GREAT BRITAIN LINE-ENGRAVED PLATE REPAIRS 1840 to 1855



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by

Scott Treacey FRPSL

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Front page: 1841 1d red plate 1; TK in state 5 (plate 1e) and TL in state 3 (plate 1c). Frame 1, page 3. Images and text copyright © Scott Treacey 2017 Great Britain, Line-engraved Plate Repairs 1840 to 1855

Probably the most famous plate repair of the early GB line engraved issues is the very early total repair to plate 1 of the 1840 1d black, for there surely are many collectors whose interests lie outside GB who have heard of certain penny blacks being referred to as 'plate 1a' and 'plate 1b'. In an endeavour to get plate 1 to press and producing stamps in time for the 1 May 1840 issue date, the plate was left unhardened and consequently wore very rapidly. Going to press on 11 April 1840 in its original state ('plate 1a') it lasted only till about the second week of May before it needed to be removed from press and all 240 impressions on it repaired by re-entry to restore the engraving. The fully repaired plate, now in the second state ('plate 1b'), was probably back at press by very late May 1840 since the earliest reported use of plate 1b appears to be 12 June 1840.

This first sequence of wear and repair set the scene for what was to become fairly common practice, for many of the subsequent early plates were also repaired by re-entry although it would not be until 1853 that another plate was subjected to a total repair of all 240 units like penny plate 1 was at that first repair operation. The repair to some plates comprised in some cases just one or two impressions, in other cases twenty or thirty or more.

To continue the story of the penny plate 1, perhaps less well known is that plate 1 was still at press in early 1841 and so was used to print stamps in red, and that during this latter period of red printing use of the plate resulted in further wear of its engraved lines and so it went on to be repaired on another three occasions giving rise to some units existing in five states. Prints from these last three repairs are known to collectors of this area as plates 1c, 1d and 1e (though this is the only plate that uses this classification - prints of repairs from later plates being simply called 'state 2', 'state 3' etc). Why repair?

The main reason by far is to restore engraving that has become worn from use of the plate. On a recess printing plate where ink lies trapped in engraved lines waiting to be collected from contact with a sheet of paper, wear from day-today use flattens/reduces the raised detail of the engraving. This has two consequences. The recessed parts become shallow and thus cannot hold enough, or even any, ink. Secondly the raised parts that are designed to produce unprinted (ie white) areas on the stamp, spread and these white parts of the printed stamp become broader.

In some cases repair was apparently carried out very early in the plate's life, since examples in the original state before repair are difficult, or even rare, to find. Often examination of several state 1 prints show no evidence of any wear, leading one to suspect that the reason for repair might have been some manner of damage having occurred to the impression requiring such an operation to be carried out.

In at least two cases repair was an indirect necessity of the plate developing corrosion. Twopence plates 3 and 4 both developed corrosion leading to unsightly blurring on the printed sheets. One or more attempts to clean the plate of this corrosion in turn resulted in some impressions becoming prematurely worn, and so they were repaired by re-entry.

How does one identify a stamp that is a repair, ie printed in a second or later state? Some of the indications are:

1. Restoration of areas that were previously worn, in comparing more than one example from a particular plate and impression.

2. Thinned/weakened checkletters. The corner checkletters are not present on the transfer roller used to lay down the plate's 240 impressions, they are punched in by hand afterwards. Same with the roller used for repairs. So any re-entering of an impression which is designed to deepen its engraved lines will at the same time have a tendency to make the recesses of the checkletters more shallow, they will not hold as much ink, and on the printed stamps they will be weaker in comparison to prints taken before the repair. In some cases this is striking, in others the weakness is only apparent as, say, a thinner crossbar on a letter H, and in still other cases there will be no difference.

3. The presence of new Transfer Roller Line (TRL) in one or both side margins. The 'rocking-in' of an impression in the manufacture of the plate is done under huge pressure. This pressure pushes up ridges of metal in the margins between impressions from both a ripple effect in the steel and also from the edge of the transfer roller cutting into it. These ridges can hold ink. In the original manufacture of the plate, the ridges are burnished out by hand which was easy enough to do prior to the plate being hardened. But later, after the plate had been hardened, this burnishing out was more difficult and so the ridges were simply left untouched.

4. Strengthening of one or both side borders. Over zealous burnishing out of marginal ridges mentioned above frequently removed part of the sides of the impression. If such an impression was later repaired the side borders may be restored in some cases.

5. A weakening of the 'stars' in the upper corners. A characteristic only of early penny plates to plate 10, apparently some repairs were carried out using a transfer roller relief with blank upper corners as well as blank lower corners. There is little doubt that this relief with blank upper corners were made that way to produce the plates for the unissued penny black intended for official use, that had VR in the upper corners - the upper corners being left blank to enable VR to be hand punched into them. The decision having been taken not to issue separate stamps for official purposes, the printers clearly found a use for the now otherwise obsolete transfer reliefs specially made for them. 6. Non-coincidence with the original impression. The great majority of repairs were carried out coincident with the original impression; ie it was exactly on top of/in line with it. The technician's skill in achieving this should not be underestimated. Occasionally, a repair is slightly out of line and results in a discernable doubling of part of the impression.

During the earliest period following the issue of the penny black, plate repair was a regular occurrence. In the group of forty-three plates (forty penny and three twopence plates) completed up to the time of penny plate 40 on 17 August 1843, twenty-two of these underwent a repair by re-entry at some stage, and many of them twice. After that, repair became much less common with only a dozen or so penny plates between numbers 40 and 149 having been operated upon and in each case the repair is known to only involve a maximum of three impressions.

It was not until plate 150 began to produce worn printings, that significant numbers of impressions on a plate were again being repaired. In 1853 and 1854 plates 173 and 176 underwent re-entry of all their 240 units and plate 155 was similarly repaired in entirety twice.

The scarcity of a particular printed state depends totally upon the timing of the repair operation that created it. Clearly if a repair is carried out very close to when a plate was finally removed from press, then prints showing this repair will be scarce or rare. It doesn't necessarily follow that later states are scarcer than their earlier counterparts. Where an impression was operated on more than once, giving rise to three or more states, it is possible that the second - or even the first - state is scarcer than the third state where the timing of repairs mean that the number of sheets printed was less. In virtually all cases the catalogues price later states on a hierarchical basis with later states priced progressively higher. This often does not reflect the true scarcities between different states.

INDEX TO THE DISPLAYED FRAMES

(all 'Plates' refer to the penny value, except for frame 12)

FRAME 1.

Plate 1

- 1. QL plates 1a, 1b, 1d and 1e.
- 2. RL plates 1a, 1b, and 1e.
- 3. TK plates 1a, 1b, 1c and 1e.
- ID plates 1a and 1b, JG plate 1b, black and red, JA plate 1c, JC plates 1a and 1c, SG plates 1a and 1b.
- 5. RK plates 1a, 1b and 1c.
- TH plates 1c and 1d, TJ plates 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d.

Plate 2

 SD state 2 in black and red, TC state 1 in black and state 2 in black and red, TG states 1 and 2 in black, state 3 in red. TF state 2 and TG-TH state 3 strip.

Plate 5

- AC, FD, GA and MA black provisional prints, mostly matched with state 1. IA state 2 in red.
- DC state 3 in black and red,
 FB, KA and TB all state 2 with markedly weakened checkletters,
 EA state 3 in red, cancelled with 1844 numeral,
 NA state 2 in red.



Plate 2 strip, TG and TH in state 3 from the final repair to this plate.



Plate 1, QL and RL state 5 (plate 1e), final repair of this plate. Three units only exist in this state – see the front cover for unit TK.



Plate 1, RK state 3 (plate 1c), non-coincident re-entry showing duplication of the lower left square.



Plate 1, TH and TJ state 4 (plate 1d). Just seven units exist in this state.



Plate 5, FB and TB state 2, showing weak checkletters and stars. The B of TB is markedly weak.

Plate 6

- 1. FG, KE and LE all states 1 and 2.
- 2. MD states 1, 2 and 3; ME states 1 and 2.
- 3. NC, NL and OC all states 1 and 2; ND states 1 and 3.
- 4. PE states 1 and 3; PF and QC states 1 and 2.
- 5. QE states 1 and 3; QL and RD states 1 and 2.
- 6. RE states 1 and 2; TB state 2.

Plate 9

- 7. BB state 1 and 2 (provisional print) in black and state 2 in red,
 FE state 1 (pre-provisional print) and state 2 in red,
 GB state 2 in red, on cover cancelled with London No. 1 in Maltese Cross.
- 8. FC-FD pair in red, on cover cancelled with London No. 3 in Maltese Cross.
- 9. FF state 1 in black and red (pre-provisional prints), state 2 in black (provisional print) and state 2 in red.



Plate 6, ND states 1 (early print) and 3 (late, worn print).



Plate 6, MD states 1, 2 and 3. Note the progressive weakening of the right side of checkletter M and the TRLs in the lateral margins of the final state.



Plate 9, FC-FD pair state 2.

Detail from 1843 cover; usage of the late 1842-43 printing from this plate.



Plate 9, FF state 1 in red and state 2 in black.

Pre-provisional and Provisional prints, respectively.

This unit in black as state 2 is a relatively new discovery – one other on cover has since been found.

- 1. Plate 33 SA and TA.
- 2. Plate 40 AF and AI.
- 3. Plate 40 KB (states 1, 3b and 4).
- 4. Plate 48 AD, AE and AF including 'imprimaturs' .
- 5. Plate 49 TE, TG and TH.
- 6. Plate 49 TF.
- 7. Plate 54 SH.
- 8. Plate 57 AF and AG.
- 9. Plate 62 AF including the 'imprimatur'.



Plate 33, SA states 1 and 2.

Ex Dr Stone, and illustrated in his book "Repairs of the 1841 One Penny Plates 1 to 40" (1973).



Plate 54, SH state 2 non-coincident re-entry; detail showing the duplication across the base. This stamp in the original state, without duplication, is very scarce.



Plate 33, TA states 1 and 2.

Ex Dr Osborne, and illustrated in his book "Repaired Impressions" (1949).



Plate 40, KB states 1 and 4.

Note the repositioning of checkletter B in state 4 – disproving a recent claim that this is impossible without complete removal and re-entering of the impression.



Plate 48, AE and AF, the stamps removed from the registration sheet and state 2 examples.



Plate 49, TF state 1 early and two later, very worn prints, then state 2 with restored background, portrait and sidelines, weakened checkletters and TRL at left.

- 1. Plate 64 BH.
- 2. Plate 65 BD.
- 3. Plate 71 TG and TH.
- 4. Plate 94 RK and TK.
- 5. Plate 141 TF.
- 6. Plate 154 AE and AG to AL.
- 7. Plate 150 DD and GE.
- 8. Plate 150 S and T rows.
- 9. Plate 150 TG.



Plate 65, BD states 1 and 2.

The original state is very scarce and this repair was apparently not required due to plate wear but possibly due to some damage to the plate; in support of this, all state 2 stamps seen have a mark in E of PENNY and an unprinted area directly above this.



Plate 141, TF states 1 and 2 – the discovery example.



Plate 150, DD states 1 and 2 – the discovery example.

FRAMES 5 and 6

Plate 155

- 1. AA, AB, BA and BB.
- 2. AF, AG and AH 'imprimatur'.
- 3. AJ ('imprimatur'), AK, AL, BK and BL.
- 4. BF, CA, CB, CF, DF and EB.
- 5. ED, EE, EG, EH, FD and FE.
- 6. GG, GH and HA.
- 7. HL, IA and IB.
- 8. JA, KA and the marginal rosette.
- 9. JE, JK and KK.
- 1. LB, LD, LF, MA, MD and MH
- 2. NE to NH, NL, OA, OD and PD.
- 3. OG, OH, OK and OL.
- 4. QA, QB, QG, QH, RG and RH.
- 5. QI, QK, QL, RA and RJ.
- 6. RF and RL, including the 'imprimaturs'.
- 7. S row.
- 8. T row.
- 9. TF and the lower pinning mark.



Plate 155, AB showing typical progression of checkletters – original state 1, state 2 with letters thinned following re-entry and state 3 with letters recut following second re-entry.



Plate 155, AH, the stamp removed from the registration sheet (ex the De La Rue archive), imperforate and perforated state 2 with thinned checkletters and state 3 showing letters recut.



Plate 155, HL states 1 and 2, the latter with weakened checkletters from plate compression due the repair by re-entry; the perforated stamp with constant broken perf pin variety.



Plate 155, detail of the margin adjacent to JA-KA showing the marginal rosette in the original state and then following the first repair with markedly thinned points.



Plate 155, RF, the stamp removed from the registration sheet (ex The Royal Philatelic Collection), imperforate states 1 and 2 the latter with weak checkletters and state 3 after second re-entry and letters recut.



Plate 155, TF states 1, 2 and 3.



Plate 155, TF detail showing the effect on the lower marginal pinning marks – virtually absent in state 2 and heavily recut in state 3.



Plate 155, AJ and RL, stamps removed from the registration sheet.

- 1. Plate 157 AC.
- 2. Plate 157 AF and AG.
- 3. Plate 157 Al and AJ.
- 4. Plate 157 AK and AL.
- 5. Plate 157 BL and CA.
- 6. Plate 157 SE, TB and TE.
- 7. Plate 157 TF and TG.
- 8. Plate 158 RD.
- 9. Plate 160 AB (including the 'imprimatur') and BG.



Plate 157, AF and AI state 2 prints in this plate's typical orange-red shade for perforated prints.



Plate 157, BL state 1 very worn print with weak sidelines and original burr-rub over POSTAGE, state 2 with right side firm, engraving and POSTAGE restored and new TRLs in both lateral margins.



Plate 157, CA state 2 imperforate and perforated, with long TRL at left and short TRL at upper right.



Plate 157, TG state 2 imperforate (lake-red) and perforated (orange-red).



Plate 158, RD in the original state is a non-coincident fresh-entry with duplication across the upper tablet and stars, after later re-entry this duplication is greater and there is doubling of the baseline of the D square.

Plate 162

- 1. IC, ID, JB and JC.
- 2. MB, NB, PB, QA, QB and QE.
- 3. RB, RC, RD, and RE.
- 4. TC, TD, TE and TH.

Plate 163

- 5. AE, AF and AG.
- 6. AH ('imprimatur'), AJ, AK and BD.
- 7. BF, BG, BH, BJ, BK and BL.
- 8. TA, TB and TC.
- 9. TF, TG and TH.



Plate 163, AG state 1 and state 2 (double) perforated though showing new wear.

In the repaired state the sidelines are firmer, checkletters weaker, baseline under E of PENNY is restored and there is slight duplication in the right star.



Plate 162, PB QA QB and QE perforated state 2 examples, all with new TRL at right.



Plate 163, TF-TG detail showing the effect on the lower pinning mark which is virtually absent.



Plate 163, AJ imperforate states 1 and 2.



Plate 163, TG detail from a block of six with TG in the second state with strong TRL at right, yet with other impressions known to have been repaired still in state 1. An important block that proves repairs to this plate did not happen all at once.

Plate 164

- 1. AC, AD, AF and AG.
- 2. AI, AJ and AK.
- 3. AL.
- 4. BJ, BK and BL.
- 5. CK, CL and DL.
- 6. RJ and SF.
- 7. SG, SH, TC and TD.
- 8. TE and TF.
- 9. TG and TH.



Plate 164, CL state 2 both imperforate and perforated.



Plate 164, SG state 2 both imperforate and perforated, with TRL at right.



Plate 164, TD states 1 and 2 imperforate. The TRL associated with the repair to this unit is extremely strong.



Plate 164, TF states 1 and 2.

Note the area of weakness at lower right on state 1 is discernibly firmer with adjacent feint TRL in state 2.



Plate 164, TH states 1 and 2.

- 1. Plate 165 AA, AB, AE and BB.
- 2. Plate 165 BD, SA and SL.
- 3. Plate 165 TH, TJ and TK.
- 4. Plate 168 EL.
- 5. Plate 168 IL.
- 6. Plate 168 MB.
- 7. Plate 169 AJ and BJ.
- 8. Plate 170 LL.
- 9. Plate 170 GL, ML, NL and TA.



Plate 165, AE states 1 and 2 – the latter is an original discovery and the only known state 2 example.



Plate 169, AJ state 2, detail showing major duplication at the right upper end.



Plate 165, BB states 1 and 2 showing duplicated outer line of the lower right square.



Plate 168, IL state 1 with extreme wear at lower right and state 2 showing partial correction of this and duplicated outer line of the L square – non-coincident re-entry.

- 1. Plate 171 OB, QA, RA and SC.
- 2. Plate 171 SA and SB.
- 3. Plate 171 TA, TB, TF, TI and TK.
- 4. Plate 172 AE, AF and AG.
- 5. Plate 194 AL and TG.
- 6. Plate 173 AB, CD, DD, EE, and HA.
- 7. Plate 173 JA, KE, KK, MA and OD.
- 8. Plate 173 PB, QD, SF, TB, TC, TH and TI.



Plate 171, TA states 1 and 2.



Plate 171, TK states 1 and 2.



Plate 172, RB states 1 and 2.



Plate 194 states 1 and 2, both perforated 14.

State 1 with weak left sideline and blind checkletter A. State 2 with left side firmer, adjacent TRL and checkletter A now open. An original discovery.



Plate 194, TG states 1 and 2, both perforated 14.

State 1 with the lower half of the right sideline recut. State 2 with no trace of previous recut side, G weaker and duplicated left star. Non-coincident repair.

2d Blue, plate 4

- 1. AC.
- 2. AD.
- 3. AE and AF.
- 4. AI.
- 5. A row multiples.
- 6. TB.
- 7. TC and TD.
- 8. TF.
- 9. TG and TH.



2d blue plate 4, AC states 1 and 2.



2d blue plate 4, AH and AI very late state 1 prints showing diagonal plate scratch from top right of AH to bottom right of AI – rare (only two other pieces are known).



2d blue plate 4, AI state 2, new TRL at left and plate scratch barely visible.



2d blue plate 4, TB in 3 states.

State 1 with corrosion marks around base and lower margin. State 2 with corrosion mitigated and new TRL at right. State 3 with checkletters weakened by second repair by re-entry.







2d blue plate 4, TC very late state 2 showing extreme plate wear at base. State 3 with restored engraving and weaker checkletters (separated pair with TD in state 2 and watermark inverted).