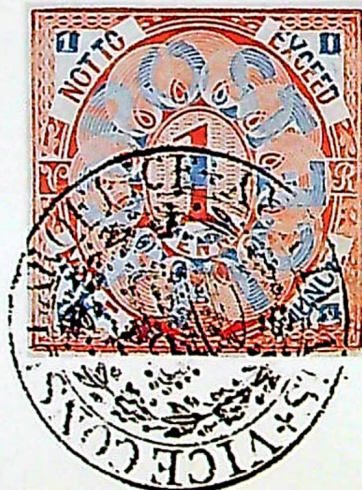
Central to Hill's plan was a simple system of pre-paying postage by using special wrappers and envelopes. Almost as an afterthought, however, he suggested that the problem of extending the system to any letter or package might be solved by the use of adhesive labels 'just large enough to bear the stamp and smeared on the back with a glutinous wash'. In May 1839, in a pamphlet entitled *On the Collection of Postage by means of Stamps*, Hill continued to argue in favour of stamped covers, regarding adhesive stamps as something to be 'reserved for exceptional cases'.

While James Chalmers and others had produced essays for such stamps as early as 1838, and Charles Whiting, even earlier (1830), had proposed the use of elaborately printed envelopes as 'go-frees', no decision was taken on how the pre-payment system should be implemented till the passage of the Uniform Postage Act in August 1839. A week later the Treasury issued an invitation to artists and the general public to submit ideas and designs. More than 2,600 suggestions were sent in, but very few involved adhesive stamps. In the end prizes of £100 each were awarded to Benjamin Cheverton, Henry Cole and Charles Whiting, and £50 each to James Bogardus and Francis Coffin for a joint entry. No submission was wholly satisfactory, but elements of them were embodied in the final concept by Rowland Hill. Essays by

Cole and Whiting, illustrated here, include very attractive bicoloured embossed designs produced by the Congreve method.



Essays submitted by
Charles Whiting (left) and
Henry Cole (below)



LINE-ENGRAVED STAMPS, 1840-81

In the end it was the simple design, showing the Queen's head in profile, which Hill himself had suggested, that formed the basis of the world's first adhesive postage stamps. This was done not so much out of deference to Her Majesty but as an antidote to forgery as even the slightest deviation in the portrait would immediately be detected.

The format of the stamps was based on the small adhesive labels used to secure the back of the lead staples affixing embossed tax stamps to parchment legal documents. Both the upright rectangle, and the system of check letters as a further precaution against fraud, were borrowed from these labels for the line-engraved stamps.

Fear of fraud induced the Board of Inland Revenue to opt for the intaglio method of printing the stamps. The contract was awarded to Messrs Perkins, Bacon and Petch who used the improved Rose engine of Jacob Perkins to produce a background of intricate lines for bank-notes and share certificates.

The rates of postage having been fixed at a penny per half ounce, stamps in denominations of one penny (1d) black and twopence (2d) blue were recess-printed in sheets of 240, so that a row of 12 cost a shilling or two shillings, while complete sheets cost £1 and £2 respectively. The inscription was confined to POSTAGE across the top and the value in words across the foot. The upper corners had star ornaments, while the lower corners were lettered from AA to TL according to the position in the sheet. A version of the 1d black with the letters VR in the upper corners was intended for use on official mail, but this was aborted when the system of official paid postmarks and certifying marks of government departments was instituted instead. Most of the surviving examples came from the circulars whereby postmasters were notified of the impending stamps.

The 1d black was ready for distribution on 1 May 1840, though not postally valid till 6 May. The 2d blue was released two days later. A superb cover bearing six 1d blacks (see front) is one of the gems in the collection donated by Reginald M Phillips to the Post Office in 1965 to form the nucleus of the National Postal Museum which opened in 1966. The 1d black was printed from 11 plates, some of which can be found in several states, while the 2d blue was printed from only two plates. The stamps did not bear the plate number but can be identified by the style of corner lettering and other minor peculiarities. The plate number, however, was printed in the sheet margin, along with instructions to the user: 'Place the Labels ABOVE the address and



An engine-turned pattern was used as the background to a profile of Queen Victoria (above). The engravers Charles and Frederick Heath produced the master die for the plates from a sketch by Henry Corbould (centre). Corbould's drawing was made from the medal engraved by William Wyon to commemorate the young Queen's visit to the Guildhall following her Coronation (top).



Top: 2d blue, from a block of eight. At first stamps were imperforate and had to be cut apart with scissors. In 1848 Henry Archer began experiments in separation, at first using a form of roulette and then in 1850 a fine perforation gauging 16. Following trials at Somerset House in 1853, perforation was adopted in February 1854, using machines constructed by David Napier.

Above: 1d red-brown Treasury roulette.

towards the RIGHT-HAND SIDE of the Letter. In Wetting the Back be careful not to remove the Cement.'

Concern that the vermilion ink of the cancellation could be chemically removed led to the adoption of black oil-based cancelling ink. This, in turn, necessitated a change in the colour of the 1d stamp, from black to red, in 1841. At the same time, the composition of the ink for printing the 2d stamp was changed, and this was indicated by a slight modification of the design, to include two white lines, above and below the portrait.

One style of lettering was used for the 1d blacks and 2d blues, but in the 1d reds, current for 40 years, three different styles of punches were employed, known to collectors as Alphabets I, II and III. A fourth style, Alphabet IV, was hand engraved, not punched, on plates 50 and 51 of the Penny Reds in 1861.

The first Penny Reds, from January 1841 till 1843, were printed from plates 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 10 and 11 of the 1d black. It is thus possible to collect the black and red stamps in 'matched pairs' from identical positions on the same plates. The 2d Blue with Lines was printed from two plates, numbered 3 and 4 and fairly easy to differentiate on account of their distinctive corner letters.

Altogether 204 plates, plus 14 reserve plates, were used to print the 1d stamps up till 1855. In that year the portrait was re-engraved by William Humphrys, the chief difference being that the eye was more deeply shaded and the chin given a firmer appearance. Die II was used in the manufacture of plates numbered from 1 to 225 and R15 to R20, from which stamps were printed till the end of 1879. Twopenny stamps were printed from plates 1 to 6 using Die I till 1858 and, using Die II, from 7 to 15 till the line-engraved were withdrawn in 1880.

Fears that dishonest individuals might 'piece' stamps (ie stick two uncanceled portions of used stamps together to make an apparently unused stamp) led the authorities to adopt check lettering in all four corners. This was applied to the 2d blue in 1858 but because of the large number of 1d plates still on hand, it was not extended to the 1d red till 1864. The new plates, with letters in all four corners, also bore the plate number engraved in the side panels as a further precaution. Thereafter, the task of reconstructing plates of used stamps became a very simple matter.

A proposal to alter postal rates led to the production of a 1½d stamp in rosy mauve in 1860, but the idea was dropped and the issue aborted. Ten years later, however, the introduction of printed matter rates and



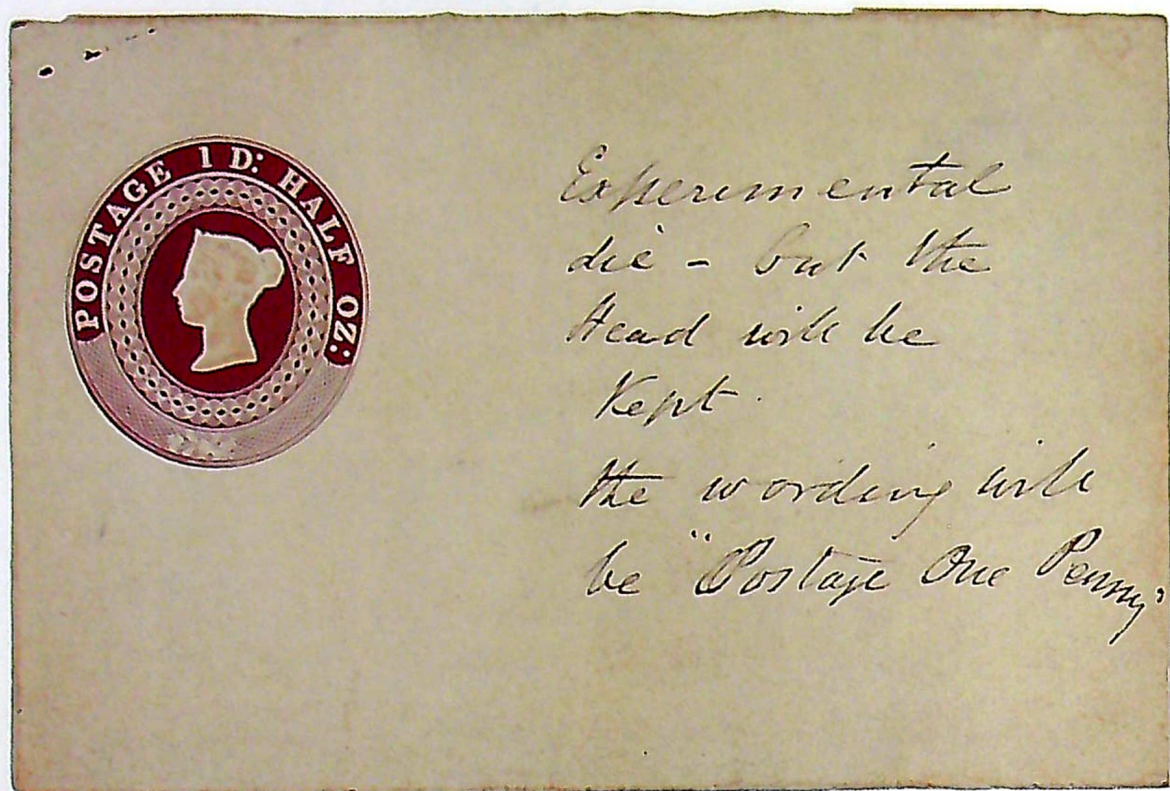
a revision in the higher rates of letter postage resulted in this denomination being revived, but printed in the same red shade as the 1d stamps. Only two plates (1 and 3) were used for the 1½d, stamps from plate 1 being unnumbered and those from plate 3 having the numeral in the frame. Some 20 plates were used for the ½d, plate 9 being by far the scarcest. The plates for the 1d red with lettering in all four corners ran from 71 to 225. Of these, plates 75, 126 and 128 were never used owing to defects. Plate 77 was also rejected but a few stamps were printed from it, and are now major rarities. Plates 226 to 228 were made, but never put to press.

It having been decided to print the low-value stamps by the same process as the higher denominations, six months' notice was given to Perkins Bacon on 23 December 1878 of the termination of their contract. Production of the line-engraved stamps ceased in mid-1879. The 1d red was superseded on 1 January 1880 and the other denominations in the course of that year.



Top: part of a proof sheet of 240 1d black stamps.

Above: a ½d stamp, in a small horizontal format, was adopted at the same time as the 1½d denomination was revived.



EMBOSSSED STAMPS, 1847-54

Wyon's first embossed design (in brown) for stamped paper, 1840.

Embossing had been used since the reign of William and Mary (1694) for impressing the tax label on legal documents, a practice which continues at the Stamping Department of the Board of Inland Revenue at Somerset House, London to this day. It is not surprising, therefore, that this process was suggested in many of the essays submitted in the Treasury Competition of 1839 and some of them, notably those entered by Benjamin Cheverton, Charles Whiting and Robert Sievier, were extremely elegant in appearance. Among Whiting's proposals was an embossed oval stamp inscribed 1D HALF OZ. These and other Whiting essays in the Phillips Collection were produced at Beaufort House, London. Embossing was applied to the manufacture of stamped envelopes, wrappers and letter sheets from 1841 onwards but the individual method of production, however, made embossing too tedious a process to be widely used in the manufacture of adhesive stamps.

In 1847 the Board of Inland Revenue bowed to pressure from the public for stamps of higher denominations, but decided that this work should be carried out on the Board's premises at Somerset House, using the embossed method. In embossing, the original die is engraved rather like a cameo, the details being achieved by variations in the

depth of the sculpture. Intermediate dies, known as punches, are struck from the master die and then working dies are struck from the punches. The ink is spread on the flat portions of the die and the paper pressed on a pad of leather, to squeeze the paper into the recesses of the die.

Simultaneously the paper takes up the ink from the unrecessed portions of the die. Thus the design is shown in colourless relief against a flat, coloured background. Each impression was struck individually and, as a result, the spacing of stamps on the sheet was often irregular, sometimes overlapping.

William Wyon engraved the dies for the postal stationery, beginning with the 1d pink of 1841-1902. The Guildhall portrait of the Queen was retained by Wyon for the 1s green, set in an octagonal frame inscribed POSTAGE ONE SHILLING on the upper sides, and released on 11 September 1847. This stamp, like the 10d brown which appeared the following year, was embossed on special paper manufactured by John Dickinson showing two vertical silk threads impregnated in each stamp. This readily distinguishes the adhesive stamps from cut-outs of undated postal stationery of the 1890s which are often confused by beginners for the adhesives.



The 6d lilac, with an upright oval frame and flat extensions at top, bottom and sides, had a similar arrangement of inscriptions, but added a spray of heraldic flowers at the foot. It was introduced in March 1854 and bore a watermark 'VR' in single-lined letters, which may be found upright, inverted or reversed. Later printings of the 6d had the gum tinted green to aid the printer in distinguishing the gummed side of the paper.

Die numbers were indicated on these stamps by minute figures engraved on the base of the bust, together with the initials 'ww' (William Wyon). Two dies of the 1s were used (1-2), five for the 10d (1-5) and only one for the 6d. Some stamps from die 1 of the 10d exist without the die number showing while, generally speaking, the die numbers tend to be rather indistinct. Although a few stamps from die 5 have been recorded, this die was generally employed only from 1889 in the production of postal stationery. The stamps were issued imperforate and good, four-margined square copies are worth a substantial premium. It seems to have been an unfortunate practice by Victorian collectors to trim these stamps to fit the spaces allotted them in the early printed stamp albums.

Embossed stamps: specimen overprints on 6d and 1s, and essays for 1s in green and brown



SURFACE-PRINTED STAMPS, 1855-87

Colour trials for 1865 6d stamp

In 1855 a radical change was made in British stamp production when Thomas De La Rue was given the contract to print a fourpenny stamp by the letterpress process. Previously this company had produced Draft and Receipt stamps for the Board of Inland Revenue in 1853. Mounting disquiet over the security and adhesive qualities of the line-engraved stamps led the Board to award a postage contract to De La Rue, whose stamps, being printed on dry paper, did not suffer the problems of uneven shrinkage experienced in the Perkins Bacon stamps, thus rendering accurate perforation difficult.

Over the ensuing years De La Rue typographed many different stamps, using the Corbould version of the Wyon medallion portrait,

engraved by one of the greatest exponents of the *en epargne* process, Jean Ferdinand Joubert de la Ferté. Over 25 years from 1855 to 1880 De La Rue produced numerous designs, often varying in comparatively minor details, so that the beginner tends to be bewildered by their profusion. To complicate matters further, the stamps were not issued in sets, but in ones and twos as required.

The earliest issues, from 1855 to 1861, had no corner letters. The 4d was printed in various shades of carmine on paper with a Garter watermark, whereas the 6d lilac and 1s green used paper with a watermark showing heraldic emblems in the corners. These watermarks were retained for the stamps of 1862-4 which had tiny corner letters in white on a coloured background in all four corners. In this series 3d and 9d denominations were included, the 4d now changing to red. Large uncoloured letters were adopted for the series of 1865-67. The 6d stamp of 1856 had the value rendered as SIX PENCE, but in the 1862 version it appeared as SIX-PENCE. The first printings of 1865 retained the hyphen but later printings omitted it again. A 10d value was added to the series in November 1867.

From 1867 to 1880 the 3d, 6d, 9d, 10d and 1s were printed on paper with a Spray of Rose watermark. Versions of the 6d with or without hyphen appeared in this series. A 2s stamp was added in July 1867, originally printed in various blue shades but changed to brown in February 1880. During 1872-3 the colour of the 6d changed from lilac or mauve to chestnut, buff or grey, the denomination shown as SIXPENCE.

In 1873 the 3d, 6d and 1s stamp were re-issued with large coloured corner letters on a white ground, and this style was extended to the 4d in 1876. The colour of the 4d changed from vermilion to sage-green in 1877 and then to grey-brown in 1880, and latterly the colour of the shilling changed from green to orange-brown. Following Britain's accession to the Universal Postal Union, a 2½d stamp was introduced in July 1875 to pre-pay the foreign letter rate. Originally rosy mauve, it changed to blue in 1880 to comply with UPU colour regulations.

In July 1881 a new 1d stamp was introduced as part of the policy of consolidating postal and fiscal duties. Inscribed POSTAGE AND INLAND REVENUE, the 1d lilac was intended for use either as postage or as a receipt stamp. The original die with 14 corner pearls was replaced in December 1881 by one with 16 pearls, remaining in use till 1902.

A 9d green stamp was introduced in August 1883 in connection with the Parcel Post. Other values, from ½d to 1s, appeared in April 1884 and came to be known as the 'Lilac and Green series'. In this set coloured corner letters were restored.



A crown watermark was adopted in 1880 for the typographed low-value stamps from ½d to 2d which replaced the Perkins Bacon line-engraveds. A 5d stamp was added to this series in 1881. In this set, only the 1d Venetian red retained coloured corner letters. This watermark was extended to the higher values (2½d to 1s) from December 1880 onwards. In 1883 the 3d and 6d were re-issued in lilac with the values prominently surcharged in carmine. The Phillips Collection contains a fine range of material from the experiments with these surcharged stamps (above).



HIGH-VALUE STAMPS, 1867-83

The Phillips Collection has a comprehensive range of the high values, including a block of six 2s6d on blued paper and the magnificent block of six 10s cobalt on blued paper, above.

The need for high-value stamps to pre-pay the postage on bulky overseas packets led to the introduction of a 5s rose stamp in 1867, followed by 10s greenish-grey and £1 brown-lilac in September 1878. These were printed by De La Rue in a larger, almost square format, using paper with a cross pattee watermark. An anchor watermark was substituted in 1881-3 when a £5 orange stamp twice the width of the other stamps was added to the range. This large stamp was in the design of the £5 telegraph stamp of 1876, with the inscription suitably amended. These stamps may be found on white or blued paper. Most of the higher values, especially the £5, were confined to internal Post Office accounting systems and were not for use on parcels and packets. The 'postmarks' on used examples are invariably the cancellations used in the Receiver and Accountant General's Department and its branches.

In the stamps of 1867-83 the corner lettering had been colourless on a coloured ground. In 1883 this was changed to coloured letters on a white ground and the opportunity was taken to introduce new designs, and a 2s6d value. In this series the value appeared in numerals in the side panels, as well as in words across the foot as in the previous series. Both blued and white paper versions exist, the latter being the commoner. For the new £1 stamp a format three times as wide as the low-value stamps was adopted, and an Orb watermark appeared three times on each stamp. The colour changed from brown-lilac to green in 1891.



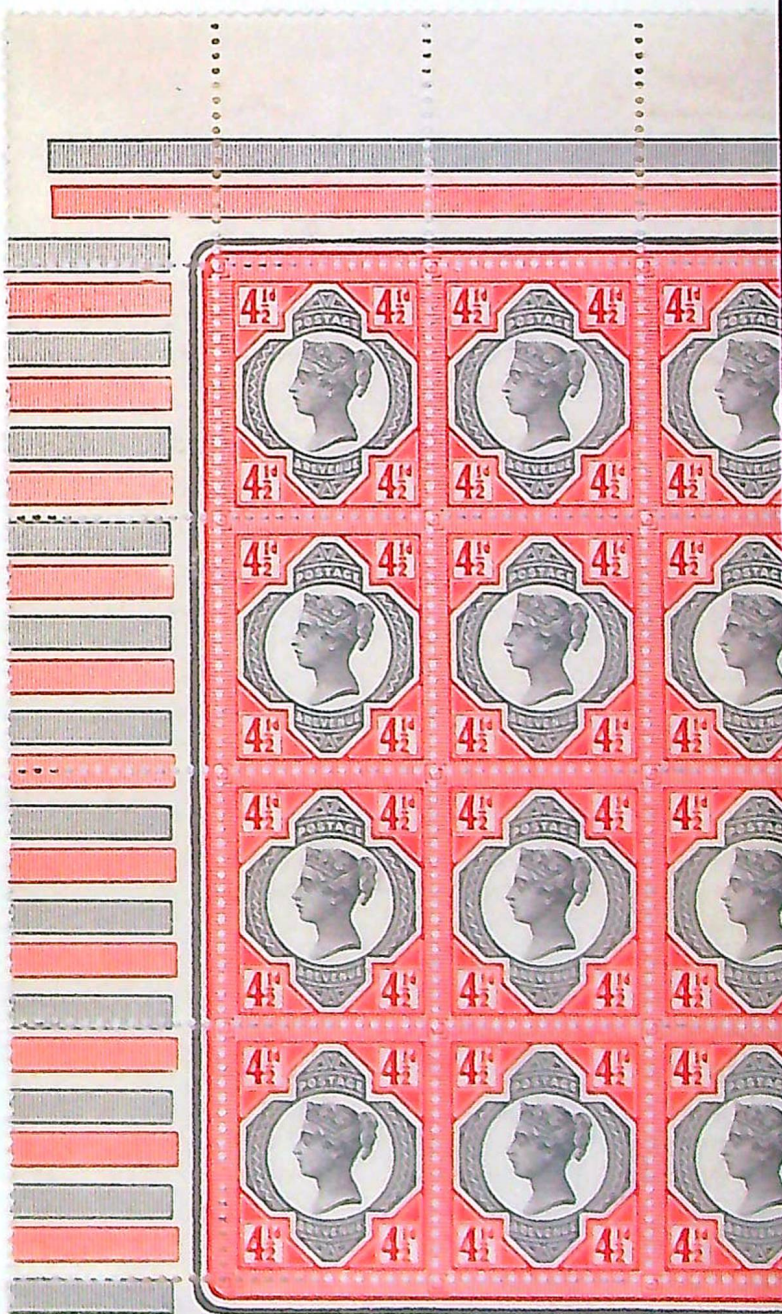
One of ten sketches submitted by De La Rue for new 10d stamp, 1889. The company did not consider this design 'particularly happy'!

JUBILEE SERIES, 1887-1900

This issue derives its nickname from the fact that it appeared in the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee but this was quite fortuitous and it cannot be regarded as a commemorative set. All the low values up to 1s were altered, except the 1d lilac, while the ½d vermilion was modelled on its predecessor, reducing the Queen's head to incorporate the new inscription POSTAGE & REVENUE in a circular frame.

The previous Lilac and Green series had been criticised on account of its monotonous appearance. In the Jubilee series the need to retain doubly fugitive lilac and green inks was mitigated by an adroit combination of these pigments with singly fugitive inks in bicoloured stamps. Thus the 2d was printed in green and carmine, the 4d in green and purple-brown and the 5d and 9d in purple and blue. The 1½d was printed in both doubly fugitive inks and the 1s in green alone. An interesting innovation was the use of purple ink on tinted papers to produce the 2½d (blue), 3d (yellow) and 6d (rose-red).

A 10d value, in purple and carmine, was added to the series in February 1890 and a 4½d green and carmine in September 1892. To con-



The 4½d value of 1892, one of the more attractive of the series, was printed in sheets of 240 divided into panes of 20 surrounded by bicoloured Jubilee lines and separated by pillars. The Phillips Collection includes two complete panes from the sheet.

form to the UPU colour regulations the ½d, pre-paying the international printed matter rate, was changed from vermilion to green in April 1900, and at the same time, to avoid confusion, the 1s became a bicoloured stamp, in green and carmine.

In this Unified series (ie unifying postal and fiscal duties), the inscription included the word REVENUE as well as POSTAGE. On the ½d and 1s the value was rendered in words, but in every other denomination it appeared in numerals – twice on the 3d, 5d and 10d and four times on the 4d, 4½d and 9d. Great care was taken to fill every part of the design with ornament although only the 5d, featuring the arms of the United Kingdom, contained a pictorial element.

After the Queen's death and the introduction of the corresponding denominations of the Edwardian series by July 1902 the Victorian stamps were gradually demonetised. Subsequently, the public were given till 31 December 1902 to exchange Victorian stamps for Edwardians or their cash equivalent at the regional offices of the Inland Revenue. Nevertheless it appears that they continued to be used for several years after that date, as it became necessary to publish an announcement in the *London Gazette* on 21 May 1915 that Victorian stamps would not be valid for postage after 30 June.

The Victorian stamps were also overprinted for use on Government parcels (from 1883) and by the Inland Revenue (1882), Office of Works (1896), Army (1896) and Board of Education (1902) for departmental mail. Many of these are scarce, especially used on cover or parcel wrapping.



Nine of the 15 colour trials for the One Shilling (Jubilee Issue) of 1887.



Many of the items illustrated here can be seen in the Reginald M Phillips Collection in the National Postal Museum – first opened in 1966 to house and display this outstanding collection of British 19th century stamps, and the Post Office's own collection of British and overseas stamps. In 1965 Mr Phillips generously donated his magnificent collection – the most comprehensive of its kind in private hands – to the PO in trust for the nation so that all who shared his interest in Victorian stamps might enjoy it forever.

In recent years the Museum has expanded considerably and now includes postal artefacts as well as stamps. The 'Post Hastel' exhibition tells the story of the postal services through vehicles, letterboxes, machinery and numerous small artefacts. Visitors can see changing exhibitions of stamps (announced in the *British Philatelic Bulletin*), as well as permanent displays of issues from around the world. The Museum's research facilities are available by prior request.

The Phillips Collection

THE NATIONAL POSTAL MUSEUM

King Edward Street, London EC1A 1LP.
Telephone 0171 600 8914

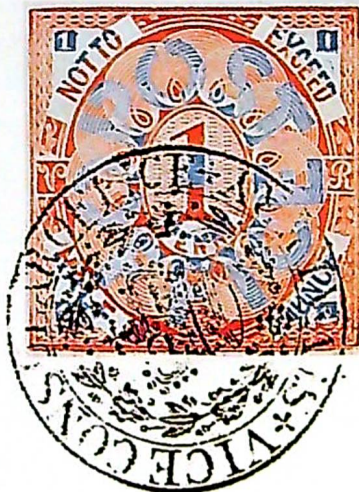
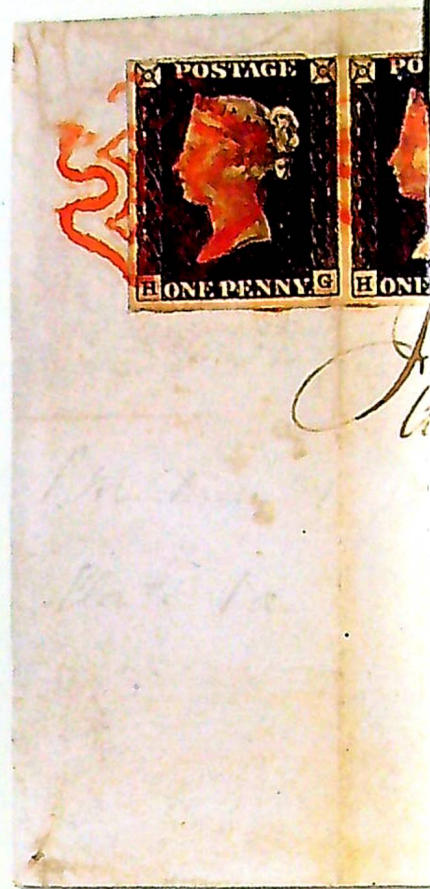
Open Monday to Friday 09.30 to 16.30,
admission free. Near St Paul's Cathedral
and underground station.



Detail from plaque in NPM main gallery: 'His object was to create a living tribute to the vital contribution that Britain has made to international postal communications through the development of uniform postage and the invention of the adhesive postage stamp'.



2. SHILS



£2.95 UK retail price

