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THE SOCIETY DOES NOT NECESSARILY AGREE WITH THE VIEWS EXPRESSED BY CONTRIBUTORS

Re-used Line-Engraved Plates

W. de L. M. Messenger

I should like to add some further observations on the re-use of plates to the articles by Dr David Leivers (GBJ, Vol. 37, No. 1, p. 1; Vol. 39, No. 2, p. 22), Mike Batty (GBJ, Vol. 38, No. 1, p. 18) and Winston Hollins (GBJ, Vol. 39, No. 2, p. 22).

It is obvious that there was strong reason to re-use plates since, at the prices in the records, each plate cost over £100 in today's money. Worn or defective plates were partially defaced by means of a file (Bacon, p. 120) as they were withdrawn from use and the image was eventually erased completely by grinding. I believe this was done in a grinding machine, which would produce a surface both plane and plain. If the final grinding wheel were of sufficiently fine texture there ought to be no scratch marks. (If a lathe, as erroneously thought by J. B. Bacon, or a planing machine were used there would have been tool marks). Again I cannot believe the 'planing' was done by hand scraping without taking a long time and leaving marks which, though perhaps invisible on the plate, might show up on the printed sheet.

I would have expected that the scores from a file used for partial defacement would often be deeper than the engraving and would be more likely than the original design to re-appear on a re-used plate. It should also be understood that a plate re-used for 2d stamps would very probably have been a 1d plate in its earlier life. Therefore, when looking for evidence of re-use, particular attention should be paid to the value tablet.

RE-USED LINE-ENGRAVED PLATES

| RE-USE OF HALFPENNY PLATES | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------|----|----|----|----|-----------------------------|---|---|----|-----|---------------|
| Dates begun | PLATES | | | | | | | | | | Dates defaced |
| | ½ in. thick | | | | | ⅜ in. thick (Bacon, p. 196) | | | | | |
| 6. 6.70 | 1 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 13. 6.70 | | 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| 15. 6.70 | | | 3 | | | | | | | | |
| 21. 6.70 | | | | 4 | | | | | | | |
| 28. 6.70 | | | | | 5 | | | | | | |
| 4. 7.70 | | | | | | 6 | | | | | |
| 12. 7.70 | | | | | | | 8 | | | | |
| 19. 7.70 | | | | | | | | 9 | | | |
| 1. 5.72 | | | | | | | | | 10 | | |
| 8. 5.72 | | | | | | | | | | 11 | |
| | X | X | | | | | | | | | 15. 1.73 |
| 12. 1.74 | 12 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 19. 8.74 | | 13 | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | X | X | | | | | | | 20.10.74 |
| 5. 1.75 | | | 14 | | | | | | | | |
| 10. 5.76 | | | | 15 | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | X | | | | | 22. 9.76 |
| 3. 1.77 | | | | | | 16 | | | | 17 | 18 |
| | | | | | | X | | | | (X) | (X) |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 11. 1.77 | | | | | | | | | | 19 | |
| 25. 1.77 | | | | | | | | | | | 20 |
| | | | | | X | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | X | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | 7. 6.77 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | 19.10.78 |
| 10. 9.79 | | | | | 21 | | | | | | |
| 23.10.79 | | | | | | | | | 22 | | |
| | X | X | X | X | X | | X | | X | X | X |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | X | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | 26.10.80 |
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | 20. 6.04 |

Dates are taken from IR 79/79. Where two plates were defaced on the same day it is uncertain which (of two) were their new plate numbers. It is likely that Plate 16 was irreparably damaged by breakage of what was probably the spindle of the roller (the roller proper merely suffering hairline cracks invisible until early proofs were taken soon after the laying down of Plates 17 and 18 began.

Plates 1 to 9 (excluding 7) were made from the first batch of new plates (see de Worms, p. 740).

It is possible to draw a few deductions from the available evidence:

No plate was defaced before January 1842, so any plates engraved before then could not have been 'second-hand'.

The Perkins, Bacon hardening record (de Worms, p. 741) had, against 17 April 1864, '72. *Postage Plate. No. 93. 35 minutes. Mem: Steel thin but good & had been plained. Hardening Excellent.*' I suggest the thickness had been reduced by grinding to make the surface 'plain'. In other words this seems to be a re-used plate. Stamps from it may be worth critical examination.

The Somerset House record of 'Recess printing Plates' (IR 79/79 in the PRO, Kew) does not record repairs by re-entry to any of the various plates mentioned by Messrs Leivers, Batty and Hollins, except for 2d Plate 9. This was repaired by extensive re-entry twice:

| Ref. | No. of re-entries | Approx. date |
|-------|-------------------|--------------|
| A 136 | 16 | June 1866 |
| A 208 | 48 | Late 1867 |

The references are to some sort of day books which recorded every event in each plate's life. Comparing them with similar or adjacent references for other events where dates are recorded suggests the dates in the last column.

Finally, I am at present engaged in drafting a detailed study of the chronological and numerical data of the ½d issue of 1870. In the course of it I have worked out a possible scheme of utilisation of new blank plates and reconditioned ones. This is based on the available chronological evidence, in particular dates from IR 79/79.

Bacon says (p. 196): '*The plates of the halfpenny stamps were at first of the same thickness as those of the other values, five-eighths of an inch [c. 15.9 mm], but owing to their larger size and great weight, thinner plates were afterwards used which were only three-sixteenths of an inch [4.8 mm] in thickness. The plates had to be screwed down on the loose bed of the transferring press and the holes of the four corner screws were afterwards filled up with steel rivets*', i.e. before use for printing. Did they leave traces in the corners of the sheets? This would show which were the thinner plates and perhaps help to validate the table.

Perhaps the suggested scheme will help focus attention on ½d stamps with a view to discovering any re-used plates. Unfortunately it does not seem feasible to produce similar schemes for the other denominations. ☒

Book Review

TAXATION ON PLAYING-CARDS IN ENGLAND FROM 1711 TO 1960. John Berry. Size A5, card cover, vi + 87 pp., B&W illustrations. Published by The International Playing-Card Society, 2001. Price £8 plus postage & packing from the publisher, 6 Reynard's Copse, Highwoods, Colchester CO4 4UR. ISSN 0305-2133.

The author admits he has recently realised that much of the early work was done by philatelists rather than by playing-card collectors, so this provides me with a good reason for reviewing it here.

John Berry states that his account is intended not so much as a history of taxation but rather as an attempt to bring together the sort of information that should be useful to collectors and cataloguers of English playing-cards. To this he could have added that it would also be of use to revenue stamp researchers. One of his aims has been to correct the many misconceptions that have been published in earlier treatments of the subject and for this we must be grateful for his research.

The subject is covered in three sections. The first is a detailed description of the way in which the various statutory enactments were implemented and how the duty was indicated on the wrapper and/or on one of the cards, notably the Ace of Spades. The second section is a catalogue listing of Aces, labels and wrappers with the third section providing illustrations of many of them.

The history starts in 1711 when a duty of sixpence a pack was imposed, comparatively a very large sum since the cheapest cards cost only a halfpenny a pack and even the dearest cards cost little more than four pence. Additional sixpences were added later and there has been much debate as to how they were indicated, but John Berry puts his view (earlier advanced by John Chandler) very convincingly.

Collectors will find the early history only of technical interest due to the paucity of material, but with the later use of handstamps and printed Aces of Spades the listing will be of greater practical use.

The illustrations of the Coats of Arms from 1707 to the present day could be helpful in other contexts.

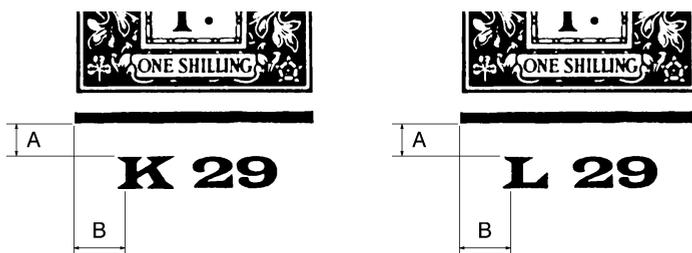
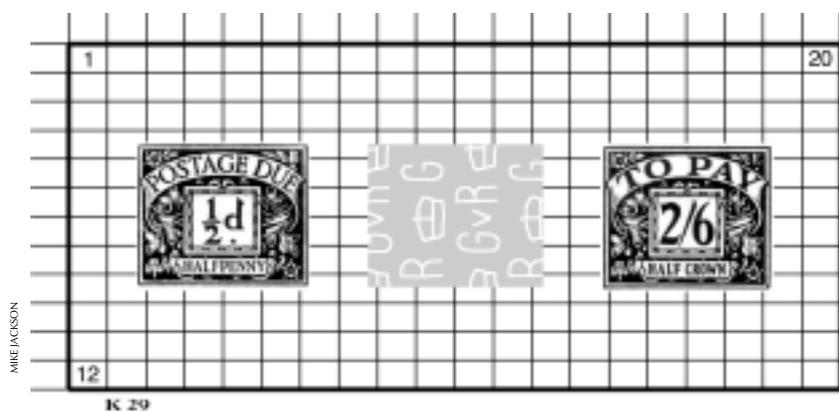
The book is well produced and clearly laid out and is a valuable addition to the literature of revenue stamps.

H.D.

1929 Postage Due Controls

Jean Alexander FRPSL

The postage due stamps printed in 1929 had the control letters K 29 (first six months of 1929) and L 29 (last six months). The design of the postage dues was in 'landscape' format (rather than 'portrait' as on the definitives) and the sheets were thus made up of 12 rows of 20 stamps — see diagram below. The control letters were positioned in the margin below R12/2; this included the 1d value (which on the definitive issue was positioned at the other end of the bottom of the sheet).



The plates used to print the stamps had the control piece screwed in when in use. The position of the control is characteristic for each plate, and it can be positioned by the use of two co-ordinates as shown (measurements are in mm).

Two plates were used for each value and for each control letter except for the 1s (which was only printed with K 29) and 2s 6d (which was printed from only one plate per control).

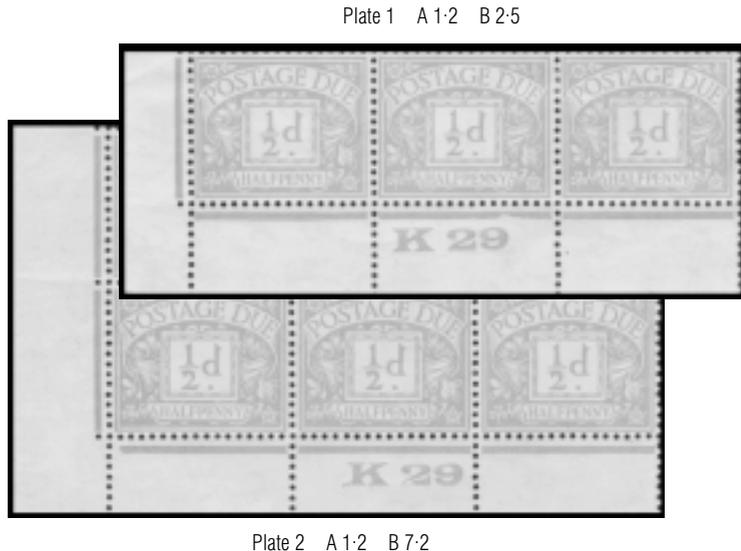
| CONTROL POSITIONS OF POSTAGE DUE PLATES USED WITH CONTROLS K 29 AND L 29 | | |
|--|--|--|
| | Control K 29 | Control L 29 |
| ½d | Plate 1: A 1·2 B 2·5 Plate 2: A 1·2 B 7·2 | Plate 1: A 1·2 B 3·6 Plate 2: A 1·0 B 2·3 |
| 1d | Plate 1: A 1·0 B 0·5 Plate 2: A 0·8 B 7·6 | Plate x: A 1·2 B 8·2 Plate y: A 3·2 B 7·4 |
| 2d | Plate 1: A 1·8 B 2·6 Plate 2: A 1·8 B 7·6 | Plate x: A 1·4 B 8·4 Plate y: A 3·2 B 8·0 |
| 3d | Plate 1: A 1·2 B 2·0 Plate 2: A 1·6 B 7·4 | Plate x: A 1·4 B 3·2 Plate y: A 1·0 B 2·0 |
| 4d | Plate 1: A 1·5 B 7·4 Plate 2: A 1·4 B 0·2 | Plate 1: A 1·2 B 2·2 Plate 2: A 1·0 B 3·6 |
| 1s | Plate 1: A 1·2-1·4 B 4·0 Plate 2: A 3·1 B 4·8 Plate 3: A 1·4 B 7·4 | — |
| 2s 6d | Plate 1: A 3·0 B 5·0 | Plate 1: A 1·4 B 8·6 |

Each of the K 29 plates has been arbitrarily numbered and where possible have been matched with the L 29 controls from the same plate. Where this has not been possible the L 29 controls have arbitrarily been given ‘unknown’ plate numbers (x or y) which can later be changed when they are matched with their K 29 control.

½d value

K 29 Plate 1 — this has an indentation in the base of the 2nd marginal rule above and to the right of ‘9’ of K 29.

K 29 Plate 2 — the left end of the marginal rule under 1st damaged.



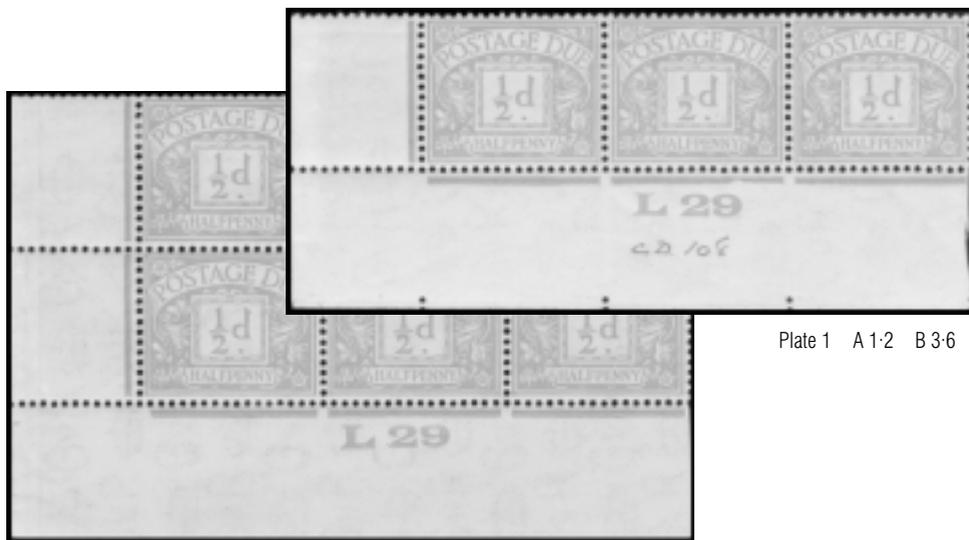


Plate 1 A 1·2 B 3·6

Plate 2 A 1·0 B 2·3

L 29 Plate 1 — This has the indentation in the base of the 2nd rule which is matched to the K 29 piece.

L 29 Plate 2 — The control shows the same damage to the 1st rule as on the K 29 piece and is considered to be from the same Plate 2.

1d value

The two K 29 plates have been numbered 1 and 2 but have so far not been matched with the L 29 controls labelled x and y (although a minute nick in the bottom right of the 2nd rule might link K 29 Plate 2 with L 29 Plate y.

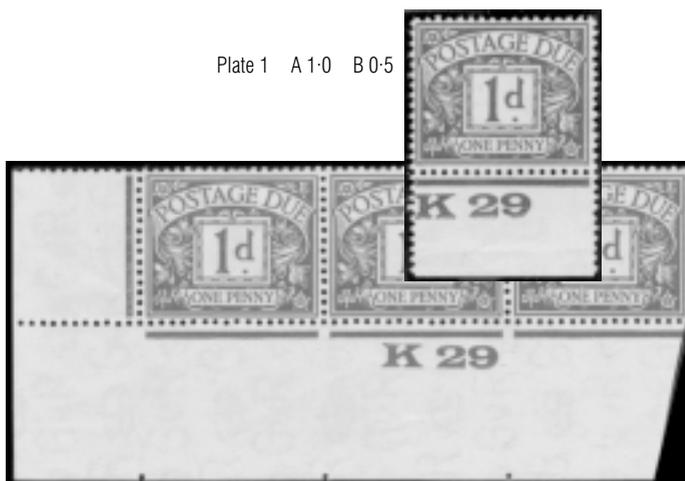


Plate 1 A 1·0 B 0·5

Plate 2 A 0·8 B 7·6

Plate x A 1:2 B 8:2

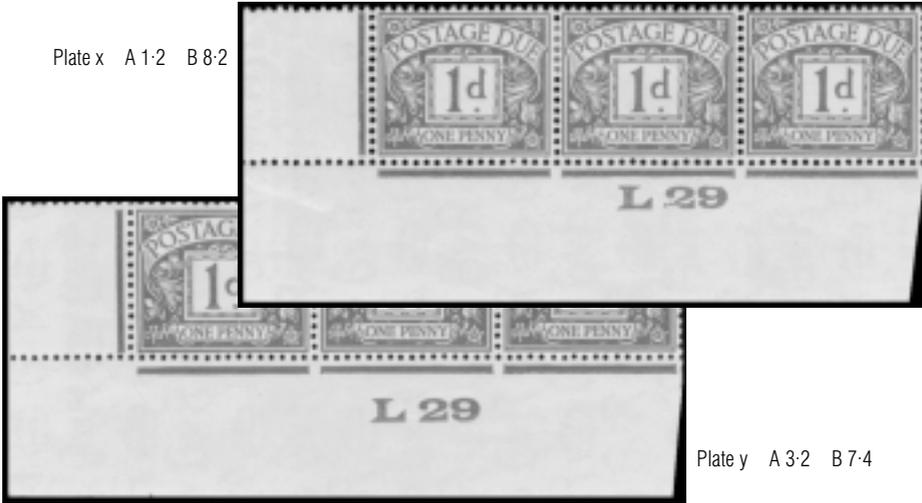


Plate y A 3:2 B 7:4

2d and 3d values

Like the 1d, the two K 29 plates for these two values have been numbered 1 and 2 but have so far not been matched with the L 29 controls labelled x and y.

Plate 1 A 1:8 B 2:6

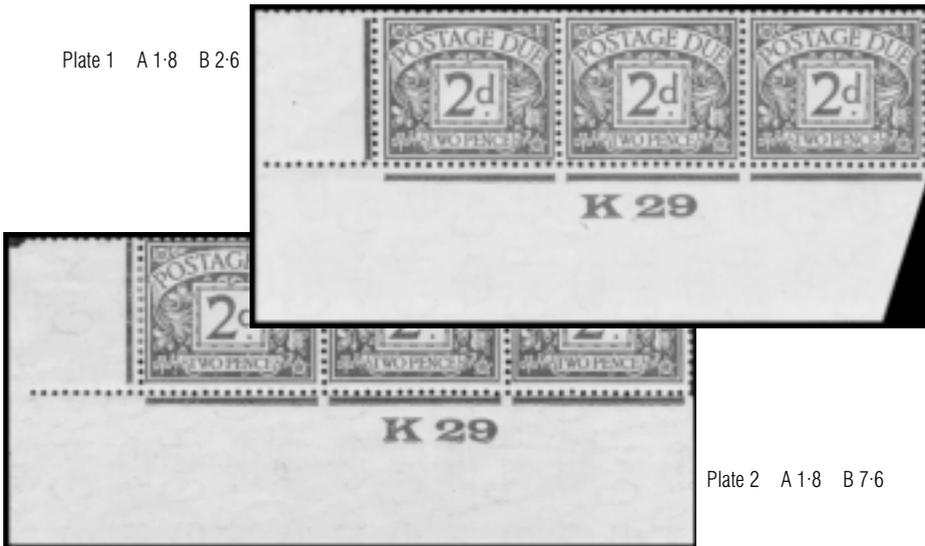


Plate 2 A 1:8 B 7:6

1929 POSTAGE DUE CONTROLS

Plate x A 1-4 B 8-4

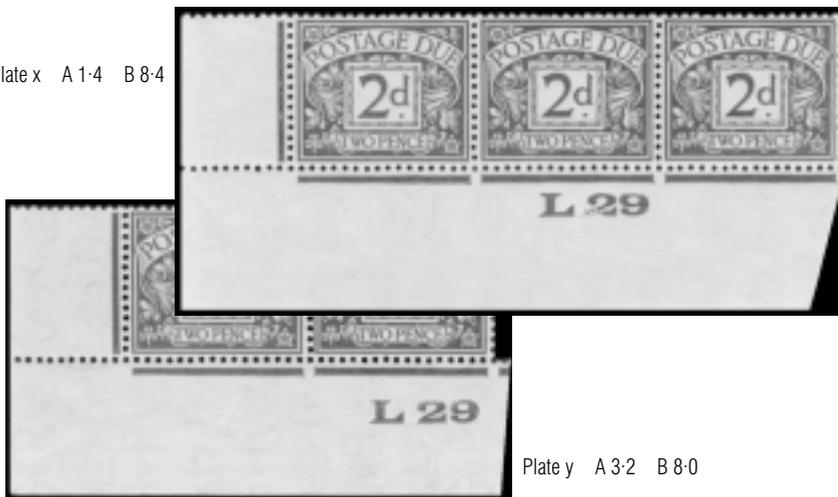


Plate y A 3-2 B 8-0



Plate 1 A 1-2 B 2-0



Plate 2
A 1-6 B 7-4



Plate x A 1-4 B 3-2



Plate y
A 1-0 B 2-0



Plate 1
A 1-5 B 7-4



Plate 2
A 1-4 B 0-2



Plate 1
A 1-2 B 2-2



Plate 2
A 1-0 B 3-6

4d value

On Plate 1 with both K 29 and L 29 controls R12/2 show the inner serif of the 'G' to have a thread like extension (*see close-up at right*). It is assumed the other two controls are from Plate 2.



Plate 1
A 1-2-1-4 B 4-0



Plate 2
A 3-1 B 4-8



Plate 3
A 1-4 B 7-4



1s value

There was only one control letter used (K 29) in three distinct positions; three plates may have been used, or as someone suggested one plate repaired and re-used.

2s 6d value

Only one plate was used: official Plate 1/44 (Richmond, GBJ 12/80-81 (1974)). Controls K 29 and L 29 have the plate marking under 2nd.



A 3-0 B 5-0



A 1-4 B 8-6

Shades

Vic Currie

Without wishing to become a bore (particularly on a subject of which I have little or no expert knowledge), I must say that nothing in the articles so far on the subject of ‘shades’ has given me reason to change my assertion that ‘there must be a more objective method of certification for the shades listed in the SG *Specialised Catalogue*, than the present subjective method’. That an instrument capable of doing this would probably be outside the affordable range for most collectors, would be unfortunate, but not alter my case.

Knowing that Minolta are recognised as experts in the field of colour measurement, they were asked to comment on whether or not an instrument could be used to recognise ‘shades’ of a given colour objectively. The following quotation is from their reply:

‘One of the main purposes for Instrument Colour Measurement is to remove the subjectivity from colour assessment. We cannot be consistent in the way that we see colours as there are so many variables which can affect our decisions. Instruments use a standard light source and are calibrated to a traceable Standard, the calculations are also standardised and we give guarantees on the repeatability and inter-instrument agreement of most of our instruments. No human can claim to give consistent results time after time as even our health and state of well being can affect the way we see colour. There are many different factors which can affect instrument consistency too, but if care is taken with good measurement technique then the effect of these can be minimised. Certainly even the most basic of instruments is considerably more consistent than we can be.’

I rest my case.



Supercalendering

Tony Wiseman (Vol. 39, p. 32) expresses ignorance of the term ‘supercalendering’, so let me briefly explain. Paper emerging from a papermaking machine has a slightly rough surface which is not conducive to good printing without further treatment. This is effected by passing the paper through what is known as a calender, which consists of a series of pairs of highly polished rollers that ‘iron’ the paper giving it a smoother surface.

A supercalender is just what it says — it produces an even smoother surface, a super surface in fact. The pressure between the rollers is greater and there are more of them. The result is the harder and smoother surface that is needed for high quality stamp printing. H.D.

Seahorses Revisited

Some New Research Findings

Bryan Kearsley FRPSL

In Robert Maushammer's recent article (GBJ, Vol. 39, No. 1, p. 2) on the Bradbury Wilkinson 2s 6d Seahorse, anyone seeing the illustrated re-entries, using the latest digital technology, must have been impressed by their clarity. The only drawback was the magnification covered such a small area. Even so, it is a most useful device in revealing the actual appearance of these scarce items. At the end of his interesting article, he posed a number of questions, primarily directed at those currently researching the Seahorse issues.

My own investigations, which are still on-going, cover all the issued Seahorse printings, including those bearing *overprints*. Interestingly, my early findings do enable me to answer most of Mr Maushammer's questions. But, before doing so, let me begin by identifying the plate and position of his Variety #1.

Variety #1 identified

This is from Philatelic Plate 8 R5/1. It is a plate that possesses more significant re-entries than any other I have encountered. It has two major and eight distinctive ones and, as many as, 23 minor re-entries. Only seven impressions remain untouched.

With the minor Variety #2, I am not entirely sure of its plate. I suspect it may have come from one in its second state, possibly Philatelic Plate 5. (My researches have revealed several of the earlier plates appearing in two or more different states.) More investigative work is needed to identify Variety #2.

Now, let me turn to the questions.

No complete study

Although more than eighty years have elapsed since the Bradbury Wilkinson stamps were first issued, there is still no study that covers *all* their 2s 6d plates. For that you will have to wait a while longer, until my researches are complete. What I can reveal is that 22 plates for this denomination were made; more than has been assumed until now.

Research to date

Apart from the carefully observed and well annotated study on 3½ plates by Major General Sir Leonard Atkinson, the only other extensive work I am aware of was that conducted by Johan Rehnberg on the plates used for 'Irish overprints'. His findings were published in *Irish Philately*.

Misconceptions Over the years, it is interesting to consider just how many misconceptions about the Bradbury Wilkinson plates have been allowed to grow, unchallenged. The three most significant being that the change in plates (philatelically known as 'A' and 'B') precipitated an increase in the height of the printed stamp. And, whereas the earlier 'A' plates carried a small coloured dot in the margins, above the middle of the stamp, the larger 'B' plates did not. Furthermore, if the 'A' plates were re-entry ridden, the later 'B' plates were free from such tampering. None of these perceived truisms is correct.

Same die In fact, the height of the engraved impressions on the Bradbury plates remained unchanged throughout their contract period. The Mint supplied the firm with the original die (M 4 for the 2s 6d denomination), from which the printer produced a set of roller punches to enable them

Different plate layout to roll out their plates. Unlike their predecessors, who printed from flat plates containing 40 impressions each, Bradbury made double pane plates of 80 stamps (40 per pane). They used rotary presses for printing Seahorses, which required curved cylinder plates. Bending the plates had the effect of stretching the height of the stamps' engraved impression by nearly ½ mm to around 22.5 mm, which accounts for the comparative difference in the height to the early printings of Waterlow and De La Rue (22.1 mm), using the same Howard paper.

Why height varied If, then, the engraved plate impressions remained constant, why did Bradbury stamps vary in height? Two reasons. Firstly, differences in the types of paper they used and, secondly, a change to their printing processes from dampened to pre-gummed, dry paper.

Provisional findings From the large number of sheets I have, so far, examined, I can provide some provisional information on the variations to the image height of the 2s 6d Bradbury stamp. The figures I have shown (*see Table 1*) are an 'average size' taken from mint stamps only. They take into account the fluctuations in height found over a number of printings, using the same process and paper. During their 15½ years of printing Seahorses, Bradbury Wilkinson used three different papers (Howard, Joynson and Portal's Mixed Furnish). The periods shown against each type are the first and last known printing dates. Each change seems to have brought about a movement of about ¼ mm to the height of the stamps' printed impression.

| Table 1 — 2s 6d BRADBURY WILKINSON | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------|
| Printing periods | Average stamp height (mm) | Plate types |
| Damp printing from Nov. 1918 | | |
| Howard paper (Nov. 1918 – Dec. 1920) | 22.55* | } Series I |
| Joynson paper (Dec. 1921 – Sept. 1924) | 22.73* | |
| Dry printing from Jan. 1926 | | |
| Joynson paper (Jan. 1926 – Oct. 1926) | 23.12 | Series II |
| Portal's Mixed Furnish paper (Aug. 1927 – Jan. 1934) | 22.89 | Series II & III |

* These experienced greater fluctuations in height, due to variability of paper shrinkage on drying.

Sources: NPM, The British Library, PO Archives, private collections and Author.

'A' & 'B' plates — misleading The use of the present terminology of 'A' and 'B' plates to distinguish between the earlier and later plates is an over simplification and, ultimately, a misleading one. What is more, my researches have found

Guide dots present

the existence of guide dots on *all* Bradbury Wilkinson plates. Admittedly, even on some of the earlier plates their presence is not always evident. On the last Series (III), they are often absent and, even when present, they remain very faint indeed.

Three plate types

At various stages of its life, the Bradbury 2s 6d experienced three subtle but distinct changes to its plates. Basically, they were constant flaws to do with the value tablet. So, in addition to the differences in their image heights, there are other factors, which I have described in Table 2. To enable you to distinguish between each of the plate types, I have categorised these Series I, II and III.

Answers to other questions

- Atkinson's Plate 5 (Series I) is from its second state, after its refurbishment. Printed on Joynson paper, it was postally used in July 1924. Being 'used' may well account for its above average height.
- I have only been able to find two Bradbury plates on 'ribbed' paper. These being Philatelic Plates 2 & 8. Both are from Series I and were printed, almost entirely, on Howard paper. The only overprinted examples I have come across from these plates, using 'ribbed' paper, have been on Levant and Ireland (narrow date).
- Whether you accept that 'ribbed' paper was a result of a fault in the paper making process or the incorrect pressure of the gumming rollers, it occurred only on Howard

Table 2 — 2s 6d BRADBURY WILKINSON PLATE TYPES

| Plate type | Period in circulation (GB only) | Brief description | |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| Series I | Nov. 1918 – late 1926 | Constant flaws | Weakened horizontal frame lines to top left of value tablet, directly above 'AL' of 'HALF' |
| | | Re-entries | Fairly common, ranging from major to minor, including doubling of frame lines |
| | | Guide dots | Normally present and usually clearly visible |
| Series II | Early 1926 – late 1930 | Constant flaws | Horizontal frame lines of value tablet, now strengthened Frequent presence of broken letters, either 'C', 'R' or 'O' of 'CROWN' and/or 'P' of 'POSTAGE' |
| | | Re-entries | Occasionally, a few minor ones |
| | | Guide dots | Often present, but not so pronounced |
| Series III | June 1930 – late 1934 | Constant flaws | None |
| | | Re-entries | None so far discovered |
| | | Guide dots | Occasionally present, but very tiny and faint |

paper which was supplied to both Waterlow and Bradbury Wilkinson. This would explain its rare presence on the 2s 6d and £1 stamps of Waterlow.

You can help

To complete the Seahorses research, I am in need of your help in identifying some 2s 6d stamps, examples of which I have not been able to find in museum archives.

1. The well-known, but rare, re-entry on *De La Rue R10/4 (SG Spec. N64b)*. Although the position is known, the identity of the plate is not. A single marginal mint example appeared in the Shaida Collection, Lot 679. There is also a marginal vertical pair from a collection sold by Stanley Gibbons in December 1982 (Lot 1063). In addition, I believe, a used single example exists.
2. *Any marginal block examples from the last 2s 6d Bradbury Series III*, would greatly help in identifying their plates. The last series appeared in the early to mid-1930s. Their printing was, generally, very crisp and clean and their colour was mainly 'chocolate brown'.

Should you wish to make a valuable contribution to finalising this research, I would be most grateful if you could approach me through either Mike Jackson, the Journal's Editor, or Leslie Wilkinson, the Society's KGV research consultant. ☒

Sale of Stamps and Covers from The Royal Philatelic Collection

Spink — 17 May 2001

Further to the recent announcement that The Queen has given her assent to auction selected material from The Royal Philatelic Collection, Spink has published the catalogue of this forthcoming sale of stamps and covers. This sale, unprecedented in terms of the nature of the material to be offered and its extraordinary provenance, will take place on Thursday 17 May 2001. It will comprise some 200 lots, offering a range of stamps and covers from Great Britain, Dominions and the Empire.



Lot 2, a First Day Cover

In order to fund a programme of enhancement which has already begun with the purchase of a first day cover bearing ten 1840 Penny Blacks, Charles Goodwyn, The Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection, has recommended the sale of certain duplicate and surplus items from the Collection.

Among the 94 Great Britain lots to be offered is an 1840 Penny Black Plate 1a on a wrapper posted on 6 May 1840, the first day of use (est. £6,000–8,000). There are also mint examples of 1840 Penny Blacks and Twopenny Blues including singles and multiples, and a range of high value surface printed stamps with imprimatur impressions. Among these is a fine example of the 1883 10s anchor watermark on blued paper (est. £5,000–6,000). The reign of King Edward VII is represented by a very fine unused example of the 2d Tyrian Plum (est. £8,000–10,000). This stamp was never issued, owing to the death of The King. Also included from the reign are high value Official Stamps.



Lot 73, £1 brown-lilac
Plate 1 imprimatur,
est. £5,000–6,000

A King's hobby

The Collection was originally founded by King George V who was an enthusiastic and astute collector who made every effort to acquire the rarest stamps at the first available opportunity. By 1904, when Prince of Wales, he had obtained both the 1847 1d and 2d 'Post



Lot 23, an unused block of 12 of the 1840 2d from Plate 2,
est. £18,000–20,000

Office' stamps of Mauritius — the first stamps issued by a colonial Post Office and probably the most prized stamps that any collector could wish to acquire. The 1d was bought from the Earl of Kintore's collection and the matchless unused example of the 2d was acquired at auction in 1904 for a record price of £1,450. When The Prince of Wales was asked by a courtier whether he had seen in the papers that some fool had paid £1,450 for a postage stamp, he replied, 'Yes. You're talking to him.'



Lot 92, 2d Tyrian Plum,
est. £8,000–10,000

The King preferred to have mint blocks of stamps and in doing so started a trend. To this day, The Queen receives blocks from the Post Office and the Crown agents.

On many occasions, The King told of the great benefits which he had derived from collecting and of the immense relief which he was able to find from his arduous duties by forgetting affairs of state for a time by absorbing himself in his stamps. This was

especially true during the 1914–1918 war. For some thirty years he devoted time on three afternoons a week whenever he was in London to his stamp collection, and was only interrupted by his Page on two occasions. ☒



Lot 94, 10s I.R. Official,
est. £8,000–10,000

The Last Week of Postage Due Adhesives, January 2000

Graham Mark FRPSL

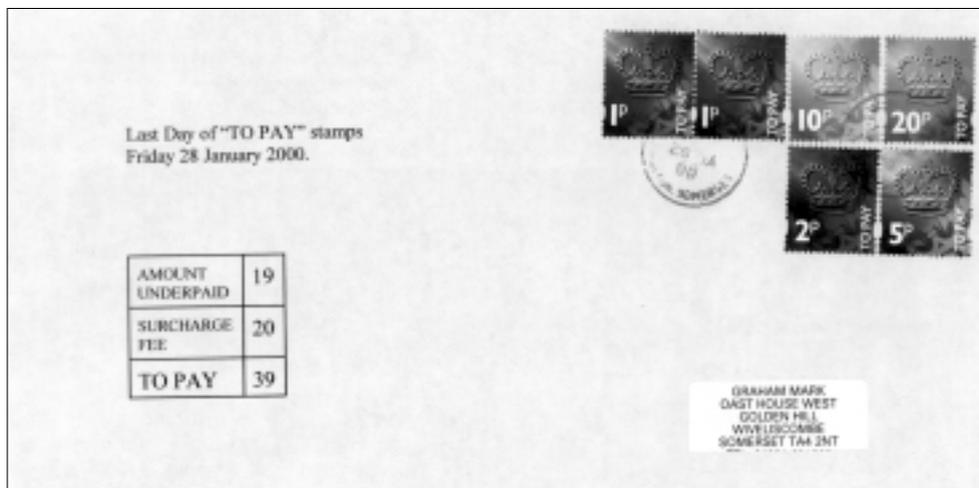
It was not well publicised, but the final demise of the TO PAY labels took place on 28 January 2000. As I understand it, from talking to Post Office people, instructions were given, a year or two ago, to cease using TO PAY labels but in some areas this instruction either did not reach the operating staff, or it was ignored, or it was phrased in such a way as to make their use optional. In any event I discovered that my local delivery office was one of the last to use the TO PAY adhesives so plans were laid accordingly.

Letter Mail is brought to Wiveliscombe Post Office by van from Taunton. At the Post Office there is a staff of seven delivery postmen/postwomen who then sort the mail for their delivery rounds. Two town rounds are delivered from bicycles and six rural deliveries are made by vans (five of them resident, plus the van from Taunton). Mail for surcharge is handled by the sub-Postmaster and from observation I noted that the stock of TO PAY adhesives was kept in the back of the counter book at one of the tills in the public office.

Taunton Sorting Office is being run down and soon all outward mail will be processed at Bristol. Not knowing what effect this might have, or quite how quickly items would get through the system, some mail was posted early in the last week of January. In the event anything posted in the Taunton area got through promptly and was usually received the next day. However, items posted just over the county boundary, in the Exeter postal area, were not processed as quickly. Among the items were: a Recorded Letter paid only 19p which was surcharged 80p on 27 January; a guaranteed delivery item, paid only 26p, and posted out of course, which was charged £3.29p on 28 January; and a bundle of unpaid items posted on 27 January were duly charged 39p each on the last day.

Unfortunately it seems that Taunton Sorting Office is 'de-mob happy' as much of the mail passed through their hands without being postmarked, or marked in any other way. It was all down to my local Post Office to spot the underpayments and apply the appropriate charges. Sometimes items were missed so I took them back and asked to have them properly charged, much to the amusement of the sub-Postmaster. Among the more unusual items received that week was a brick! Someone wanted to get higher value labels and posted a small brick in a Jiffy bag. (How are you going to mount that in the album, John?).

Throughout that week my local delivery postman brought the surcharged items to my door and collected the cash from me against delivery. This was out of keeping with systems



Unpaid cover posted at Wiveliscombe. Not postmarked at Taunton. Charged 39p at Wiveliscombe on the last day of TO PAY adhesives. The surcharge mark was printed onto the envelope before posting as Taunton Sorting Office did not mark earlier items for surcharge.

elsewhere which use the notice card. That may be accounted for by me having a good relationship with the postal staff, or the fact that we are a good honest rural community.

During the following week I called on a friend in Taunton to deliver his winnings and collect my fees and we decided to test the system once more. He agreed to send me an unpaid letter which, upon delivery, I would refuse to see how the Post Office handled such items. In the event his unpaid letter was delivered through my door without the postman asking for any money. On finding it amongst my mail I struck through the address and wrote 'Refused' and 'Unpaid' on the cover. As I was going out that day, I put the item in my bag and re-posted it at a small hamlet a mile or two away from Wiveliscombe. From there it was collected and it went to Bristol for sorting (the Taunton Sorting Office being phased out for handling outward mail). At Bristol it received an ink-jet postmark 'BS (code) RETURN TO SENDER', and it was then sent back to Wiveliscombe 'for proper handling'. Back here the return address was outlined in blue pencil, a multi-choice red label was affixed, the appropriate box ticked and the item was datestamped. From Wiveliscombe it went to back Taunton and was delivered to my friend, still unpaid and with no charge raised, three days after original posting. ☒

Stretched or shrunk?

Harry Dagnall FRPSL

In the catalogue of the recent auction of Dr Pichai Buranasombati's collection (Shreves 15 March 2001 – see GBPS *Newsletter* 269 for a report on the sale) there is illustrated as Lot 43 a mint block of 24 Plate lb Penny Blacks, reconstructed from a block of 18 and a strip of six that had once been attached to the larger block. The pairing of these two pieces has been called 'The Littaur reconstruction' as a tribute to the remarkable visual memory of Gavin Littaur that gave Dr Pichai the opportunity to acquire the matching strip. While some may admire the reconstruction as an example of a large block of Plate lb and others may wonder at the price (est. £150,000–200,000, sold for £165,000 plus 10% buyer's premium) it interests me for another reason: because it shows a feature that should be a warning to all students of 19th century stamps.

The strip of the six stamps PA to PF is noticeably wider than the six OA to OF in the row above, indeed the strip is wider than any of the other rows. The width of the stamps in the P row increases very regularly (compare the gradual shift of the right-hand star square in the P row with the column letter square of the O row) so it is not due to misalignment of an image on the plate.



Measuring the O and P rows on the photograph with a graticule I made the difference to be 1.3 mm, i.e. an average of 0.2 mm per stamp. The right-hand sides of the three F column stamps of the block are quite accurately aligned so it is reasonable to assume that PF would originally have been similarly aligned.

What caused the stamps to stretch so much? Was it atmospheric contamination, the condition of storage or perhaps some drastic treatment by a previous owner? The clue is given in the catalogue description — it once had a horizontal crease that was later ironed out. Heat usually causes paper to shrink but perhaps the pressure as well pushed the fibres apart. Also, the block has 'practically full original gum' while the strip is 'unused' (i.e. without gum), factors which may affect the size. The significance for collectors is clear — any measurements made on your stamps now do not necessarily provide a true record of what the measurement would have been at the time of printing. ☒