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BUCKINGHAM PALACE

GREAT BRITAIN - KING GEORGE V

Comments on the display from the Royal Philatelic Collection given by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen at the Royal Philatelic Society London on 17th September 1998.

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This display includes most of the material in the Collection relating to the adhesive postage stamps of Great Britain for the reign of King George V, and is particularly rich in artists' drawings and proofs of various kinds, especially from the earlier part of the reign.

Because of the sheer volume of material it has been necessary to leave out the postage due adhesives (introduced in 1914) and the extensive range of colour trials prepared for that issue, and also the postal stationery and embossed stamps, much of which is extremely repetitive, albeit of interest to the specialist!

So far as I am aware, however, little of the material being shown today has ever been exhibited.

As will be seen in the frames, while the imprimaturs and issued stamps of the reign are held in the Collection in the standard albums, for reasons of size of many of the items, virtually all the artwork and proofs are mounted on album pages very much larger than standard, and without remounting and rewriting around 60 sheets (which would probably amount to about 200 standard pages) and for which we simply do not have the time, the problems of display are apparent as no more than three of the oversize pages can be adequately shown in the frames here. I apologise, therefore, for the unfillable blank spaces, which are particularly noticeable in the free standing frames with their dark brown background.

The Collection generally follows a strict chronology; this does sometimes make it difficult to follow the sequence of a particular design or value, and where possible I have grouped items which are related even though this may break the intended chronology.

The Downey Head - Frames 1 to 18

The "drama" of the first issue for King George V is fairly well known - how it was criticized severely in public and in Parliament; even The King was upset by the controversy and did not like the stamps (see LP May 1997); the issue and its problems were also covered in a 15 minute paper by Michael Sefi, read to the Society in April 1993 (see LP March 1996) and illustrated from his own collection. The first 14 frames, therefore, cover the extensive work and trials leading up to the so-called Downey head issue, of which only the ½d and 1d values were actually issued although work was also being undertaken on the other values, as can be seen, until halted.

While frame 1 relates to the Downey head (and the sepia photographs are now fading somewhat) frames 2 to 5 are particularly important, being large size artwork and bromides. Frame 2 shows the ½d design which originally was proposed as the 1d; frames 3 & 4 show progress to the 1d while frame 5 develops the design to 4d. Of significance is the signing of some of the sketches by (Sir) Bertram Mackennal, the artist (and sculptor), or, in two cases, by J A C Harrison, the engraver.

Frame 6 shows work, mainly by J A C Harrison, on developing the ½d and 1d values to final die proofing (½d - 5A & 1d - 6B on the top right hand sheet in the frame) and frame 7 has Perkins Bacon essays (top sheet) and paper trials (the two lower sheets). Of particular note are the two blocks on the lower left sheet in frame 7 which are printings of the ½d and 1d values in reversed colours - i.e. the ½d is in red and the 1d is in green; I am not aware of the existence of any other examples of these printings in either of the two main national collections of Downey head material, or indeed privately.

Frame 8 shows development of the 2d and 2½d values and also Die 2 (the developed revised dies for the ½d and 1d). The lower right sheet in the frame has blocks of the printed 2d and 2½d values which were subsequently scrapped when the remaining Downey head values were cancelled. Of interest is the fact the plates at this stage did not have controls inserted in the flanges, suggesting that these printings were made at Somerset House and the plates had not been released to the printing contractors, Harrison & Sons (no relation to the engraver.) Complete sheets of these two values can be found in the two main national collections, overprinted "Cancelled", although a single, unoverprinted, 2½d copy has been in private hands for many years.

Frames 9 to **11** contain artwork, photographs and colour trials for the values to 1/-.

Most of the Collection's holding of "Hentschel" colour essays are shown in frames 12 to **14**. These essays were printed from zinc plates prepared for all the values for colour essay purposes and those shown cover the series of trials comprehensively. Of particular note is the lower sheet in frame **13**, showing the Downey head Hentschels in pair with die proofs of the equivalent King Edward VII designs to the 7d value. The colour schemes were dropped, leaving the ½d and 1d accepted shades of SD3 and SD2 respectively, being inks provided by the Stamping Department. New trials were undertaken for the profile head - see frame 22.

Frames **15** to **18** cover the issued stamps for the Downey head ½d and 1d - including imprimatur blocks, control blocks and booklet panes (with selvages removed) and imprimatur printings from the plates used for booklet panes. There is also a small and incomplete set of whole booklets on the top row of frame **16**. The lower row in frame **18** shows the scarce Somerset House printings on multiple cypher paper.

The Downey head issue, despite being at press for only two years from 1911 to 1913, is rich in variety, containing as it does 3 die types for each value and printings on three watermarks - imperial crown, royal (simple) cypher and multiple cypher, with some of the printings being carried out at Somerset House as well as the contractors, Harrison & Sons.

The Profile Head. Royal (simple) Cypher Watermark - Frames 19 to 34

Having decided, late in 1911, that they were never going to succeed with the Downey head (and The King's views on the debacle had been made very plain) work began in earnest to examine the possibilities of use of a profile head image of The King. In frame **19**, top left, examples of the experiments are shown, using cut outs of various heads inserted in the various designs to 3d. G W Eve had a major hand in the work, and sketches by him are also shown in frame **19**, top right.

Bertram Mackennal was resorted to again, and a sculpted design in clay was prepared by him. The bottom sheet in frame **19** shows a photograph of the 1d design as sculpted, initialled by The King on February 21st 1912. Frames 20 to 22 show work progressing on the profile head designs together with a spectacular group of colour trials on the two lower sheets in frame 22.

Frames 23 to 34 show the profile head printings to 1/-. The King obtained imprimatur blocks for virtually all the values but curiously did not manage to acquire one of the 1d value in the P O sheet printing format. However, he did obtain complete sheets of the eight 1d colour trials, and one of these is shown, in the approved colour and initialled by him, as seen in frame 24.

The King's methodology was to obtain an example of each control used in the printings, though more than one might be acquired if the shades were demonstrably different. Most of these printings have been left out of the display, although some have been included where known flaws or other changes are illustrated.

Frames 25 to 27 have booklet material - the Collection is not complete in this area in a specialised sense, but the imprimaturs and booklet panes in sheets are spectacular.

The Profile Head. Multiple Cypher Watermark - Frame 28

Frame 28 shows the scarce multiple cypher watermark printings (used almost entirely for coils) for the ½d and 1d values.

The Seahorses - Frames 35 to 39

This issue of the high values to £1 is regarded by many as one of the most beautiful designs ever conceived for Great Britain stamps. While enthusiasts for the 1840 1d and 2d might object, and certainly the design is not to modern taste, it was interesting for my two assistants to see a modern cast fountain in Moscow close to the venue for the "Moscow 97" exhibition which may well have derived from the seahorse design!

Bertram Mackennal was again employed to prepare designs as early 1910, and frames 35 to 39 show the progression to the initial issue in 1913, including signed sketches, die proofs, marvellous colour trials, imprimaturs and issued stamps, including examples of the stamps by each of the three printers employed at various times for the 2/6 to 10/- values. The re-engraved 2/6 to 10/- values of 1934 are also shown.

The Wembley Exhibition - Frames 40 to 42

Bromides of various designs by four artists, together with die proofs of the selected design are shown in frame 40; frame 41 and 42 show imprimatur sheets for both 1924 and 1925 issues, together with the issued stamps, showing for the 1924 printings both perforation methods. It will be seen that there are two distinct shades of both values in the 1925 printings.

The four imprimatur sheets were presented to Her Majesty in the early 1980s; the 1925 1½d sheet has one stamp missing. Cut from the sheet at some earlier point in its history, that stamp has recently surfaced, mounted on card.

The "Block Cypher" Values to 1/- - Frames 43 to 46

In 1924 Harrison & Sons lost the low values contract (they regained it in 1934 with photogravure printing proposals - see frames 48 to 51). Waterlow & Sons obtained the contract, no doubt on price criteria, but at the same time the paper was also changed and the new paper carried a more modern sans-serif block cypher watermark.

Frames 43 to 46 show a selection from the Collection of all the values ½d to 1/-, plus, again, a very limited group of complete booklets. A number of "printed on the gummed side" varieties appear, and in frame 46, top row, an unrecorded example of the 6d with no control.

1929 Postal Union Congress - Frame 47

All the material in the Collection relating to the 1929 special stamp issue commemorating the Postal Union Congress held in London that year is found in frame 47.

The Collection has none of the artwork for this issue, but the colour trials on the bottom row of the frame are particularly interesting.

The Photogravure Issue - Frames 48 to 51

Harrison & Sons regained the printing contract for the low values to 1/- in 1934. Their proposal was to print by the photogravure process "in the web" (i.e. onto reel fed paper, only guillotined into sheets after printing). However they did not have their equipment ready at the start of the contract and both Waterlows and Harrison printed the values most in demand from old plates during 1934. Examples of these "provisionals" appear in frames 43 to 46.

A series of colour essays, and presentation examples of the 1d & 1½d, are shown in frame 48.

Examples for each of the values to 1/- are shown in frames 49 and 51, but the Collection does not cover the issue in the way a modern specialist would, and a number of important items are not present.

However, the Collection does have five imperforate proof sheets of the 1 ½d in different colours printed in a strange format which unfortunately are too large to show today. In addition there is a perforated 1½d proof sheet, shown in frame 50, printed in May 1934, the stamps not actually being issued until August in that year.

The Silver Jubilee - Frame 52

The third special issue, in the space of 11 years, is represented by essays and the issued stamps for the 1935 Silver Jubilee (of The King's accession to the Throne). Full justice to the issue is not done in the Collection; no real attempt has been made to illustrate the three "types" in the ½d, 1d and 1½d values, types II and III coming from booklet printings.

However it is interesting to note that the essays in covering the 2½d value show examples in Prussian blue as well as the normal issued blue and there continues to be mystery as to what they were and how the (at least three) sheets of perforated Prussian blue 2½ds came to be in a sub-post office in Edmonton, London!