



The work of RPSL Ltd – Expert Committee

9th February 2017

Presentation to The Royal Philatelic Society London
Guide to material showing in the frames

THE FORMATION OF THE EXPERT COMMITTEE – 1894

In the November 1893 issue of The London Philatelist, the editor M. P. Castle proposed the formation of an Expert Committee in the following words:-

“The Statutes of the London Philatelic Society (sic) include in its objects “the detection and prevention of forgeries and frauds,” and it seems to us that no worthier manner of achieving this laudable aim could be devised than by the appointment of an Expert Committee, who should literally sit upon all suspected stamps. It will be readily inferred that a collector who has made the stamps of any especial country or group of countries his especial hobby for many years, and has his treasures available for the purposes of comparison, must naturally be a better judge than the dealer whose wares are spread over a vast surface and are subject to constant fluctuations.

There are within the London Society several names of men whose authority is unquestioned, and whose command of philatelic accumulations would constitute them an invaluable tribunal of appeal. It should, however, be borne in mind that in almost all cases these gentlemen are busy men in many ways, and+ can ill afford to devote their leisure time – and it would often involve much of that valuable commodity – in passing judgement upon specimens that could have perhaps been diagnosed by their owners, or were possibly stamps of so little value as to be beneath the waste of valuable time.

We suggest that the Expert Committee should be paid for each individual specimen a moderate fee, and in return therefor should give a certificate of opinion. The fee in question should be one that would allow of a photographic reproduction of the stamp, which could then be signed by the Committee, and would, in after years, materially enhance the value of the specimen accompanying it. This photograph would require to be taken in duplicate, a copy being preserved in the “archives” of the Expert Committee, thus – both as to the forgeries and the genuine – forming a most valuable fund of information. It can be inferred that this would cost money, but we are inclined to think that many would gladly pay it even “to make assurance double sure,” and that the fee charged could be made not only to cover this expense, but to contribute something to the funds of the Society, without exacting from the owners of several stamps a tax that was not fully represented in value received.”

M. P. Castle, November 1893

THE EXPERT COMMITTEE FOR THE ROYAL PHILATELIC SOCIETY LONDON

Background

The Royal Philatelic Society Expert Committee first met in 1894. Initially, there were three members, with Edward Denny Bacon as chairman, and M. P. Castle and Major E. B. Evans as its members.

By the time of the Society being given its “Royal” status in 1906, the Expert Committee had issued some 3,000 certificates.

Today, the Expert Committee operates through RPSL Limited, a limited liability company, which is 100% owned by The Royal Philatelic Society London. The number of certificates issued since its start has exceeded 225,000. They cover almost every country in the world and include many of the world’s great rarities.

RPSL Limited is a “for profit” entity but, as The Royal Philatelic Society London is a charity, all profits are donated to the charity and make a significant contribution to the finances of the Society.

Expertise

The Expert Committee currently has nine members. Between us we cover a wide range of subjects, with knowledge and expertise across stamps, postal stationery, postal history and revenues, as well as reprints and forgeries. Our combined knowledge extends across material from most countries. The Committee members give of their time for free, with the only cost being some travel expenses.

Whilst the majority of patients are items of Great Britain, the British Empire, or British Commonwealth, we see material from many countries and have considerable expertise as well as research material available to us covering the philately of most countries in the world.

We are privileged to have a standing invitation to visit St. James’s Palace in order to compare material for the stamps of Great Britain and the British Empire with The Royal Philatelic Collection. Obviously The Royal Philatelic Collection stands as the finest and most complete collection of Great Britain and British Empire material in the world and is a most valuable resource for the Committee.

Outside the British and Empire areas, if we need to view comparative material, regular use is made of the collections of The British Library, especially the Tapling Collection. The Royal Philatelic Society also owns a number of very important collections.

The Committee has access to consultants in areas where we need particular specialist knowledge. These are often the leading specialists on their particular subjects. The knowledge of consultants is especially useful for postal history material where rates, routes, dates of use etc. are relevant. Today we often use scans as a first step in the consultancy step, which obviates the need to send material out of the premises.

MANAGING THE EXPERTISING CYCLE

RPSL Limited issues certificates on circa 2,500 to 3,000 “patients” per annum on more or less a six week cycle. The running of the workload of some 350 patients for each of the eight meetings during the year is managed and overseen by a permanent secretary, Lucy Caulfield.

The work of the Committee is labour intensive and relies on a dedicated team of volunteers. Ways of using technology to make the system more efficient have been considered on a regular basis. To date no better way of handling the patients has yet been devised than the very largely manual basis currently employed.

The process for the patient involves:-

Before the Expert Committee meeting -

- Acknowledging receipt;
- Checking photographic records to ensure that the patient has not been seen before;
- Detailed examination of the patient and its condition;
- Researching the patient.

At the Expert Meeting -

- Each member of the Committee has the opportunity to see each patient, make comment, or raise queries. Decisions on each patient are normally made at the meeting, but a certain number of patients may need more study prior to a decision;
- Certain technical matters, for instance plating of GB line engraved and verification of GB departmental overprints, are referred to outside consultants on a regular basis;
- Certain patients will be taken to St. James’s Palace for comparison with material in The Royal Philatelic Collection.

After the meeting -

- Every patient is photographed. One copy of the photograph is for attachment to the certificate and another is added to the Committee records;
- Certificates are written up with the decision of the Committee and signed;
- Photographs are mounted on the certificates and sealed with the RPSL Ltd seal.

Since time immemorial, a “good” certificate is signed only by a single signature (normally the chairman of the Committee) and a “bad” certificate is signed by at least four members of the Committee.

WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD YOU EXPECT TO FIND ON THE CERTIFICATE

Opinion – not a Guarantee

The Certificate issued gives the opinion of the Committee on the patient. It is not a guarantee; it is an opinion. However, it is an opinion that reflects considerable knowledge, experience, and access to reference material for comparison.

Mistakes are made but they are in a small minority and we are happy to re-visit an opinion if asked. Naturally, as with any area of human endeavour, the one mistake is remembered and the many hundreds of correct opinions are forgotten.

There are items where the opinions offered by various expertising committees will differ. Expertising is not always an exact science and opinions, even among the leading specialists in a subject, may differ. Thankfully, such contentious items are few and far between.

The Committee do not offer monetary valuations of material, although the fee structure is based on catalogue values (mostly Stanley Gibbons).

One piece of advice that we give to those submitting an item to us is to ask the submitter to tell us what they themselves know about the patient. Have they yourself found out anything that bears on the genuineness or otherwise of the item? Do they know anything of its history? Can they add any additional information? We may not agree with all their conclusions but such information certainly assists our analysis.

The Certificate itself describes the patient and offers an opinion in terms of:-

- An accurate description of the stamp;
- Whether or not it is genuine;
- Whether gum, postmark, perforations etc. are genuine;
- Whether there are any repairs or material issues as to condition.

We may change the question asked by the submitter in order give a positive certificate:-

Thus the question *“Is this the rare Cyprus Green shade”*.

Could be answered on the certificate:- *“Is not the Cyprus Green but is the Yellow-Green”* – a negative opinion.

But would probably be certified as *“Yellow-Green – is genuine”* – a positive opinion.

EXPERTISING EQUIPMENT

Technology used by The Expert Committee

The use by the Committee of modern technology has greatly assisted our analysis of certain material:-

VSC 6000

The video spectral comparator (made by Foster & Freeman) permits a number of useful examination techniques including:-

- The viewing of the patient under a wide range of light sources from ultra-violet to infra-red and through a range of filters. Features such as repairs, altered or removed obliterations, painting in or removal of elements of the design that are not visible under normal lighting, can become obvious under other lighting conditions;
- The ability to direct lighting sources from different angles. Side-lighting can be particularly useful in seeing repairs or re-backing of stamps;
- One of the key features of the VSC is that it gives a record of the conditions under which the patient was examined. Thus the same conditions can be replicated and used when another example of the same stamp needs to be analysed;
- The ability to fix the image of one stamp and overlay it on another permits accurate comparison of design elements. It is especially useful when comparing overprints or obliterations. The VSC can strobe between the two images in order to make accurate comparisons;
- On-screen rulers permit extremely accurate measurements to be made of features on a patient.

Leica Microscope

This new microscope is a top of the range optical microscope that can magnify up to 200 times. It can be used both as a normal binocular microscope or to produce the image on the computer screen. This recent purchase was assisted by a generous donation by a member and is proving a valuable addition to our armoury.

Scans used for seeking opinions from Consultants

The Committee has always made use of consultants in areas of specialisation or to support the Committee's conclusions. Today we make much use of scans of patients as a means of requesting opinions from consultants. Certain material needs to be seen in the flesh in order to come to a conclusion, but a considerable amount can be gleaned from coloured scans. This is particularly the case with postal history, where rating, routing and obliterations can often be confirmed from scans.

FUTURE PROJECTS

Scanning Photographic Records and Worksheets

The core records of the Committee going back to its very early days are currently held in physical form, with the attendant risks of loss or damage. These very largely consist of the photographic records of past patients and the associated worksheets recording the analysis and conclusions of the Committee.

Recent research into digitisation of these records has confirmed that the creation a searchable database to include both the photographs and the worksheets is entirely possible. Quotes for this work have been sought and attention is being given to the management of this significant and expensive project.

The resources of RPSL Limited are sufficient to cover the costs of this project, although the impact on the Society from the lack of the regular donations from RPSL Limited if these resources were diverted to this project needs careful consideration.

Write-up of the Forgery Collection

The forgery collection stands as one of the most substantial collections of its kind. However, the quality of write-up is distinctly variable and, over the years, various collections have been added.

The whole collection requires amalgamation into a single entity and those sections that are not written up need study and putting into proper order.

As part of preserving and organising the Society philatelic collections, the forgery collection is being steadily worked on.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Most of the reference collections used on a regular basis by the Expert Committee are in fact owned by The Royal Philatelic Society London. However, it is probably the Expert Committee that makes the most use of these collections on a day-to-day basis and the display in the frames shows a sample of some of those regularly used.

Frame 1 – Collection of Forgeries presented by H.M. King George V

This album has remained intact since donated by King George V, although a number of pages have been re-written for display purposes.

The majority of the forgeries are those made by George Kirke Jeffryes in the late 1880s. Some, particularly the Sydney Views and Laureates of New South Wales, are remarkably skilled and deceptive. They were hand-engraved by Jeffryes and sold via the dealers Alfred Benjamin and Julian Sarpy. In 1891 all three were tried and convicted of conspiracy to defraud and were sentenced to various terms of hard labour.

Frame 2 – Collection of Bahamas bequeathed by Louis Bradbury

The collection bequeathed to the Royal in 1950 by Louis Bradbury is probably the finest collection of the early stamps of the Bahamas that can be formed. The Expert Committee use this and other such collections owned by the Society as references for these difficult early issues.

The section shown is devoted to the 1863 issues printed by De La Rue from the Perkins, Bacon plates. The Crown Agents had cancelled the Perkins, Bacon contract in January 1862 and handed the dies, plates and printing contract to De La Rue. De La Rue were specialists in typographical printing and for the first year of their contract struggled both with the printing from line engraved plates and the perforating of the stamps. However, by early 1863, they had mastered the techniques and were producing very fine products.

During the next decade, as ink technology evolved, De La Rue produced stamps in a wonderful array of shades, some of which are shown in the frame. The rarest of the Bahamas shades of this period is the 6d from the first perf. 12½ De La Rue delivery, which is the same rose-lilac colour as the earlier perf. 13 issue. It is a very rare stamp and is usually found with inverted watermark.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Frame 3 – George Kirke Jeffryes - Forgery Plates

When George Kirke Jeffryes, together with Alfred Benjamin and Julian Sarpy were arrested for fraud in 1890, many forged stamps were found in Jeffryes house in Bow Road, East London but very few implements used for forgery.

The plates from which Jeffryes printed his forgeries were unknown to the present generation of collectors until 1996. They were owned by Robert Clarkson, who bought the premises at No. 1 Cullum Street in the City of London previously occupied by Benjamin and Sarpy. In the basement of the shop were found these small forgery plates and various other forgery implements. These were exhibited as part of Clarkson's small, private museum in Sussex called the Wayside Museum.

Many of the museum exhibits were auctioned by Phillips and Clarkson had left the plates in the care of David Boyd of Phillips. Soon afterwards, Clarkson died unexpectedly and his executors agreed that the plates should be donated to The Royal Philatelic Society London. The Robert Clarkson bequest includes not only the printing plates but also overprint formes and various implements used for creating forged postmarks.

George Kirke Jeffryes was a fine engraver, although nothing is known as to how and where he trained. Several of his best forgeries are very deceptive, especially when the design is partly obscured by a postmark. Of his forgeries, one is recorded as causing Jeffryes some considerable concern. This was his forgery of the 1875 issue of Grenada. The reason for this concern was that the Grenada items were forgeries of revenue stamps rather than postage stamps. The defrauding of the Her Majesty's Revenue, as opposed to making money selling forged postage stamps to collectors, was a very much more serious offence, with punishments that very often involved deportation.

Frame 4 – Japan – Pages from the UPU Reference Collection

It became a standard procedure for The Royal Philatelic Collection to receive examples of the stamps distributed to member countries of the Universal Postal Union. Since The Royal Philatelic Collection entirely focused on the stamps of the British Empire, those UPU distributions for "foreign" countries were passed to The Royal Philatelic Society London.

The UPU Collection covers stamps issued from circa 1920 up to about 2000 and proves extremely useful in providing comparisons when the Committee sees such material. Coverage is incomplete for certain countries, but is generally very comprehensive. The pages in the frame show pages of Japanese stamps from 1962 to 1965 numbered according to the Stanley Gibbons catalogue.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Frame 5 – Collection of New Zealand bequeathed by James Cummings

James Cummings was not a member of The Royal Philatelic Society London but left his collection to the Society upon his death in 2003. The collection comprises a comprehensive coverage of several countries, with strength in 20th century issues up to the modern period.

The most complete coverage is in Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand, but the collection also covers Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States. It is probably the single collection most referred to by the Expert Committee since it contains examples of a wide range of often ordinary stamps.

The pages shown are typical of the coverage of one of the stronger countries represented.

Frame 6 – Pages from the Red Albums - Plating Study of Turks Islands Surcharges

There are 25 volumes of what are referred to as the “Red Albums”. These are large sized leather albums made by Goodman of Birmingham and contain studies and notes on many different aspects relating to the expertising of stamps of many countries.

The pages in the frames show a section of Turks Islands 1881 surcharges, some of which were used to illustrate the book entitled “*The Postage Stamps of the Turks Islands*” by E. D. Bacon (published by Stanley Gibbons Ltd – 1917). Whilst these surcharges have not been extensively forged, they have among the surcharge types some of the rarest stamps of the British Empire. This issue received considerable collector interest at the time of their issue and consequently exist in complete sheets of 30 for all but the rarities.

The pages show photographs of some of the settings of all three surcharges.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Frame 7 – Photographic Records of Past Patients

When, in November 1893, M. P. Castle set out his suggestion for the formation of the Expert Committee and the issue of a certificate with a photograph of each stamp, he also suggested that *“..... This photograph would require to be taken in duplicate, a copy being preserved in the “archives” of the Expert Committee, thus – both as to the forgeries and the genuine – forming a most valuable fund of information.....”*

The Expert Committee’s photographic record today contains photographs or scans of virtually all of the circa 225,000 certificates issued since its start. A very few only are missing, mostly from the earliest period.

The worksheet showing the analysis of each patient is also retained and referred to if necessary. Each new submission is compared against this photographic record in order to check whether we have seen the item before.

The pages in the frame show three subjects. Please note - those certificate numbers with a red line across the label are “bad” certificates:-

- Great Britain – 1912-22 Issue 2d Intense Bright Orange – an expensive stamp but reasonably easily available. Collectors should beware of colour changelings, which are plentiful.
- Cape of Good Hope – 1861 Woodblock 1d Blue Error of Colour – an iconic classic variety that is hard to find in fine condition.
- France – 1849-52 15c Green – a classic of French philately that also exists as a reprint as well as very deceptive forgeries.

Frame 8 – Royal Philatelic Society London - Forgery Collection

In addition to the various reference collections held by The Royal Philatelic Society London, there is a very substantial collection of forgeries and reprints. Often the forgery collection will include examples of the genuine stamp together with identifying features for certain rare varieties.

Those pages shown in the frame are selected for the detailed study that is shown. Not all countries have this level of treatment but a team is working to re-mount more of the collection.

The frame includes pages of:-

- Mauritius – 1848 Post Paid 1d forgeries and 1859 Dardenne lithographed issue genuine and forgeries.
- Bergedorf – 1861-67 genuine, reprints and forgeries.
- Burma – 1942 Peacock overprints – identifying features of genuine and forgeries written up by Gerald Davis with certain illustrations by W. Adgey-Edgar.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Frame 9 – Collection of Zurich Cantonal Forgeries formed by Cedric Dry

Cedric Dry was a student of the forgeries of the Swiss Cantonal issues and corresponded regularly with members of the Expert Committee.

Upon his death in 2011, the Society was offered the opportunity of purchasing his collection. It is not only useful as a reference collection but is presented in an appealing and informative way and has consequently been shown regularly at Society displays.

The pages shown in the frame are part of the 1843 Zurich forgeries section of the Dry collection, to which has been added material from The Royal Philatelic Society collections and from donations received from the Helsinki Philatelic Club.

Frame 10 – Forgeries by Lucien Smeets and Jean de Sperati – Chemical Removal of Designs and “Upgrading”

In the early years of the 20th century a number of forgers experimented with techniques to remove designs from a cheap stamp, leaving the paper, watermark, perforations, and even postmark, intact. Sometimes they would remove the complete stamps and at other times only part of the stamp, such as the value tablet. On this piece of genuine paper they would then print a forged design.

Erasmo Oneglia of Turin advertised that his forgeries were available printed on original paper, at a commensurately higher price to those printed on new paper. In Belgium, Lucien Smeets printed numbers of more or less crude forgeries of contemporary British Empire high values on genuine paper from which low value stamps had been bleached out. This gives the intriguing situation of finding stamps “used abroad” – for instance a Grenada King Edward VII 10/- with a Ceylon obliteration.

At this time Jean de Sperati was starting his career and did actually live for a time in Belgium. There is the possibility that he worked with Smeets.

Sperati, of course, went on to perfect the techniques of removing a design from original paper and printing a new one in its place. Sperati’s remarkable ability was his eye for accurate colour replication and his skill in touching up the photographic images to ensure that every detail of the stamp was accurate. These make Sperati forgeries extremely difficult to detect.

Of great assistance to the collector, the original British Philatelic Association book on his productions published in 1955 (and republished as a reprint by James Bendon) and the more recent expansion by Robson Lowe and Carl Walske listing new discoveries (published in 2001 by The Royal Philatelic Society London) make for easier detection of Sperati forgeries. The forgeries of Jean de Sperati still stand as among the most technically perfect due to their photographic element and thus among the most deceptive forgery for the collector and expertiser.

THE REFERENCE COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Frame 11 – Reprints

Reprints have always been a feature of philately, especially in the collecting of classic stamps. The book entitled *“Reprints of Postal Adhesive Stamps”* by E. D. Bacon (published by Stanley Gibbons in 1898) extended to 168 pages and had 426 illustrations.

Reprints were done for a variety of reasons, of which the most regular was to provide examples of obsolete stamps to dignitaries or collectors. Among the stamps of the German States, Austria and Italy reprints are legion, but they exist for most countries in the world.

The frame includes pages of:-

- Cape of Good Hope – reprints from the original plates circa 1940 made by A.A. Jurgens.
- India – reprints of 1889 and 1894.
- New South Wales – reprints circa 1885 from the original plates.

Frame 12 – Fakes from the manipulation of genuine stamps

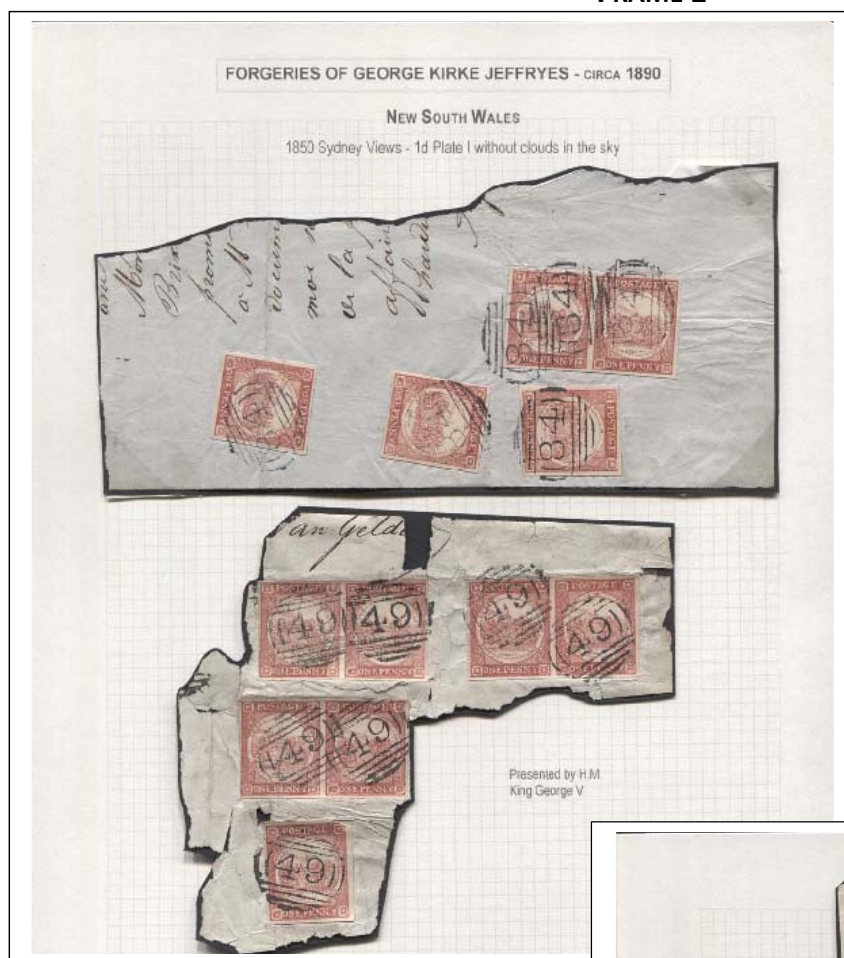
There is an extraordinary range of stamps where somebody, at some time, has fiddled with them. Collectors often ask “why” and there is no real answer to that. However, countless hours must have been spent in altering a stamp so that it looks like something different. Colour changelings; re-backing; added margins; different postmarks; changed colour of postmarks; faked perforations; stamps that have been cleaned of obliterations and regummed; covers with stamps which never originally had stamps; covers with different stamps to those originally present; the list is endless.

Examples of various nefarious varieties are shown the frame. Some are obvious, such as the booklet pane with the tête-bêche pair within the pane itself, but others are distinctly challenging. The 2d Queensland imperforate with sideways watermark is an excellent colour match for the genuine stamp and it is hard to see how it has been “re-built”.

The frame includes pages of:-

- Colour changelings of genuine stamps.
- Genuine stamps on faked first day cover.
- Faked imperforates made by re-backing genuine stamps.
- Faked tête-bêche pairs from stamp booklets.
- Fiscally used stamps with manuscript cancellations removed and with forged postal obliterations.
- Faked cover using stamps which are common unused and rare used.

FRAME 1



Pages from the collection of forgeries donated to the RPSL by His Majesty King George V

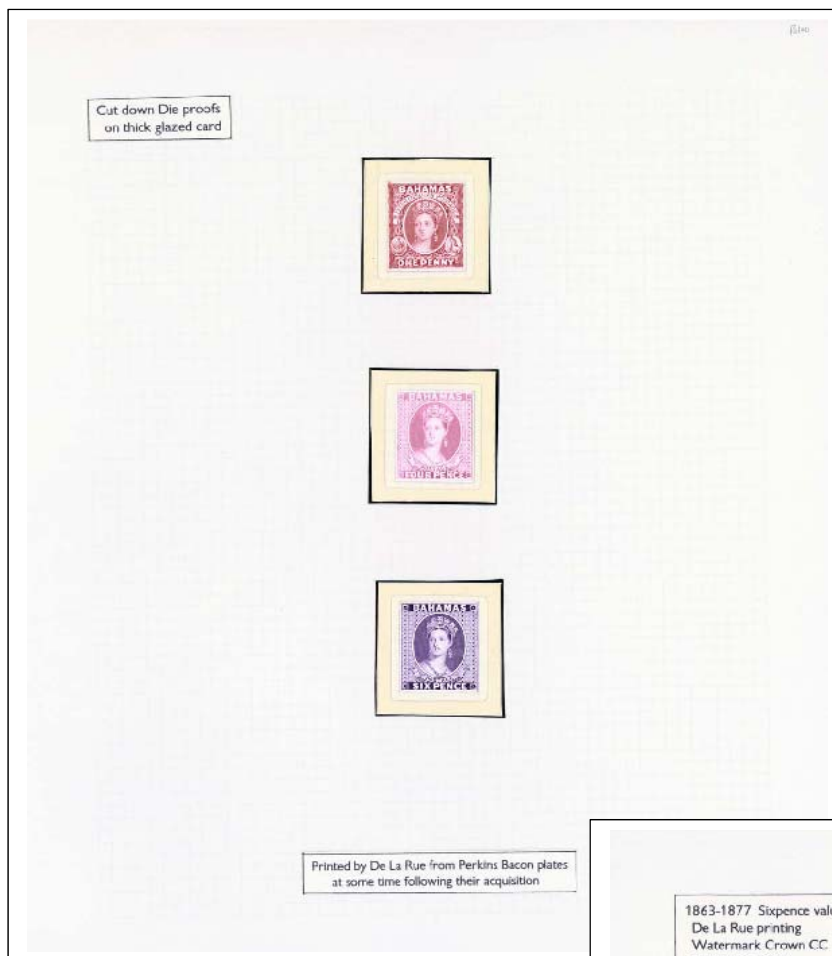
Forgeries by G. K. Jeffries

New South Wales 1d Sydney View
– Plate 1 without Clouds

New South Wales 3d Laureate –
showing the wide range of
obliterations used



FRAME 2

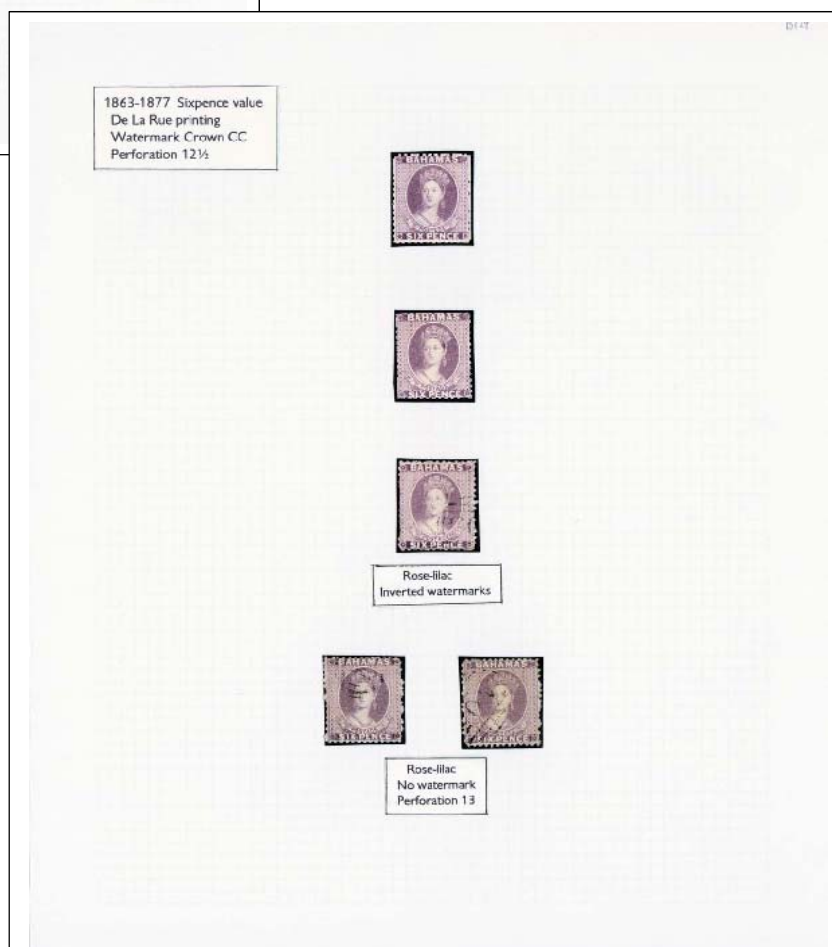


Louis Bradbury
collection of Bahamas

De La Rue Printings from Perkins, Bacon dies and plates

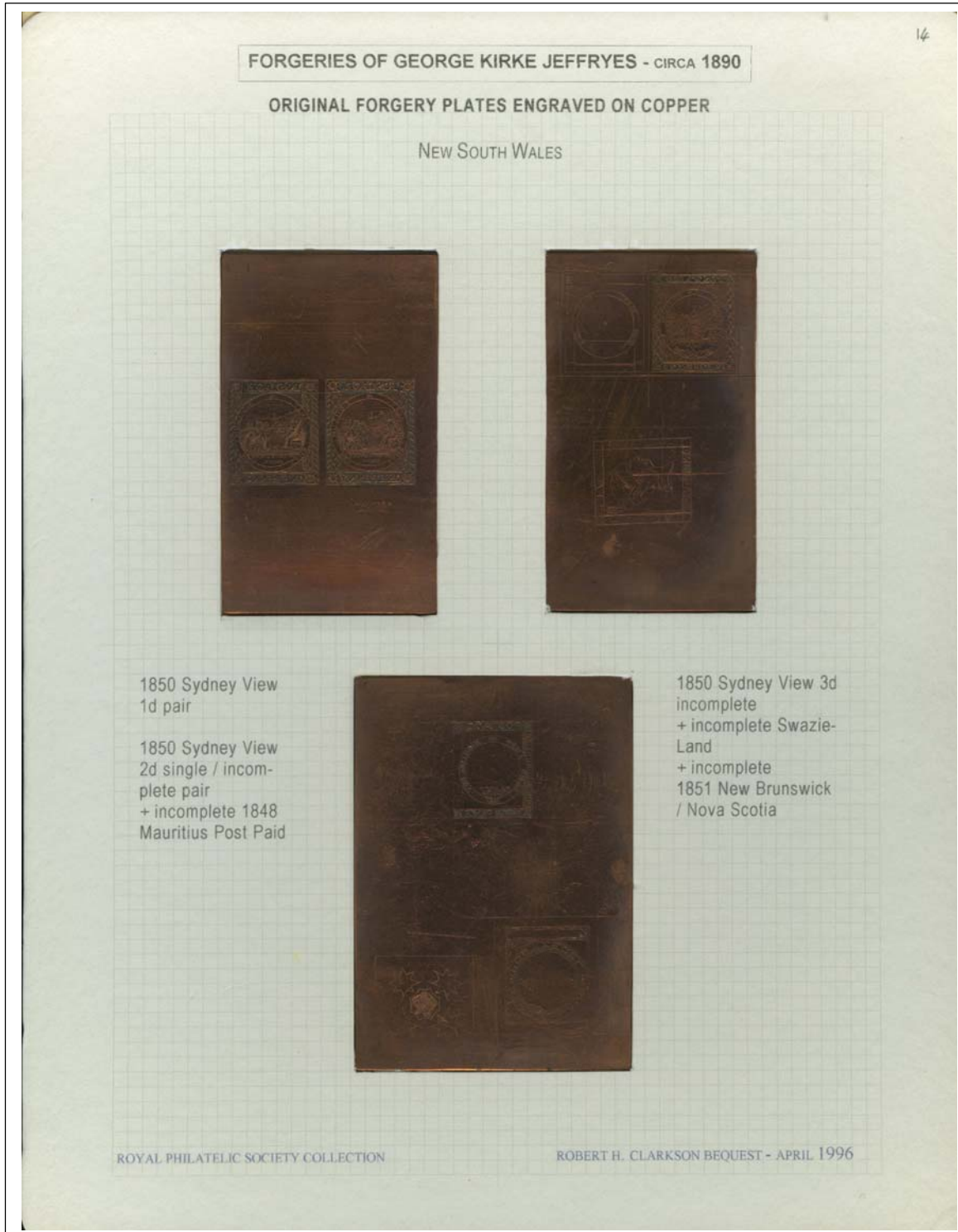
Die proofs in issued colours
struck for exhibition purposes
circa 1870

6d rose-lilac – the rare shade
from the first perf. 12½ De La
Rue printing – March 1863



FRAME 3

Robert Clarkson bequest of G.K. Jeffryes forgery equipment



George Kirke Jeffryes

Small copper plates for printing forgeries of the New South Wales Sydney Views
1d value (with clouds) pair; 2d value; 3d value; plus incomplete designs

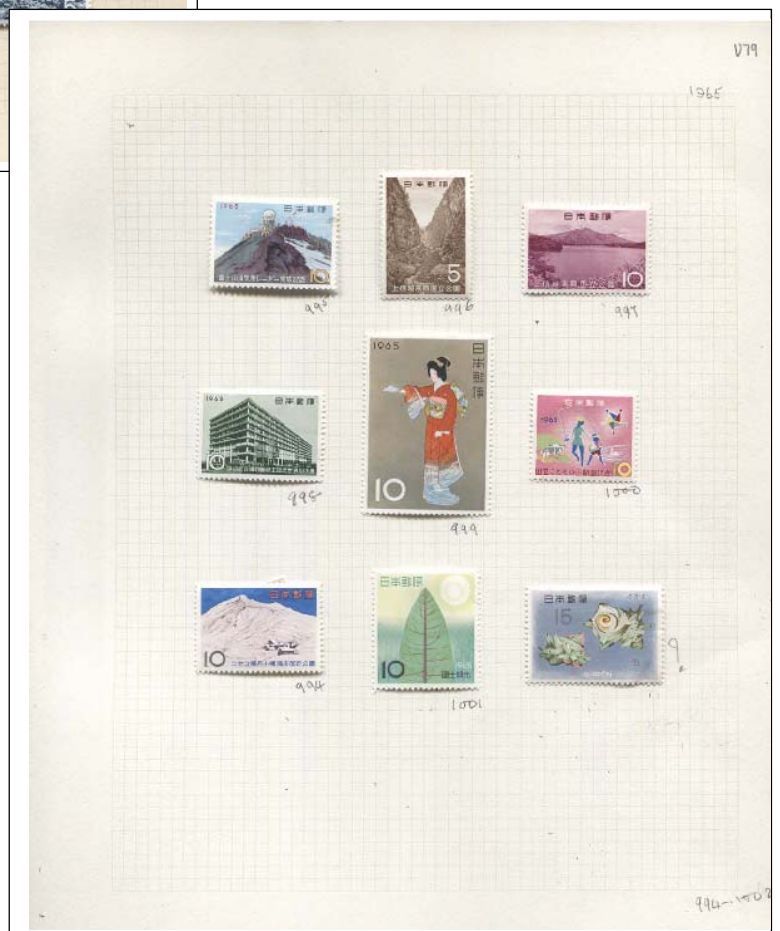
FRAME 4



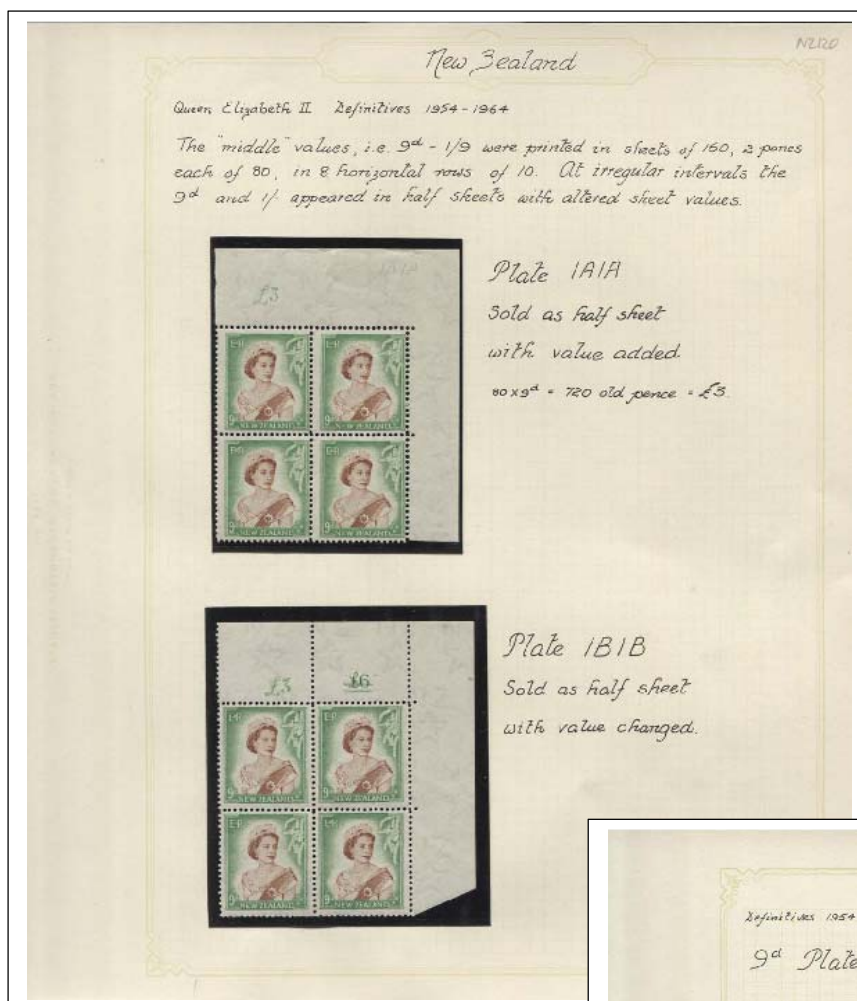
Pages from the
UPU collection of
foreign countries

**Japan issues from
1963 to 1965**

Issued stamps as
distributed by the UPU



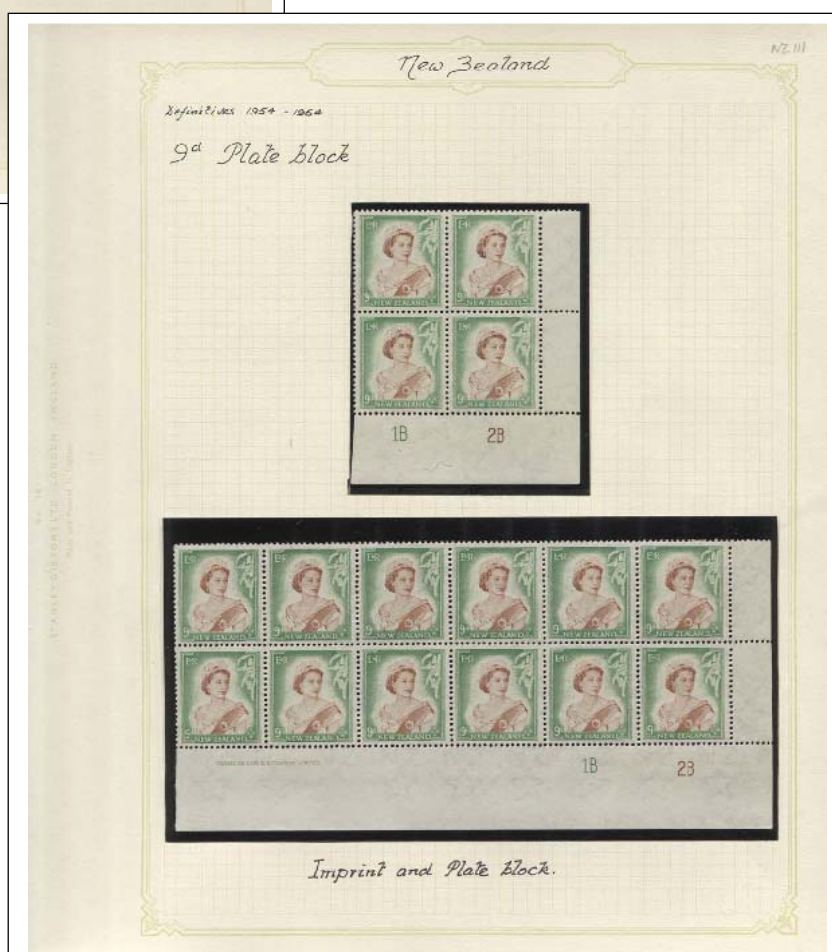
FRAME 5



James Cummings
collection of New
Zealand

New Zealand 1954 issue – middle values

Blocks showing cylinder
numbers and changes
to marginal inscriptions



FRAME 6

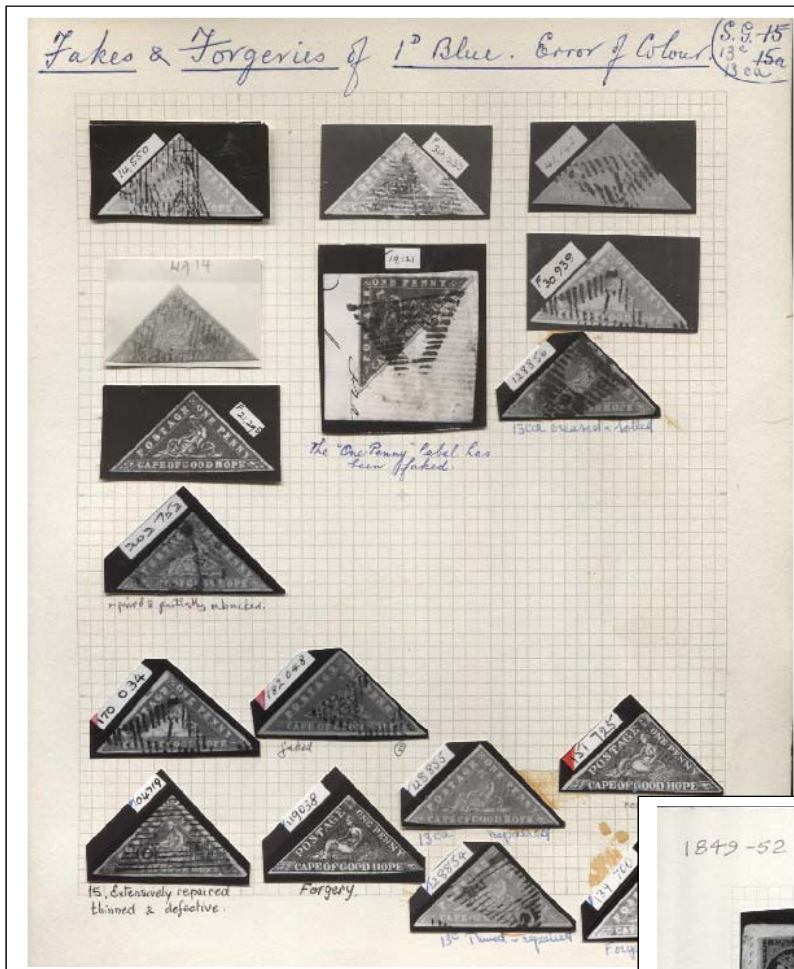
RPSL Ltd research records



Turks Islands

Study of the settings of the 1881 surcharges

FRAME 7



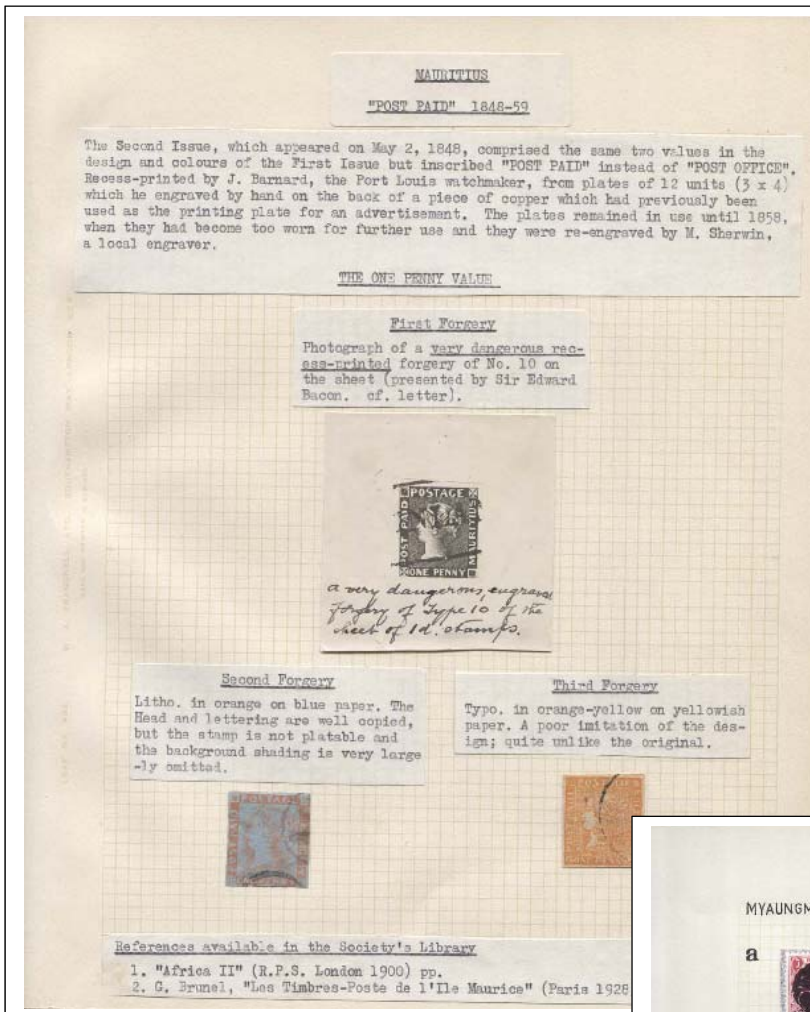
RPSL Ltd
photographic records

Cape of Good Hope 1d
Woodblock error of colour

France
15c green on bluish green paper



FRAME 8

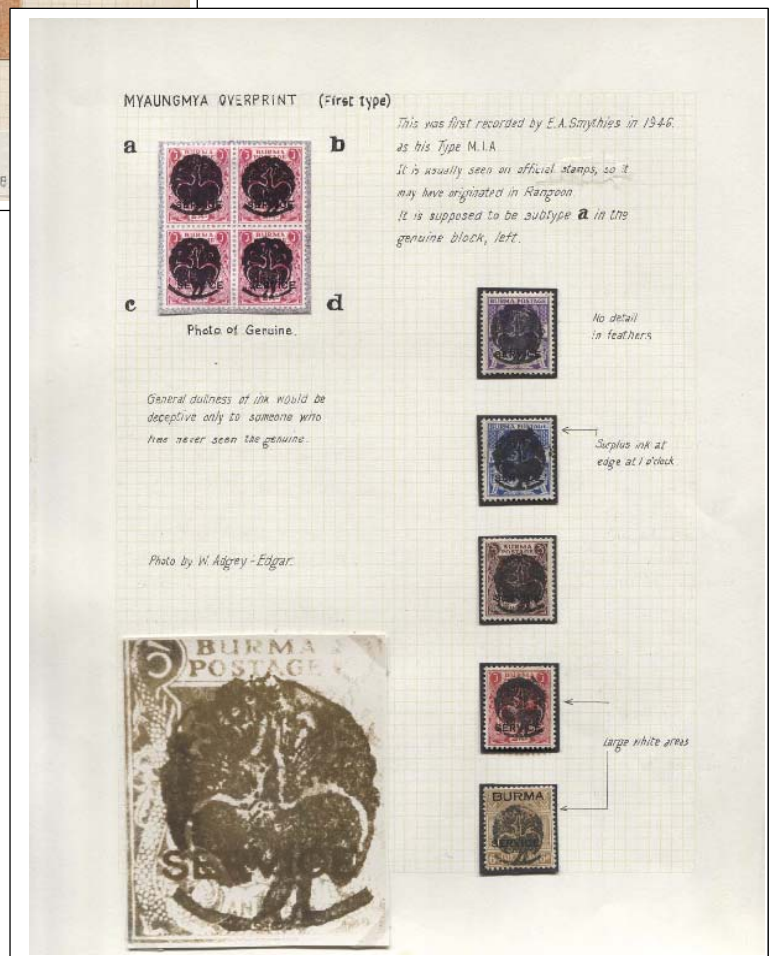


RPSL Ltd collection
of forgeries

Mauritius "Post Paid" issue Forgeries

Burma

Study of the genuine and
forged overprints –
information from Gerald
Davis and W. Adgey-Edgar



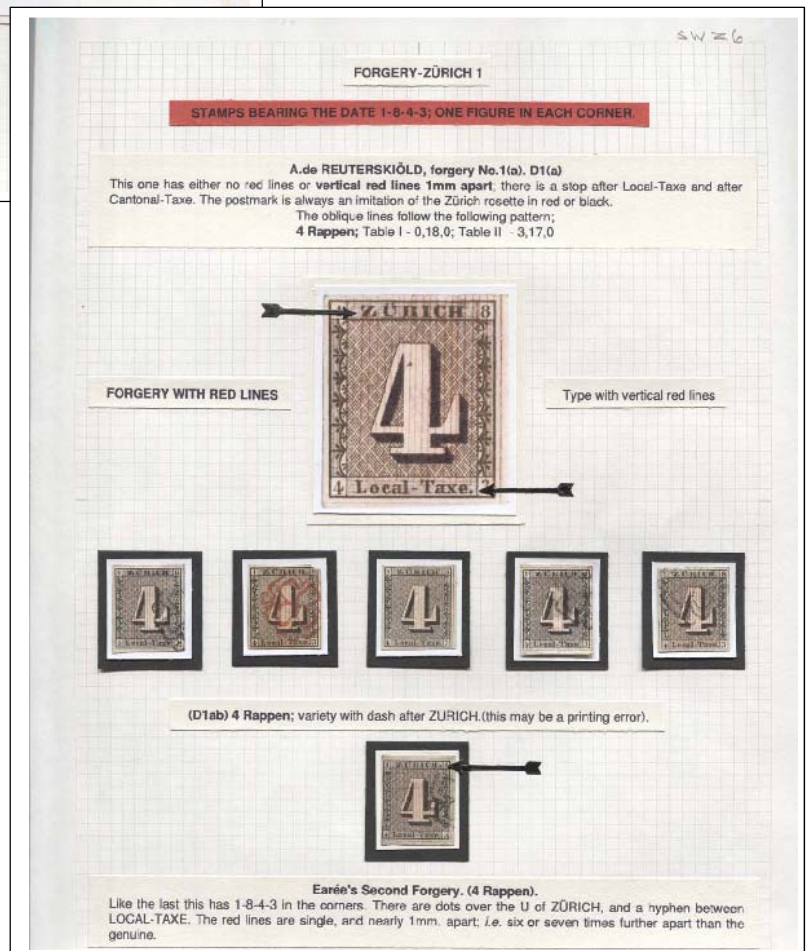
FRAME 9



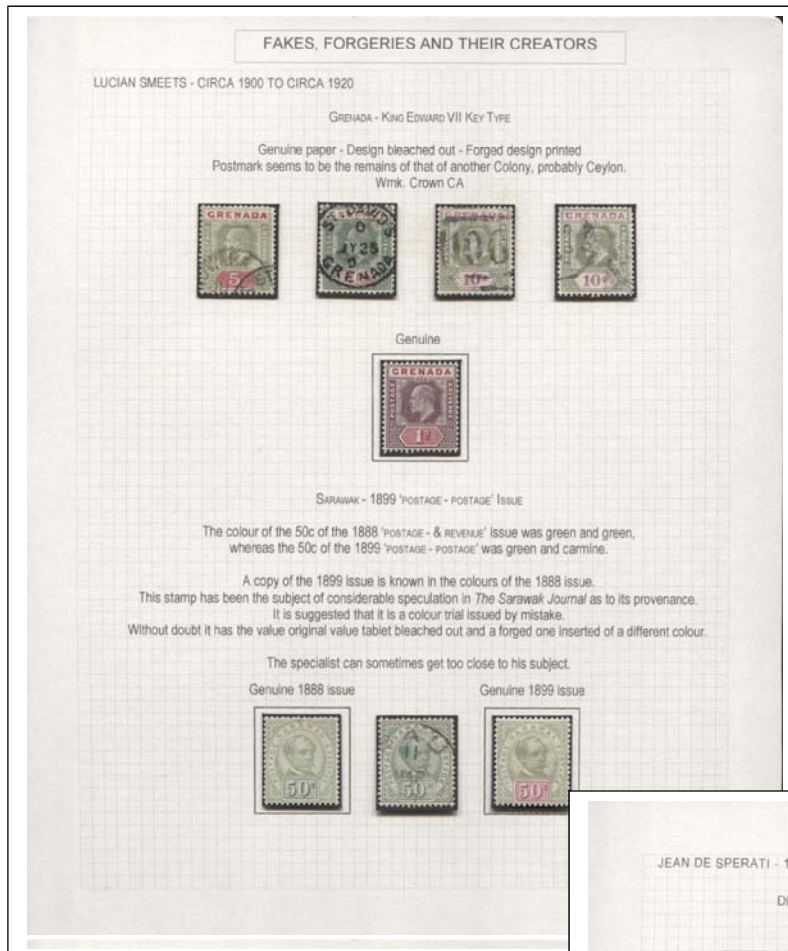
Cedric Dry display
collection of the forgeries
of Switzerland

Canton of Zurich

So-called "essay" and
"1843" forgeries



FRAME 10

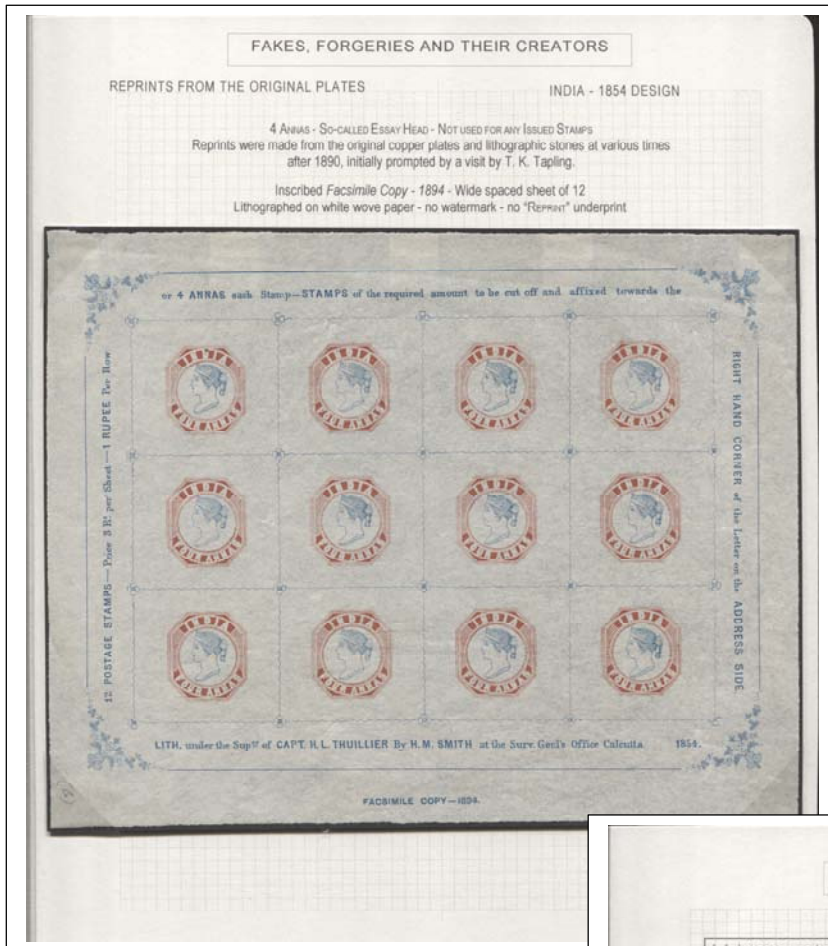


Forgeries by Lucien Smeets
King Edward VII issues of
several Colonies were
forged by Smeets

Forgeries by Jean de Sperati
There are several Sperati
forgeries of the Buenos Aires
Barquitos issue



FRAME 11



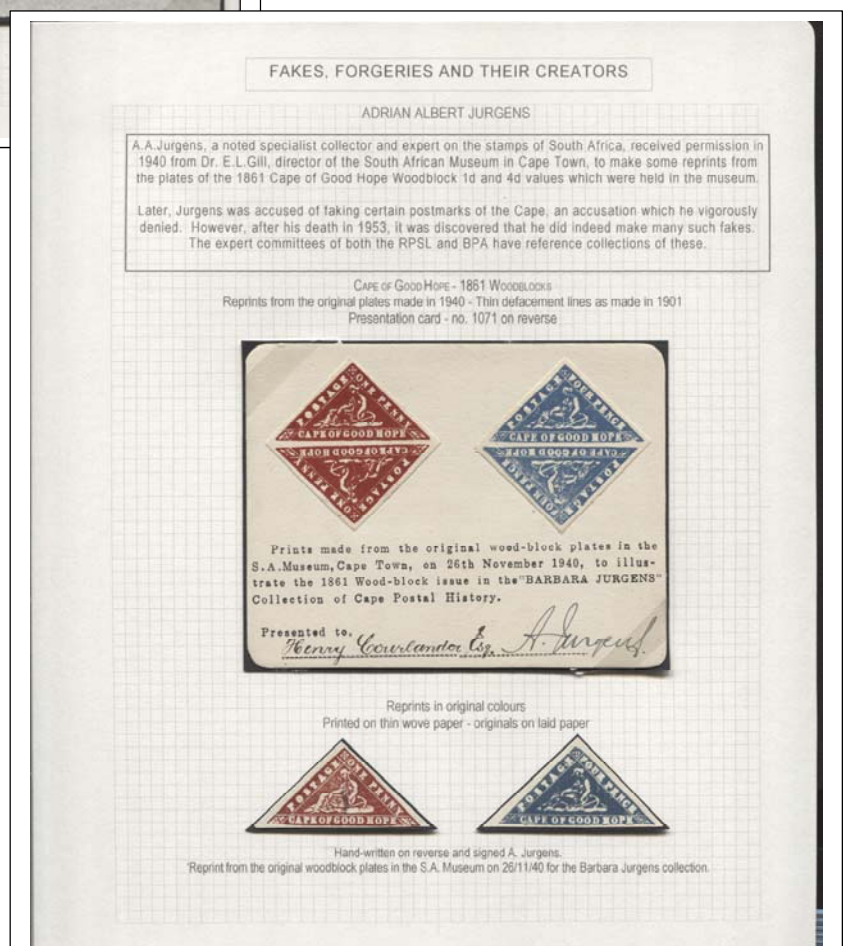
Reprints from the
C. G. Harman collection

India

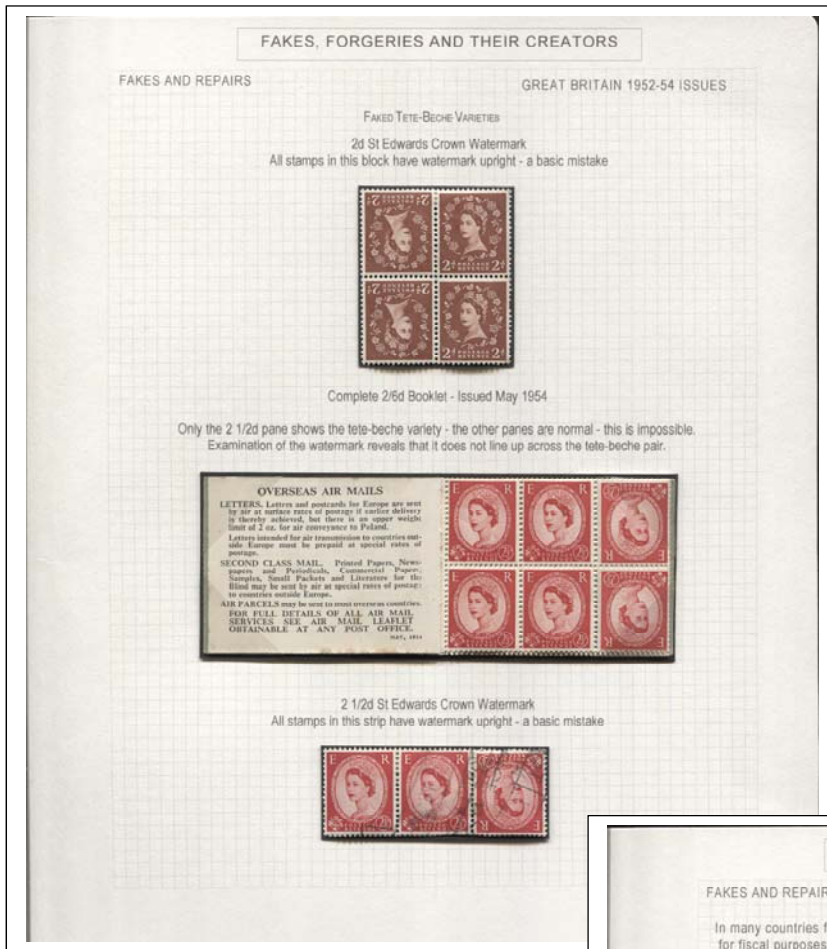
1894 facsimile reprint of 4as
wide setting

Cape of Good Hope

1940 reprint from the
original 1d and 4d woodblock
plates by A. A. Jurgens



FRAME 12



Miscellaneous fakes and forgeries from the C. G. Harman collection

Great Britain
Faked tête-bêche pairs from booklets

British West Indies
Fiscally used stamps cleaned of manuscript cancellations and with forged postal obliterations



