



STAMP TALK

by **PENNY BLACK**

THE WORLD'S FIRST OFFICIAL POSTAGE STAMP

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I am **PENNY BLACK**, the world's first official postage stamp issued for a public postal system, talking to you. **Sir Rowland Hill**, an educationist is considered to be my father. Hill saw the irregularities in the, then existing postal system of Great Britain, which caused negative revenue for the government and issued a pamphlet titled "**Post Office Reforms; Its Importance and Practicability**" on 13th February in the year 1837, which insisted on a uniform postage irrespective of the weight of the letter and the distance of delivery.

Hill also gave an idea of issuing an envelope for carrying letters. Hill's concept was accepted and he was given a two year contract to run the system. Hill along with Mr. Henry Cole ran a competition to find a good design for me. 2600 entries were received and none was convincing to Hill. So finally, Hill made a rough sketch about how I must look like, along with instructions and his signature.



Sir Rowland Hill
my creator



Rough sketch done by Hill
with instructions to the
engraver, with his Signature



Used Mulready cover with myself and Maltese Cross cancellation

Finally Hill launched my services in all post offices on 1st May, 1840 along with an envelope designed by the artist William Mulready. I was issued for public use on 6th May, 1840. I was bearing the profile of the British Monarch, Queen Victoria. This idea of the profile of the monarch on me was conceived in the thoughts of Sir Rowland Hill.



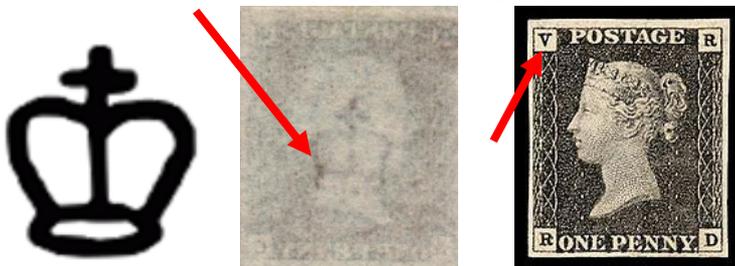
William Wyon Medal

The profile of Queen Victoria which was printed on me was engraved by Charles and Fredrick Heath based on the sketch provided by Henry Corbould. In turn, the sketch was based on the cameo-like head by William Wyon, which was designed for a medal used to commemorate the visit of Queen Victoria to the city of London in 1837, the year of Her coronation.

I was printed using the line engraved printing method from 11 plates numbered 1 to 11. Plate No.1 deteriorated quickly and was repaired to such an extent that it is generally considered as two separate plates -No.1a and No.1b - making 12 plates in total from which I was printed. Each plate consisted of 240 stamps of me in 20 rows and 12 columns. My position on the sheet was identified by two letters in the front bottom corners. The left corner letter identifies the row and the right corner identifies the column.(i.e) AA,AB,ACAL for top row BA,BB,...BL for second row and so on till the bottom row as TA,TB,TC,.....TL.(There were 240 pence in a Pound (£), 12 pence to a shilling and 20 shillings to a Pound.) Thus 1 full sheet of me (240 stamps) will cost one Pound, ½ sheet of me (120) cost 10 shillings, and one row of me (12) cost a shilling.

AA	AB	AC	AD	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK	AL
BA	BB	BC	BD	BE	BF	BG	BH	BI	BJ	BK	BL
CA											BL
DA											DL
EA											EL
FA											FL
GA											GL
HA											HL
IA											IL
JA											JL
etc											etc
RA											RL
SA					SE						SL
TA	TB	TC	TD	TE	TF	TG	TH	TI	TJ	TK	TL

To prevent forgery, I had a small crown watermark on my back and check letters in front bottom corners. I was printed in 2,86,700 sheets in a year totaling to 68,808,000 stamps. I am not a rare stamp but finding me in a good condition with uniform margin is very rare.



Crown watermark and its visibility at the back of me

I was issued for official usage with letters V R at the top corners



I had two corner letters (bottom left and bottom right). Myself with letters SE is shown here, as well as my position on the sheet.

In addition to the general issue, my design was little modified to be used for official, government mails. The new design was produced, with the letters "V" and "R" replacing the crosses in the top corners.

I was initially cancelled by a red Maltese Cross cancellation, however this was difficult to see and easy to remove. Changing to black ink cancellation was still more difficult to see. Hence I was replaced by Penny Red and printed from the 12th plate from January 1841.

Initially, Hill decided that my size should be 3/4 inch square, but altered the dimensions to 3/4 inch wide by 7/8 inch tall (approx 19 x 22 mm) to accommodate the writing at the bottom. The word "POSTAGE" at the top of the design distinguishes it from a revenue stamp, "ONE PENNY." at the bottom shows the amount pre-paid for



Complete sheet of Myself (12x20)



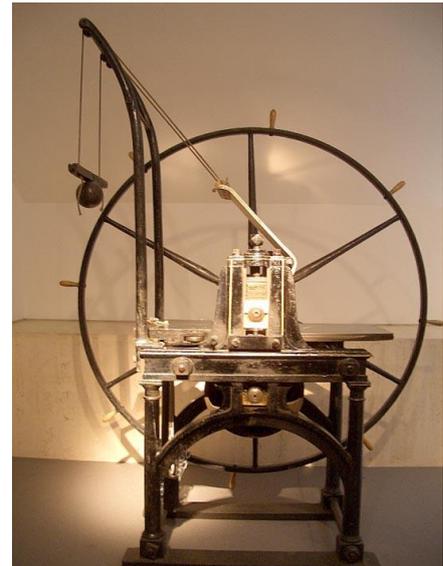
Maltese cross cancellation, on me in red and on my replacement (Penny Red) in black

postage of the stamped letter. The background has a finely engraved engine turnings. The two upper corners hold Maltese crosses with radiant solar discs at their centre, the lower corner letters show the position of the stamp in the printed sheet, from "A A" at top left to "T L" at bottom right.

To separate me from the sheet as a single stamp, scissors or some sharp instrument was used. Stamps from Henry Archer's perforation trials were issued in the last few months of 1850. UK government purchased the perforation machine from Henry in 1853. Perforation of postage stamps began in January 1854 and the first officially perforated stamps were issued in February 1854.

The black ink cancellation on my replacement (Penny Red) was much more effective and harder to remove. The re-use of stamps with the un-cancelled portions of two stamps to form an unused whole impression continued and in 1864 the stars in the top corners were replaced by the check letters, as they appeared in the lower corners, **but in reverse order**.

Since I was the world's first stamp, country's name was not printed on me. So in remembrance of me, till today



This is Jacob Perkins' press, which printed my sister, Two Pence Blue and me., This "D" cylinder press patented in 1819, is now on display at the British Library, London.



My sister, Two Pence Blue. Well centered Block of Four.

all British stamps bear a profile of the reigning monarch somewhere on the design looking always towards the left. When I was born, I was called as a **postage label**, not as a stamp. I have a sister, two pence blue who was born after 2 days, on 8th May, 1840. **Thank you friend. See you.**