

Great Britain Imperforate Line Engraved the Vanity and the Insanity

In 1840 Great Britain issued the first adhesive labels to be used to prepay postage. These stamps were issued without perforations until 1854. Two denominations were used, a one penny that was originally printed in black and a two pence in blue. In 1841 the one penny began to be printed in red and the two pence design was altered to include a white line above the value tablet. Both denominations were printed by line engraving and featured a portrait of Queen Victoria.

The vanity: The stamps were printed in sheets of 240 subjects arranged in 20 rows, each with twelve stamps. As a method to deter forgery, each of the 240 different positions on the stamp sheet bore a unique letter combination in the lower corners. The initial in the lower left corner designated the horizontal row location, these were in alphabetical order, top to bottom, from A to T. The initial in the lower right corner designated the vertical column location, these were in alphabetical order, left to right, from A to L. One position on each sheet, the 18th row, 6th column, bore the *letters RF* which corresponds to the exhibitor's initials. This is an exhibit of stamps from that single position.

The insanity: This is a collection of *plated* stamps from position RF. Over the period that imperforate line engraved stamps were printed, there were 177 plates used for printing the one penny and four plates for the two pence. Some plates were repaired and exist in more than one state, and some plates were used to print the one penny stamps in both black and red. In general, plating the stamps is an exercise in "fly speck" philately. As the corner letters were punched in separately for each plate, the exact placement varied between plates. In addition, there are minor plating characteristics that can be used to determine the actual plate that a particular stamp is from. Luckily proof sheets exist of most plates and reference to these "imprimatur" sheets is conclusive where they exist. The RF position stamp has been cut away from seven of these sheets. One of these imprimaturs is shown below.

This exhibit shows examples of position RF stamps arranged by plate number and includes a small selection of usages on cover. Information below each stamp includes the date the plate was registered, number of sheets printed, and the more significant characteristics. Stamps are grouped closer together when the plates were registered on the same date. Stamps have been plated against imprimatur images.



imprimatur (plate 156)
ex the Royal collection



mint block from plate 70
central position is "RF"

One Penny Black

1840: Plates 1 - 10

plate 1a



4/15/40 15,000
NW ray flaw

Plate 1 was not hardened and wore rapidly necessitating repairs to every position. This repair was performed on May 23, 1840. It is usual to refer to the plate in its original state as plate 1a and to the repaired state as plate 1b.

plate 1b



4/15/40 30,000
NW ray flaw, foot weak

plate 2



4/22/40 30,000
recut letter square

plate 3



5/9/40 20,000
NW ray flaw

plate 4



5/18/40 35,000
frame line extends SW

plate 5



6/1/40 36,000
NE weak

plate 6



6/15/40 38,000
mark NW

plate 7



6/26/40 25,000
guide line NE

plate 8, state 1



7/31/40 29,300
"O" flaw

plate 9



11/6/40 16,000
"O" flaw

plate 10



12/2/40 9,000
hand cut "R"

1841: Plates 8 (state 2) and 11 Provisional Printings

A repair to plate 8 was performed in January 1841 after the initial printing in red. Stamps printed from the plate, after this first repair to position RF, are classified as being from state 2. The provisional printing in black took place sometime between January 22 and February 2, 1841.

plate 8, state 2



7/31/40 ≈2000
bulges at foot

Plate 11 was registered on January 27, 1841 and printings in red commenced two days later. A provisional printing of only 700 sheets from this plate in black was performed on February 1 and 2, 1841. The following day printings in red were resumed.

plate 11



1/21/41 700
guide line NE corner

One Penny Black On Cover

1840: Plates 1 - 3

Plate 1a

16 September 1840 Prescott



Plate 2

11 November 1840 Inverness



Plate 3

12 June 1840 London



Plate 4

9 August 1840 Roscrea



Plate 5

1 July 1840 Bedford

Plate 6

12 April 1841 Whithorn, Scotland



One Penny Red

1841: Plates 1b - 22

A color change from black to red was instituted for the one penny in 1841. The first printings used the six plates that had previously been used for printings in black. These were plates 1b, 2, 5, 8, 9 and 10. Provisional printings in black were performed on February 1 and 2, 1841 after which printing in red was resumed.

plate 1b



4/15/40 6,000
NW ray flaw, foot weak

plate 2



4/22/40 8,000
recut letter square

plate 5



6/1/40 16,000
NE weak

plate 8, state 1



6/26/40 5,000
strong line NE corner

plate 8, state 2



6/26/40 12,000
weak line NE corner

plate 8, state 3



6/26/40 5,000
burr in left margin

A repair to plate 8 was performed in January 1841 after the initial printing in red, but before a provisional printing in black. An additional repair, resulting in a third state, occurred after the provisional black printing was completed.

plate 9



11/6/40 35,000
"O" flaw

plate 10



12/2/40 24,000
hand cut "R"

plate 11



1/27/41 40,000

plate 12



2/25/41 40,000
small NE corner flaw

plate 13



3/27/41 21,000
recut SE corner

plate 14



3/27/41 28,000
small NE roller flaw

plate 15



7/23/41 48,000
NE roller flaw

plate 16



7/24/41 48,000
NE roller flaw

plate 17



9/21/41 40,000
basal shift

plate 18



9/21/41 31,600
basal shift

plate 19



11/3/41 50,000

plate 20



11/15/41 55,000

plate 21



12/11/41 50,000
scratch NW

plate 22



12/30/41 53,000
defective "R"

One Penny Red

1842 and 1843: Plates 23 - 41

plate 23



1/18/42 53,000
defective "F"

plate 24



3/4/42 55,000
NE breaks

plate 25



3/17/42 55,000
NE breaks

plate 26



6/22/42 55,000
NE open, NW ray flaw

plate 27



9/5/42 52,000
NE open, NW ray flaw

plate 28



9/14/42 42,000
guide line SE

plate 29



11/14/42 44,000
guide line NE

plate 30



12/6/42 41,000
hand cut "R"

plate 31



1/27/43 45,000
hand cut "R"

plate 32



2/7/43 50,000
hand cut "R"

plate 33



2/20/43 53,000
hand cut "R"

plate 34



6/7/43 52,000
guide line SE

plate 35



6/7/43 50,000

plate 36



6/7/43 50,000
guide line NE

plate 37



7/7/43 40,000

plate 38



7/26/43 41,000
mark in "Y"

plate 39



1/27/43 47,000

plate 40



2/7/43 32,000

plate 41



2/20/43 50,000
flaw NW

One Penny Red

1844 and 1845: Plates 42 - 64

plate 42



1/23/44

73,000

plate 43



1/23/44

101,000

plate 44



2/29/44

76,000

plate 45



2/29/44

113,000

top line extends

plate 46



5/4/44

154,000

blur SE and SW

plate 47



5/24/44

133,000

plate 48



6/19/44

154,000

plate 49



9/12/44

154,000

plate 50



9/12/44

145,000

plate 51



12/2/44

154,000

plate 52



12/19/44

133,000

top line extends

plate 53



1/7/45

154,000

plate 54



1/21/45

154,000

marks on face

plate 55



2/7/45

133,000

flaw at frame line

plate 56



2/25/45

84,400

flaw at frame line

plate 57



5/7/45

88,000

plate 58



5/9/45

90,800

flaw in "P"

plate 59



6/25/45

54,400

plate 60



6/25/45

52,800

bottom doubled

plate 61



8/14/45

108,000

plate 62



8/14/45

121,600

re-entry at top

plate 63



9/2/45

118,400

plate 64



12/3/45

128,400

One Penny Red

1846 to 1848: Plates 65 - 87

plate 65



2/2/46 73,000
marks NW and SW

plate 66



2/2/46 101,000

plate 67



4/17/46 76,000
left line extends

plate 68



4/17/46 113,000

plate 69



6/8/46 154,000

plate 70



6/30/46 133,000

plate 71



10/21/46 154,000

plate 72



10/21/46 145,000

plate 73



1/14/47 94,000

plate 74



1/14/47 100,000
blurs at left

plate 75



4/19/47 104,000

plate 76



4/19/47 126,000

plate 77



4/19/47 82,400

plate 78



1/12/48 84,400

plate 79



1/12/48 88,000
blurs in "RF"

plate 80



1/12/48 90,800
recut SE

plate 81



1/12/48 124,400
blurs in "RF"

plate 82



1/12/48 54,400
recut SE

plate 83



1/12/48 52,800
hand cut "R"

plate 84



10/11/48 108,000
base line doubled

plate 85



10/11/48 121,600
weak corners

plate 86



10/11/48 118,400
hand cut "R"

plate 87



10/11/48 128,400
hand cut "R"

plate 88



3/20/49

66,300

plate 89



3/20/49

79,200

top line extends

plate 90



5/24/49

70,000

top line extends

plate 91



5/24/49

95,200

tilted "F"

plate 92



5/24/49

72,400

top line extends

plate 93



12/6/49

83,600

top line extends

plate 94



12/6/49

144,000

tilted "F"

plate 96



12/6/49

136,000

top line extends

plate 97



12/6/49

100,000

tilted "F"

plate 98



12/6/49

133,200

plate 95



1/7/50

106,800

top line extends

plate 99



1/7/50

75,600

plate 100



2/25/50

61,200

plate 101



2/25/50

104,400

plate 102



6/12/50

75,600

serif "R" extends

plate 103



6/12/50

48,800

top line extends

plate 104



6/12/50

53,200

top line extends

plate 105



6/12/50

42,000

base line extends

plate 106



6/12/50

84,800

top line extends

One Penny Red

1851: Plates 107 - 131

plate 107



1/1/51 24,800
left line extends

plate 108



1/1/51 43,200
top line extends

plate 109



1/1/51 28,800

plate 110



1/1/51 34,400
top line extends

plate 111



1/1/51 50,800
serif "R" extends

plate 112



1/1/51 74,400
left line extends

plate 113



2/26/51 56,400
NE corner weak

plate 114



2/26/51 35,200
left line extends

plate 115



2/26/51 41,200
hand cut "R"

plate 116



5/20/51 60,800
top line extends

plate 117



5/20/51 37,600
top line extends

plate 118



5/20/51 70,800
serif "R" extends

plate 119



5/20/51 67,200

plate 120



5/20/51 44,000
top line extends

plate 121



5/20/51 60,400
base line extends

plate 122



7/25/51 70,000
top line extends

plate 123



7/25/51 75,600

plate 124



7/25/51 49,600
serif "F" extends

plate 125



7/27/51 61,600

plate 126



9/23/51 62,000
right line extends

plate 127



9/23/51 65,200
"RF" long serifs

plate 128



9/23/51 59,800
serif "R" extends

plate 129



9/23/51 44,800
serif "R" extends

plate 130



9/23/51 50,800
"F" blur

plate 131



9/23/51 48,400
hand cut "R"

One Penny Red

1852: Plates 132 - 160

Starting in 1852 new punches were used for the check letters. This new alphabet is termed Alphabet II and the letters are larger.

plate 132



2/6/52 24,800
guide line SE corner

plate 133



2/6/52 43,200
"F" tilted

plate 134



2/6/52 28,800
top line extends

plate 135



2/6/52 34,400
"R" heavy

plate 136



2/6/52 50,800
serif "R" extends

plate 137



2/6/52 74,400
SE corner skewed

plate 138



4/17/52 24,800
tilted "F"

plate 139



4/17/52 43,200
tilted "R"

plate 140



4/17/52 28,800
marks in corners

plate 141



4/17/52 34,400
blurred "R" and "F"

plate 142



4/17/52 50,800
blurred corners

plate 143



4/17/52 74,400
"F" tilted

plate 144



6/4/52 60,800

plate 145



6/4/52 37,600

plate 146



6/4/52 70,800

plate 147



6/4/52 67,200

plate 148



6/4/52 44,000

plate 149



7/27/52 24,800
blur NE corner

plate 150



7/27/52 43,200

plate 151



7/27/52 28,800

plate 152



7/27/52 34,400
"R" tilted

plate 153



7/27/52 50,800

plate 154



7/27/52 74,400
left line extends

plate 155



9/16/52 62,000

plate 156



9/16/52 65,200

plate 157



9/16/52 59,800
right line extends

plate 158



9/16/52 44,800
serif "R" extends

plate 159



9/16/52 50,800
tilted "R"

plate 160



9/16/52 48,400

One Penny Red

1853: Plates 161 - 177

Starting in 1852 new punches were used for the check letters. This new alphabet is termed Alphabet II and the letters are larger.

plate 161



1/14/53 85,000

plate 162



1/14/53 86,000

plate 163



1/14/53 77,000

base line scratch SW

plate 164



1/14/53 84,000

bottom line extends

plate 165



1/14/53 74,000

plate 166



1/14/53 52,000

plate 167



4/14/53 65,000

plate 168



4/18/53 70,000

"R" tilted

plate 169



4/18/53 68,000

recut NE corner

plate 170



4/18/53 79,000

"R" extended serif

plate 171



4/18/53 63,000

plate 172



4/18/53 58,000

top line extends

plate 173



7/20/53 44,000

plate 174



7/20/53 14,000

top line extends

plate 175



7/20/53 8,000

plate 176



7/20/53 2,500

plate 177

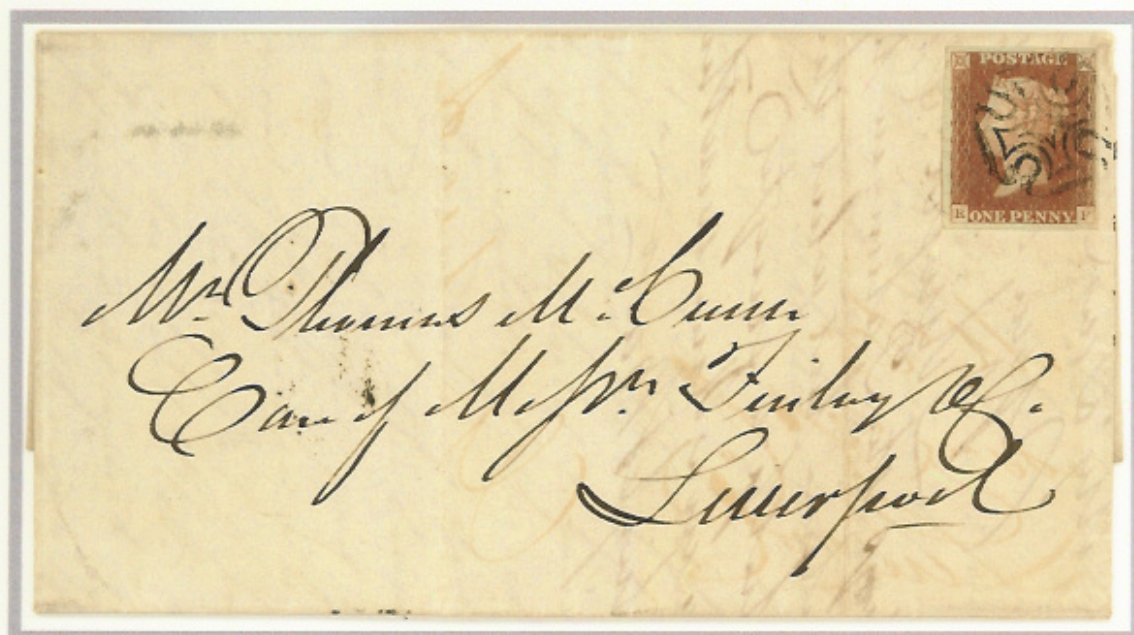


7/20/53 2,500

"RF" extended serifs

Although plates 176 and 177 were registered in 1853, they were not put to press until January 1854. Nearly the entire production run was perforated.

One Penny Red On Cover



distinctive maltese cross cancel of Greenock, 15 August 1842 usage from Greenock, Scotland, plate 23

Numeral "7" in maltese cross
7 April 1843 from London
plate 20



Numeral "11" in maltese cross
14 October 1843 from London
plate 33

One Penny Red On Cover



Posted After 7 o'Clock At Night handstamp, 22 June 1845 London, late fee plus postage, "RF" plate 45

Illustrated Cover
13 November 1842 Bognor
plate 23



Mourning Cover
14 January 1847 Aldeburgh
plate 69



One Penny Red Multiples



plate 102, QE-SF block



plate 59, RC-RF strip



plate 24, RF-RH strip, note mis-alignment



plate 26, RE-RF pair



plate 79, RF-RH strip



plate 42, RE-RF pair



plate 48, December 20, 1844 Burton On Trent to Manchester, quadruple rate with RF-RI strip of four

Two Pence Blue

1840: Plates 1 and 2

plate 1



5/2/40 16,962

plate 1



RE-RF pair

plate 2



7/18/40 10,600

1841: Plates 3 and 4

plate 3



2/25/41 191,000

plate 4



11/29/49 200,000



Plate 3

23 August 1847 Wolverhampton to Calcutta, India and forwarded
1sh rate prepaid with 2d positions RD-RF, PB-PC, PA