

QUEEN VICKIE BY THE NUMBERS

By Dick Colberg

Slide 1, Title

If you like numbers with a bit of flyspeck philately thrown in to boot, then the stamps of Victorian Great Britain are for you. An overwhelming majority of the Victorian stamps of Great Britain had a means of identifying the plate number; either by the number itself in the design or by some other graphic means.

I fell into this quite by accident back in the late 1970s. I was trying to complete my Victorian G.B. collection and came across an auction listing for Scott #43, which I needed. But the listing also included this: all eight plates. Plates, what plates? Long story short, I won the lot, and it opened the entire vista of plate numbers on the Victorian stamps. After about a half dozen more years I had a ten-frame exhibit that included all the identifiable plate numbers, many also used on cover, and many also with used abroad cancels. And two Gold Medals.

In the early 1990s I sold off the high value stamps and all the used abroad material. There have been days when I wish I hadn't done that. But I kept the core of the collection and am able to make this presentation today. My exhibit was confined to the surface printed issues, but I've added the engraved issues here for completeness. I'll also not discuss the three embossed issues.

Slide #2

In the beginning.... May 6, 1840, saw the release of the world's first adhesive postage stamp; the One Penny black. The stamp was printed in sheets of 240 (240 pence = 1 pound; easy accounting), twenty rows of twelve stamps and there were "check letters" in the lower corners of each stamp. The upper left stamp was A-A, top right was A-L, bottom left was T-A and the lower right was T-L. This was the earliest attempt at preventing re-use of stamps. The stamp shown here is a bit of vanity in that it has my initials on it. Even though there were several million Penny Blacks printed, it's devilishly hard to find a specific letter combination.

I've brought with me today a reconstructed sheet of 240 of the perforated Penny red, Scott #20. While I was trying to assemble this sheet, I was corresponding with a collector in Missouri and at one time mentioned that I was only lacking about 20 stamps for completion. He was aghast. We were talking in two different languages. He was reconstructing Scott #33, and I said I had all of the plates except #77. He thought I was reconstructing sheets of all 152 plates, 36,480 stamps! You'll see mine a bit later.

The Penny Black was printed on 11 different plates, but there was no plate number identification other than in the sheet selvage. I'll follow this up with the Two Pence stamp and then take the stamps in order from one-half pence through five pence.

Slide #3

In order numerically, but not date wise, the one-half pence stamp issued in 1870. It was printed from plates 1 through 20, but not plates 2, 7, 16, 17 & 18. Regrettably, Plate 9 is missing owing to cost.

Slide #4

In 1880 the ½- 1-, 1 ½- and 2-pence stamps were all reissued without plate number identifications. Shown here is the one-half pence stamp. Plates 1 through 8 were used.

Slide #5

In 1841 the One Penny stamp was reissued in red. The black stamp was difficult for the post office to recognize cancelled. The first cancels were black. Black on black was, of course, problematic. The cancellation ink was changed to red, but it was still not quickly recognized.

Initially, the penny black plates were used for the reds. They are identifiable and many collectors collect reds and blacks from the same plates. In addition, new plates 12 to 131 were used for these stamps. There was no in-stamp plate number I.D. This stamp was reengraved and reissued in 1856 as a perforated stamp, but again without in-stamp

plate number identification. I have brought with me today a reconstructed sheet of all 240 positions of this stamp. I have all 240 positions of the imperf stamp, but it is not mounted as this one is. I was fortunate to find this example with my initials in the corners.

Slides #6 - #8

In 1864 the penny red stamp was re-issued as a perforated stamp with in-stamp plate number identification. It was printed from plates 71 through 225, except #77. There is a lot of controversy around the existence of Plate #77. Officially, it does not exist. But there are a few authenticated copies around. They are quite pricey! (2024 Scott = \$875.) Plate #225 is expensive owing to a short print run prior to the reissue in 1880. The plate number was engraved into the design of the scrollwork at the sides of the stamp as seen on this page. Finding the plate numbers on some cancelled stamps can be a real challenge.

Slide #9

Another opportunity for collectors of this material to get all anal. The London Head Office used numbered Maltese Cross cancels from March 1843 to 1844. More numbers!!! Here is a set of all 12.

Slide #10

The 1880 reissue of the one penny stamp. There is no plate number identification.

Slides #11 & #12

A year later the one penny stamp was again reissued: this time using Dies #1 and #2. They are distinguished by the number of dots in the corners: 14 for Die #1 and 16 for Die #2.

Slide #13

In 1870 a 1 ½-pence, or three halfpence, stamp was issued. Plates 1 and 3 were used. They are identified by small vertical white lines in the lower margin.

Slide #14

The 1880 reissue of the three halfpence stamp. No plate identification.

Slide #15

Like the Penny Black, the Two Penny Blue carried no plate identification on the stamp. Plates 1 and 2 were used.

Slide #16

The second issue of the Two Penny Blue, like its predecessor, bore no plate number in the design. The difference between the two issues is the thick white line above the Two Pence at the bottom. Plates 3 and 4 were used.

Slide #17

Between 1855 and 1858 they did a lot of monkeying around with the two pence blue stamp design. Plate #5 was issued with thick white lines below POSTAGE and above TWO PENCE. Plate #6 was issued with thin white lines where there were thick white lines. Plate number I.D. was added effective with Plate #7. Plates 7, 8, 9, and 12 were issued with thick white lines. Then Plates 13, 14, and 15 were issued with thin white lines. The location of the plate number is in the side scroll work as the previous penny reds of the same design.

Slide #18

The 1880 reissue of the two pence stamp without any plate number identification.

Slide #19

In 1875 a two and one-half pence stamp was issued in lilac-rose on anchor watermark paper. Plates 1, 2, and 3 were used. Plate number identification is in the upper corners as shown.

Slides #20 and #21

In 1876 the 2 ½-pence stamp was reissued on Orb watermark paper. Plates 3 through 17 were used. The location of the plate number did not change.

Slide #22

In 1880 the color was changed to blue to meet UPU requirements. Plates #17 through #20 were used. Plate number location and watermark did not change. It's possible to have Plate #17 stamps with two different colors.

Slide #23

In 1881 the 2 ½-pence stamp printing plate layout was changed from two panes of 96 to two panes of 120. Plates #21 through #23 were used. The watermark was changed to a crown. The plate number location did not change.

Slide #24

In 1862 a three pence stamp was issued. It was printed from Plate #2 but had no plate I.D. in the design.

Slide #25

In 1864 a new three pence stamp was issued. This design included the plate number at the sides as shown. Plate #4 was used at this time. Emblems watermark paper was used. A word about numerical cancels. Each post office was assigned a numerical cancel. A whole collecting area! This 131 was used in Edinburgh.

Slide #26

In 1867 the watermark was changed to Spray of Rose and plates #4 through #10 were used. Here we have a case where Plate #4 stamps can exist with either of two different watermarks.

Slide #27

In 1873 the design of the three pence stamp was changed to include colored corner letters where they had been white. The watermark and plate number location were not changed. Plates #11 through #20 were used, except for #13.

Slide #28

In 1881 the layout of the three pence stamp was changed from 12 panes of 20 to two panes of 120. The watermark was changed to a Crown. The plate number location did not change. Plate #20 from the previous setting and Plate #21 were used. So, it's possible to have Plate #20 three pence stamps with two different watermarks.

At this time there was a need for three-pence revenue stamps, but none were available. So, the then current Plate #21 three pence stamps were overprinted with a **3d** for revenue use.

Slides #29 & #30

1855 saw the issuance of four pence stamps. Between 1855 and 1862 there were three different issues, all differing by the watermarked paper. There was no plate I.D. in the design of the stamp. The watermarks are small, medium and large garters as shown.

Slide #31

In 1862 a new design for the four pence stamp appeared. It included small colored corner letters. Plates #3 and #4 were used. The Plate #3 identifier was a small Roman numeral 1 in the lower corner. The Plate #4 identifier was a small Roman numeral II and a diagonal line in the lower corner.

Slide #32

In 1865 the design of the four pence stamp was again changed. This design had the plate number I.D. easily seen at the top and had large white corner letters. As stated earlier, this is the stamp that started it all for me. Plate numbers 7 through 14 were used.

Slide #33

In 1876 the design was changed to include large colored corner letters, and a new Plate #15 was used.

Slide #34

In 1877 the color was changed to sage green and Plates 15 and 16 were used. The watermark and plate number location were unchanged. It is possible to have Plate #15 stamps in vermilion and sage green.

Slide #35

In 1880 the color was changed to brown and a new plate, 17, was used. No other changes were made.

Slide #36

In 1880 the plate layout was changed to two panes of 120 stamps and the watermark changed to a crown. Plates #17 and #18 were used. It is possible to have Plate #17 stamps with either of two different watermarks.

Slide #37

In 1881 the first 5-pence stamp was issued. Plates 1, 2 and 3 were prepared but only 1 and 2 were used. There was no plate I.D. Note the stamp at the bottom of the page. It has a VR in the cancel denoting Royal household usage.

Slide #38

In 1856 a six pence stamp was put into service. There was no plate identifier in the design but the lack of a hyphen between six and pence indicates Plate #1.

Slide #39

In 1862 the six pence stamp design was changed to include corner letters and an indication of plate number. Plates 3 and 4 were used. On plate #3, there is a hyphen between six and pence. On Plate #4, there is no hyphen between six and pence and small diagonal lines in the corner of the letter block.

Slide #40

In 1865 the design was changed to include the plate number at the lower left and right corners. Plates #5 and #6 were used.

Slide #41

In 1867 the watermark was changed from Emblems to Spray of Rose. There was also a slight change in color. Plate #6 was also used for this issue. So, it's possible to have Plate #6 stamps with two different watermarks.

Slide #42

In 1869 the six pence stamp underwent a minor design change. The hyphen was removed from between six and pence. There was also a minor color change. Plates 8 and 9 were used. Plates 7 and 10 were prepared but not used.

Slide #43

1872 saw a major redesign of the six pence stamp. This is an interesting issue. Plate #11 was only in production for a short time, 20,000 sheets. Issued in April of 1872 in chestnut, it was replaced by the next issue in pale buff on November 1, 1872. The colors are practically identical. So, only dated copies before November 1, 1872, can be guaranteed to be from his first issue. The cover shown here has a good date, June 11, 1872.

Slide #44

So, here's the next issue using Plates #11 and #12. For Plate #11 I show two copies dated very early in the production run. Plate #12 had a very short production run, 5,000 sheets.

Slide #45

In 1873 the color was changed to grey, and Plate #12 was used to produce another 20,000 sheets. So, we can have Plate 12 in two different colors.

Slide #46

In 1874 the design was changed to yield colored corner letters. Plates #13 through #17 were used. Plate #17 had a shortened press run, 15,000 sheets, before being revised.

Slide #47

In 1881 the plate layout was changed from 12 panes of 20 to two panes of 120 and the watermark was changed from Spray of Rose to Crown. A further 20,000 sheets were printed from the prior Plate #17 and then Plate #18 was used. Plate #17 can exist in two different watermarks.

Slide #48

In 1883 the six pence stamp got the same treatment as the earlier three pence stamp did. Namely, a **6d** overprint for revenue stamp purposes. Only Plate #18 was used for this purpose. This completes eleven identifiable issues of the six pence issue.

Slide #49

In 1876 an eight pence stamp was issued to satisfy special postage rates to India and Australia. This was the first 8 pence stamp issued in the UK. There would not be another for 37 years. The plate number location is easily seen at the sides of the stamp design. There would be 20,000 sheets printed.

Slide #50

In 1862 a nine pence stamp was introduced. Like the contemporaneous six pence stamp, it carried no plate I.D. in the design. Plate #2 was used for this first issue.

Slide #51

In 1865 the nine pence stamp was redesigned to include the plate number in the design as seen in the lower corners. Like its predecessor, it utilized Emblems watermarked paper. This is a somewhat scarce stamp in that there were only 3,005 sheets printed. (\$700) As we have seen, a more normal press run was in the neighborhood of 35,000 sheets. Plate #4 was used for this issue.

Slide #52

In 1867, the watermarked paper was changed to Spray of Rose and a further 25,000 sheets were printed from Plate #4. (\$350) This stamp was current for 17 years! Another case where the Plate #4 stamps can exist with two different watermarks.

Slide #53

1867 saw the introduction of a 10-pence stamp. Like the 8-pence stamp 11 years earlier, this stamp was issued specifically for the prepayment of postage to India, Mauritius and Australia via Marseilles. The plate number is easily seen in the lower corners. Only Plate #1 was used for this issue.

Slide #54

In 1856 a one-shilling stamp was issued. It was printed from Plate #1, but like its contemporary 3- and 6-pence stamps, carried no Plate number I.D. in the first issue.

Slide #55

In 1862 the design was changed to include the plate number, seen at the middle of each side. And leave it to the Brits some 90 years after the revolution to try to confuse us. Plate #1 really means Plate #2 and a #2 means Plate #3, though it was not used.

Slide #56

In 1865 the design was changed from small to large corner letters. A new plate, #4, was now used. Note the nice mourning cover to Centre Country, PA.

Slide #57

In 1867 the watermarked paper was changed from Emblems to Spray of Rose and the green color lightened slightly. Plates 4 through 7 were used. Now Plate #4 can exist with Emblems or Spray of Rose watermarks.

Slide #58

In 1873 the design was changed from white to colored corner letters. The watermark and location of the plate number were unchanged. Plates #8 through #13 were used. The Plate #13 press run was stopped at 25,000 sheets when the color was changed. (P.13 = \$185)

Slide #59

In 1880 the color was changed to orange-brown and 5,000 more sheets were printed from Plate #13. (\$ 650)

Slide #60

In 1881 the plate layout was changed from 12 panes of 20 to two panes of 120. The watermarked paper was changed to Crown. Plates #13 and #14 were used. So now we can have three different Plate #13 one-shilling stamps: two different colors and two different watermarked papers. (P.13 = \$200)

Slide #61

And as an oh-by-the-way, Plates #13 and #14 of the one-shilling stamps were overprinted GOV^T. PARCELS for official usage on large parcels.

Slide #62

In 1867 a two-shillings stamp was issued in blue. The plate number location is in the lower corners above the corner letters. Only Plate #1 was used.

Slide #63

In 1880 the color was changed to brown to meet UPU requirements. As only 342 sheets were printed, this is an expensive stamp, \$5,000 used! Only Plate #1 was used. Plates #2 and #3 were prepared but not used.

Slide #64

Now we get into the four highest values. In 1867 a 5-shillings stamp was issued and printed from Plates #1 and #2. The plate number location is centered toward the bottom, right above 5-shillings. 48,000 sheets of 80 stamps were printed from Plate #1 and 19,505 sheets of 80 were printed from Plate #2. These were printed on Maltese Cross watermarked paper and perforated 15 ½ x 15.

Slide #65

In 1882 the 5-shillings stamp plate layout was changed from sheets of 80 to 56. The perforation was changed to 14 x 14 and the watermark changed to Anchor. Plate #4 was introduced, and 10,000 sheets were printed.

Slide #66

In 1878 a 10-shillings stamp was issued on Maltese Cross watermark paper. It was perf. 15 ½ x 15. The plate number is at the bottom of the stamp. 3,025 sheets of 80 stamps were printed.

Five years later, in 1883, the layout of the 10-shillings stamp was changed from sheets of 80 to sheets of 56 and the watermark changed to Anchor. The perforation was changed to 14 x 14. 2,000 sheets of 56 were printed. Plate #1 was used for both issues.

Slide #67

In 1878 and 1883 the same actions were taken for one-pound stamps. The same plate layouts, watermarks, perforations and print runs. As an FYI, at this time one pound represented a month's salary in a good job? Can you imagine putting a month's salary on a letter or package?

Slide #68

In 1882 the highest value stamp, 5-pounds, was issued. Rather than coming up with a totally new design, the Post Office took the existing 5-pounds Telegraphs stamp out of service, removed the word Telegraphs and replaced it with Postage. The watermark was changed from three shamrocks to two anchors. 235,407 stamps in sheets of 56 were printed. The stamps were withdrawn from service upon the death of Queen Victoria.

Interestingly enough, the number of Telegraphs stamps printed before this change is far fewer than the almost quarter million postage stamps printed. The catalogue value of the Postage stamp far exceeds the value of the Telegraphs stamp. Supply and demand rules!

The End

Thanks for your attention. I'll be happy to entertain questions.