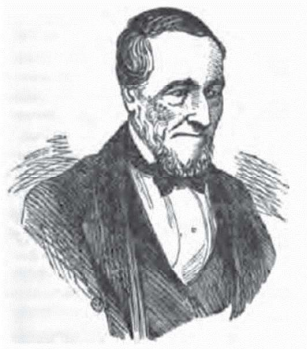


Great Britain Focus

An occasional column focusing on a single GB stamp issue and detailing aspects such as the history behind the stamp, any relevant aspects of its production and things for the collector to look out for.

1976 Social Reformers issue. The 8½p value.

The 8½p value of this issue which would generally seem unpopular with regards the apparent dreary designs commemorates Thomas Hepburn.



Hepburn was born in Pelton, County Durham. He began employment as a coal miner as a child, aged just 8 years old at Fatfield Colliery. Despite economic circumstance forcing his employment in childhood, as was common for working class children at the time, he was an intelligent child, able to read the Bible from an early age, remaining interested in education all his life.

He moved to Jarrow Colliery, and then Hetton Colliery before forming The Colliers of the United Association of Durham and Northumberland soon after 1825, which was colloquially known as Hepburn's Union. Some of the first industrial action undertaken by this union, under Hepburn's guidance was to go on strike to seek improved conditions. In this aim the strike was largely successful, with working hours being reduced from around 18 hours a day to a 12-hour shift, and ensuring that payment for labour was always in money, ending the system of "Tommy Shops" whereby the miners had to purchase provisions from a shop either owned or preferred by the colliery owner, with wages being confiscated to pay off the shop owner before the employee could directly receive them.

Hepburn then quickly had to involve his union in further industrial action in 1832 to ensure that unionised workers were given employment as pit owners threatened to cease employment of them. This strike was more bitter than the previous one, and despite Hepburn's best efforts to ensure that all action was peaceful, violence broke out on a number of occasions, such as at Friar's Goose, where unionised lead miners attacked non-unionised miners from Cumberland who

had been brought in to replace them. In another action a South Shields magistrate, Nicholas Fairless was beaten so badly by a striking miner that he died from his wounds. A miner, William Jobling became one of the last men in Britain to be gibbeted for this, although not guilty of the murder. Elsewhere a miner Cuthbert Skipsey was shot by a police constable during a disorder.

This strike withered and the union crumbled as the miners realised the necessity of employment and a wage to live was greater than the principle of trade union solidarity. The strike leaders were scapegoated by the authorities, and Thomas Hepburn became unable to secure employment as a miner thereafter, being banned from the coalfield.

Thereafter he attempted to sell tea at the mines to make a living, but in this venture he was largely unsuccessful.

Destitute, he was eventually re-employed at a colliery, at Felling, on the grounds that he did not get involved in trade union activity. He did not re-engage in any union activity but remained active in radical political circles. During 1838-39 he worked on behalf of the Chartists. He continued to work at Felling until retiring due to ill health in 1859.

Source: Thomas Hepburn - <https://en.wikipedia.org>

Something to look out for....



The relatively easily found colour shift that results in the visual "double hands" variety illustrated above with normal at right is the result of a downward shift of black from one of the two black cylinders used to print this stamp. The exact colour that is shifted from these five shades of black and grey is more readily appreciated in this traffic light gutter pair example of the error.





Perhaps not seen as frequently as the black colour shift is the shift of horizontal perforations resulting in the bisecting of the value. Illustrated above.

An error that until very recently had escaped my attention on this stamp, and by far the most dramatic of those illustrated in this article is the result of both a shift of colour, again resulting in the “double hands” and a shift of horizontal perforations.

If the stamp which is illustrated below alongside a normal at right, were seen without the normal also available for comparison it may be easy to spot the colour shift. However unless one was familiar with the relative positioning of the Queen's head and value, by virtue of the value not being bisected as in the perforation shift illustrated above, the perforation shift in this double error may escape notice.



If you have the “double hands” variety in your collection it might just be worth having a check.

I would be interested to know of the existence of any key positional pieces (traffic light gutter pair, cylinder block, corner traffic light block) of this double error and if anybody was in a position to send me good quality images I will record them in a future issue of the Philatelic Register.

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