

The Penny Black

The most famous postage stamp of all time – the Penny Black, was issued to the public on 6 May 1840. The stamp was printed on hand-made paper produced at Hardingstone, Northamptonshire, by Perkins, Bacon & Petch at their premises in the City of London. The stamps were gummed with potato starch which was officially known as “cement”. In the margins of the sheets of stamps were printed instructions on how to affix the stamp to the envelope by wetting the “cement”. The paper contained a small crown watermark. The stamps were printed in sheets of 240 which remained the standard sheet size for low-value British stamps until 1971.

The design incorporated small squares in the four corners of the stamp. Those at the top contained “stars”, those at the bottom corner letters. These letters were intended as a precaution against forgery, each stamp on each printing plate having a different combination of letters from any other on the same plate. The theory was that a forger would make a plate of one stamp only or at least of very few different combinations so that his lettering would be repetitive and thus detectable.

The stamp was in use for less than one year being replaced by a stamp of the same design but printed in red. Approximately 70 million penny black stamps were produced at a cost to the Post Office of 6d per thousand stamps.



1d black
(SG2)



2d blue
(SG5)

1841



1d red-brown
(SG 8)



2d blue
(SG 14)

1854-7



1857
1d rose-red
(SG 40)



1854
2d deep blue
(SG 19)

1858-69



1864
1d rose-red
(SG 43)



1869
2d blue
(SG 46)

1870



1/2d rose-red
(SG 48)



1 1/2d rose-red
(SG 51)

The Penny Red



1854
(SG 17)



1855
(SG 24)



1857
(SG 36)

The Two Penny Blue



1855
(SG 23a)



1855
(SG 34)



1858
(SG 36a)

The Two Penny Blue

1858

Plate Numbers

The 2d blue in a perforated state and with letters in all four corners was put on sale in July 1858. The first printings (Plates 7–12) had thick white lines below the words POSTAGE and above TWO PENCE. Later printings (Plates 13–15) had thinner white lines. The later printing was first issued in July 1869.

(1) Thick White Lines (SG 45)



1858
Plate 7



1859
Plate 8



1861
Plate 9



1868
Plate 12

(2) Thin White Lines (SG 46)



1869
Plate 13



1871
Plate 14



1876
Plate 15

The Half Penny & Penny Ha'penny

1870

Plate Number Variations (SG 48 & 51)

The half penny stamp – designed for use on circulars – was issued in October 1870. The stamp was printed from 15 different plates from 1870 to 1878. Plates 2, 7, 16–18, 21–22 were not completed or used. Plate 9 was held as a reserve plate and consequently was not greatly used.

The 1½d stamp was issued from two plates – 1 and 3 – Plate 1 did not have the plate number in the design. Plate 2 was not completed and no stamps exist.



1



3



4



5



6



8



9



10



11



12



13



14



15



19



20



1



3

The Embossed Issues

1847–54

These three stamps are unique amongst British issues – being the only embossed adhesive postage stamps. The primary die was engraved by William Wyon, using as a model his own medal of 1837 depicting the young Queen Victoria. (The medal was struck to commemorate the Queen's visit to the City of London.) His initials – W. W. – can be seen in the base of the Queen's head.

On the dies the raised (embossed) portions of the design are sunk into the metal; colourless details (diadem, hair, eye, ear, etc) are achieved by variations in the depth of the engraving. When an impression is to be printed, ink is spread over the flat unrecessed parts of the die. The paper is then pressed onto the die (using a soft material such as leather) and that part of the paper which is forced into the recessed parts of the design remains uncoloured though not lacking in detail; at the same time the parts of the paper that contact the unrecessed parts of the die pick up the ink and form the coloured portions of the stamp. The stamps were printed at Somerset House.

The 6d stamp was printed on "V R" watermarked paper. The 10d and 1/- stamps were printed on paper with silk threads.



1854
Dull Lilac
(SG 59)



1848
Brown
(SG 57)



1847
Pale Green
(SG 54)

Early Surface-Printed Stamps



1857
4d rose
(SG 66a)



1856
6d pale lilac
(SG 70)



1862
1/- green
(SG 90)



1863
4d pale red
(SG 82)



1862
6d lilac
(SG 84)

Early Surface-Printed Stamps

The first 4d surface-printed stamp was issued on 31 July 1855, printed by De La Rue & Co. on highly glazed, deeply blued paper. The same stamp but on ordinary thin white paper followed in September 1856 and the 1/- stamp in November 1856. This replaced the embossed 1/- stamp of 1847.



1855
4d carmine
(SG 62)



1856
4d pale carmine
(SG 64)



1856
1/- green
(SG 73)

The first 3d and 9d stamps were issued in 1862, they were printed on paper with the floral emblems watermark. Each stamp has small uncoloured letters in each corner.



1862
3d bright carmine-rose
(SG 76)



1862
9d bistre
(SG 86)

1865



3d rose
(SG 92)



4d vermilion
(SG 94)



1/- green
(SG 101)



6d lilac
(SG 97)



9d straw
(SG 98)

1867-80
Watermark – Spray of Rose



1867
3d rose
(SG 103)



1869
6d mauve
(SG 109)



1867
10d red-brown,
(SG 112)



1867
1/- green
(SG 117)



1867
2/- deep blue
(SG 119)



1872
6d chestnut
(SG 123)

1867-80
Watermark – Spray of Rose



1867
6d lilac
(SG 104)



1873
6d grey
(SG 125)



1867
9d pale straw
(SG 111)



1880
2/- brown
(SG 121)



1876
2½d rosy-mauve
(SG 141)



1880
2½d blue
(SG 142)



1873
3d rose
(SG 143)



1877
4d sage-green
(SG 153)



1874
6d grey
(SG 147)



1873
1/- pale green
(SG 150)

1873–80

The first 2½d stamp made its appearance in July 1875, printed in rosy mauve and having an anchor design watermark.

The 4d stamp – in vermilion – with plate numbers shown either side of the word POSTAGE was issued on 1 March 1876 (SG 152). The stamp was reissued in grey-brown in August 1880 (SG 154).

The 8d stamp – printed in orange – was issued on 11 September 1876 on paper having the Large Garter watermark. This was the only Victorian stamp of this denomination and was intended for use on letters to India.

The 1/- stamp in orange-brown was released in October 1880, replacing the earlier 1/- stamp in green.



1875
2½d rosy mauve
(SG 139)



1876
4d vermilion
(SG 152)



1880
4d grey-brown
(SG 154)



1876
8d orange
(SG 156)



1880
1/- orange-brown
(SG 151)

Imperial Crown Watermark



1881
2½d blue
(SG 157)



1880
4d grey-brown
(SG 160)



1881
1/- orange-brown
(SG 163)

1881-83

Watermark – Imperial Crown

The 3d rose and 6d grey with coloured corner letters were issued in January–February 1881.

Postmasters complained of the difficulty of distinguishing between different values in the series and so it was decided to make a provisional issue by surcharging each stamp with its own face value in large figures. Only the 3d and 6d stamps were so treated – released in January 1883.



1881
3d rose
(SG 158)



1883
3d lilac
(SG 159)



1881
6d grey
(SG 161)



1883
6d lilac
(SG 162)

Low Values

1880-81

The 1/2d, 1d, 1 1/2d and 2d stamps of this issue replaced the line-engraved stamps which had been in service for a number of years. In the case of the 1d and 2d stamps, the same design had been in use since 1840.

The 5d stamp was a new value – for use on letters to India and China.

The designs of these stamps cannot be said to be inspired but were functional. In 1878 when the Inland Revenue were negotiating with Perkins, Bacon & Co. for the renewal of their stamp-printing contract, the Post Office pointed out that line-engraved issues were unsafe in that the cancellations could be easily removed without damage to the stamps.

They recommended that the stamps should be surface-printed as were the high value stamps and so the contract was given to Thomas De La Rue & Co.



1/2d pale green
(SG 165)



1d venetian red
(SG 166)



1 1/2d venetian red
(SG 167)



2d pale rose
(SG 168)



5d indigo
(SG 169)

The Penny Lilac

1881

Only the third design of 1d value since 1840, this stamp was issued in July 1881. This was the famous Penny Lilac and is probably the most commonly found of all Victorian stamps.

This stamp was produced using a new style of engraving adopted by De La Rue from 1880 onwards which involved a much coarser treatment of the background and the Queen's head.

The design incorporated the wording "POSTAGE AND INLAND REVENUE" signifying that the stamp could be used for either postal or revenue purposes. Previously all stamps had only the single word "POSTAGE". From then until 1967 all low value stamps bore the dual purpose inscription.

There were two dies made for printing this stamp – the first had 14 dots in each corner surrounding the oval containing the Queen's portrait, the second had 16 dots (issued December 1881).



Die I (14 dots)
(SG 171)



Die II (16 dots).
(SG 172)

The "Lilac and Green" Issue



*1/2d blue
(SG 187)*



*1 1/2d lilac
(SG 188)*



*2d lilac
(SG 189)*



*2 1/2d lilac
(SG 190)*



*3d lilac
(SG 191)*



*4d dull green
(SG 192)*



*5d dull green
(SG 193)*



*6d dull green
(SG 194)*



*9d dull green
(SG 195)*



*1/- dull green
(SG 196)*

The Jubilee Issue

1887



1/2d vermilion
(SG 197)



1 1/2d purple & green
(SG 198)



2d green & red
(SG 200)



2 1/2d purple on blue
(SG 201)



3d purple on yellow
(SG 203)



4d green & brown
(SG 205)



4 1/2d green & red
(SG 206)



5d purple & blue
(SG 207)



6d purple on red
(SG 208)



9d purple & blue
(SG 209)



10d purple & red
(SG 210)



1/- green
(SG 211)

The Jubilee Issue

1900

Revised Colours



*1/2d green
(SG 213)*



*1/- green & red
(SG 214)*