GREAT BRITAIN - BEFORE AND AFTER

21/2002

THE EMBOSSED ISSUES OF 1867-54

NOTES ON A DISPLAY PRESENTED IN SUPPORT OF A PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE ROYAL PHILATELIC SOCIETY LONDON ON THURSDAY 12 DECEMBER 2002

by Alan K Huggins

The embossed high value stamps issued between September 1847 and March 1854 have long been one of the Cinderellas of 19th century British philately. Very little new information has been written about them since Wright and Creeke published their magnum opus 'A History of the Adhesive Stamps of the British Isles' in 1899 under the Society's imprint.

Sandwiched between the imperforate line-engraved issues and the subsequent perforated line-engraved and surface printed issues they tend to be either coveniently ignored, being difficult to find in fine condition and thus having attracted uncomfortably close attention from the repairing fraternity! or simply overlooked as merely being three stamps offering little by way of interest or scope for study.

In reality these embossed stamps by virtue of their method of production provide not only an unrivalled insight into the interlinking between the fields of revenue and postage stamps and postal stationery, but are also the first stamps specifically created to prepay overseas postage and fees for registration. They mark the beginning of the end to the prepayment in cash on overseas mail and since their relatively short period of use spans the rapid development of global communications on both land and sea, they have considerable postal historical significance. Another feature, unique to these issues, is the contemporaneous usage from 1855-56 of the 6d and 1s dies for stamped to order postal stationery and the later use of all three denominations on stamped telegraph forms as well as stamped to order work.

The display to-day which attempts to trace the story of the forerunners to the 1847-54 adhesive stamps and their usage both as adhesive stamps and as postal stationery is divided into the following sections:-

Showcase in entrance hall	Notices to Postmasters etc.
Frame 1	Revenue forerunners and examples of early 19th century embossing technology.
Frames 2 & 3	The origins and development of the designs for for embossed postal stationery.
Frames 4,5,6	The 1d pink and 2d blue embossed postal stationery in use prior to the issue of embossed adhesive stamps.

Frames 7,8,9,10,11,12 The adhesive usage of the 1s,10d and 6d dies and their subsequent adaptation for other pruposes.

NOTICES TO POSTMASTERS

The Notices to Postmasters issued in February and April 1841 announcing the introduction of penny embossed envelopes in conjunction with changes to the contemporary 1d and 2d adhesives; the issue of the twopence embossed envelope; and the availability of uncut sheets of penny embossed envelopes.

REVENUE FORERUNNERS AND EXAMPLES OF EARLY 19th CENTURY EMBOSSING TECHNOLOGY

A selection of embossed revenue stamps and other items to show the origins and the technological capability available to produce the essays shown in frames 2 and 3 and the issued items in frames 4 to 12.

The revenue stamps were produced at the Stamp Office, the non-revenue items are the products of Charles Whiting's printing establishment at Beaufort House in the Strand and illustrate the outstanding quality of his work.

Charles Whiting had great hopes of winning a contract to produce the new stamps either by means of embossing, the bicoloured Congreve process (he had acquired the rights by mariage to Sir william Cngreve's widow), or a combination of both. To this end he produced a wide range of different designs over several years in support of those campaigning for the reform of the postal service. In particular he worked closely with William Wyon, together with his own engraver Alfred Deacon, to develop the design for the stamps intended to be impressed on paper submitted by the public - Rowland Hill's fourth proposal for the prepayment of postage (see sheet 1 in frame 2 and frame 3). In the event this service did not become operational until 1855 and in the interim the design was reduced in size to reduce costs and utilised for the more pressing need to replace the unpopular Mulready stationery.

Besides developing the designs incorporating Wyon's head of the Queen, Whiting promoted his cause with his own designs with the Queen's head facing right instead of left, not least by sending samples to potential supporters (see sheet 4 frame 2).

One advantage of embossing was the inherant protection against forgery offered by the difficulty and cost of making the dies but the advent of the electrotyping process caused concern to the authorities as witnessed by the letter from Rowland Hill to Fry (see sheet 8 frame 3).

THE FIRST EMBOSSED POSTAL STATIONERY

This section arranged by denomination and size of envelope shows the four varieties of paper supplied by John Dickinson used for the manufacture of the 1841 1d pink and 2d blue embossed envelopes. Dickinson held the Patent for the manufacture of paper which incorporated 'silk' threads (actually twisted cotton) into its structure as a security measure. Emphasis has been placed on combination frankings with adhesive stamps, including three examples of an apparently non-existent postal rate of threepence the rationale for which remains an open question, and overseas usages.

THE EMBOSSED ADHESIVE STAMPS OF 1847-54

Considerable difficulty had been engendered since the early 1840s by the lack of higher values than 2d in prepaying the postage on overseas mail etc. and although pressure had been brought to bear on the Post Office and the Board of Stamps and Taxes, fear of forgery of what were perceived as high value stamps. led to extended delays. Reponsibility for production was finally given to the Stamping Department at Somerset House which had extensive experience and expertise in embossing high value revenue stamps. The design by Wyon incorporated an embossed head of the Queen (cf. the contemporary postal stationery) within an octagonal frame and was common to both the 10d and 1s values, whereas the frame for the 6d which, as a consequence of Wyon's death in 1851, was designed by Ormond Hill had curved as well as straight components making up the octagonal shape. As a further aid to security against frogery the paper used for the 10d and 1s stamps was of Dickinson manufacture with two vertical blue threads, while the later 6d was printed on VR watermarked paper. The letters 'W.W.' together with the number of the working die were engraved at the base of the Queen's neck but are often missing or indecipherable due to the vagaries of embossing thin sheets of paper.

Originally the 10d and 1s values were only sold at the Chief Post Offices in London, Edinburgh and Dublin, four Branch Offices in London and 109 Provincial Offices, 59 in England, 20 in Scotland and 30 in Ireland, only becoming generally available at the end of April 1850.

Essays, die proofs and SPECIMEN blocks of all three values are shown in frame 7 sheets 1-3.

THE ONE SHILLING EMBOSSED

Originally issued in September 1847 to cover postage to the USA and a number of colonies and potentially the registration fee which was reduced to 6d in March 1848, it was superseeded by the De La Rue surface printed 1s in November 1856. Two dies were used for adhesive stamps while dies

3-12 were adapted to take date plugs and used for stamping to order work from 1855-94 and for stamping telegraph forms from 1869-84. In 1894 die 14 was fitted with florets(rosettes) and used until 1898 when a new group of undated dies numbered 16-19 were registered, but only die 16 appears to have been used. In 1866 undated impressions of die WW2 and and of die WW3 dated 16.3.66 were struck on various coloured papers for the purposes of De La Rue's exhibit at the Paris Exhibition of 1867 (see sheet 4 frame 8).

THE TENPENCE EMBOSSED

It was originally intended to issue the 10d at the same time as the 1s value but it did not appear until 6 November 1848. This denomination prepaid the rate to a number of countries in Europe and was used together with the 1s to cover the 1s10d rate to India and the far East. When the European rates were reduced on 1 January 1855 to 4d demand so decreased that stocks were withdrawn in August 1855 only to be reissued between 1862-66 to meet newly introduced changes in rates for which no 10d surface printed stamp was available.

Eight dies were registered but only dies 1-4 were used for adhesive stamps although Wright and Creeke claim to have seen die 5. The 10d dies were never adapted to take date plugs but dies 5 and6 were used struck in blue to stamp Foreign and Colonial rate telegraph forms from 1889-91 and by favour a very few envelopes in April 1890 (see sheets 7and 8 frame 10). In 1892 the colour reverted to brown and dies 5 and 7 were used to stamp telegraph forms and for stamped to order work.

THE SIXPENCE EMBOSSED

This value finally came into use on 1 March 1854 and covered the registration fee, the reduced colonial rates and also those to some European countries. Four dies were registered in January 1854 but only die 1 was used to produce adhesive stamps, the replacement surface printed 6d value being issued in October 1856. Dies 2-4 were adapted to take date plugs and used for stamping to order work from 1855 and telegraph forms from 1885. Dated dies 5-26 were used for both stamping to order and telegraphic work until 1894 when dies 26-30 were fitted with florets. In 1895 a new series of undated dies were registered numbered 31-54 and stayed in use until 1901, die 49 being the highest number recorded. Impressions of die 4 prior to it being drilled for date plugs were struck for the De La Rue 1867 Paris Exhibition exhibit (see sheet 4 frame 12).

In conclusion I hope these notes were informative and that you found the material on view of interest.

Alan Huggins

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