

G.B. POSTAGE DUES

The G.P.O. Philatelic Bureau answers questions

By E. C. Ehrmann



THE article published recently in the *Philatelic Bulletin* and reprinted in *STAMP COLLECTING* of February 19th, says, "The first of the postage due labels were printed by Messrs. Harrison & Son", a statement which I challenged in a letter to the Editor of the *Philatelic Bulletin*. At the same time, an impish mood led me to ask him a handful of questions regarding the G.B. Postage Dues, not hoping that they might really receive serious and full attention.

But Mr. C. E. Sharwood, of the G.P.O. Philatelic Bureau, very kindly took the trouble not only to make extensive enquiries as to who printed the first G.B. Postage Dues, but also (in a letter dated February 24th, 1965) to answer in full questions I thought it would be interesting to ask.

* * * *

First the questions. I do not think it would be fair to comment on the answers, other than to say that it is left to the reader to pause now and then for a deep breath.

(1) Why will the Philatelic Bureau persist in calling the postage dues "labels" and not "stamps"?

Answer: "The use of the official term 'label' in the *Bulletin* article was deliberate, as it is read by a wide variety of people, many of whom criticise us when we depart from the correct nomenclature."

(2) G. W. Eve's original sketches, after all, date back to the year 1913. Why does the G.P.O. not introduce a more up-to-date design for the postage due stamps?

Answer: "We are about to consider the introduction of a new design for postage due labels. The decision, however, depends on a number of side-issues and it may be some time before a decision is reached."

(3) Why is the Queen's portrait omitted?

Answer: "The simple answer is because postage due labels are only for domestic use, i.e. there is no need to identify the country of origin by inclusion of the monarch's head in the design."

(4) Why is watermarked paper used at all?

Answer: "For the same reason that watermarked paper is used for stamp printing, i.e. security."

(5) Why are postage due stamps not produced in photogravure?

Answer: "There is no particular reason why the labels are not produced in photogravure. The existing cylinders (sic) are still good for a number of years and for economic reasons there is no justification for changing the process."

* * * *

The 1914 Somerset House "Emergency" Issue

Who printed the first G.B. Postage Dues? The Philatelic Bureau letter explains:—

With regard to the printing of the earlier values, you have raised an interesting point. Following the selection of four colours from the nineteen submitted by the Inland Revenue, on 19th February, 1914, Somerset House were

asked to proceed with the printing of the first four values. Meanwhile, however, the tender submitted by Harrisons for the printing of the labels had been accepted and the necessary paper was passed to the printer for the initial print on 14th March, 1914, in readiness for the introduction of the Service on 20th April, 1914. Although it is not clear from the records at our disposal, and the Inland Revenue have been unable to confirm it definitely, it seems likely that a small proportion of the paper earmarked for the Harrison print was withheld by Somerset House and used by them for their own print of the first four denominations, possibly to ensure that initial stocks of these values would be available for use on 20th April. It would seem, therefore, that the first issues were being printed concurrently by Harrisons and the Inspector of Stamping although the first used were those printed at Somerset House.

This anomaly persisted with the introduction of the 1s. value whereas, although Harrisons contracted to print the labels, Somerset House apparently decided to print them themselves. Again, I am unable to establish this fact conclusively, but certainly the inference in my papers leads me now to believe that this is so.

The following notes may throw some more light on the matter. They are based on the manuscript of a forthcoming *Kohl Handbuch* section which I have been privileged to compile.

Original sketches of the G.B. postage dues design by G. W. Eve, in pen and ink on a sheet of his printed notepaper and on addressed cards, and also in pencil on cards, have been preserved through the magnificent Thomas E. Field collection, which was dispersed by Robson Lowe on October 22nd, 1958.

Somerset House had the final art work photographed, and produced master dies, initially for the ½d., 1d., 2d. and 5d. values, of which proofs in black on glazed card with black surround have survived, each noted in pencil, "Proof from Soft Die—Jan. 7, 1914".

The colours were chosen after the 2d. plate had been used to print, on G v R Script watermarked paper, 19 most attractive, perforated colour samples in sheets of 120 subjects. The official colour designations for these "colour trials", as they are known today, is:—

Blue	Carmine	(Russian) green
Royal blue	Agate	Bronze green
Azure blue	Violet	Fawn
Mauve	Scarlet	Bartolozzi brown
Magenta	Faience green	Red-brown
Claret	(Blue-) green	Umber
		Orange

Next, sheets were produced from the 2d. plate in the accepted colours: emerald, carmine, agate and bistre, and overprinted "Specimen".

In the last preparatory stage the four values were printed in the issued denominations and colours and again marked "Specimen" to prevent fraudulent use by post office personnel; all but the 2d. in italic type, to which, later, the 1s. value was added. The plate proofs of the latter extend to 14 colours with four shades of blue, on watermarked paper, but imperforate, and are overprinted CANCELLED.

(Continued on page 159)

G.B. Postage Dues (continued from page 155)

There can be no doubt that Somerset House printed the $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., 2d. and 5d. values first and then handed the plates to Harrisons. Both the printers used the same initial *Control* "D.14" (= first half of the year 1914), but the full stop is deleted in all Harrison printings, a convenient means of distinguishing the two. Somerset House then printed the 1s. value in four batches from 1915 to 1923, with the Controls F.15, O.19, S.21 and V.23. By 1924, Harrisons were succeeded as stamp printers by Waterlow & Sons and, therefore, had no chance at all to produce the 1s. of the initial issue.

Watermark and Perforation Characteristics

The two printings can be distinguished also by their watermark, which, in contrast to that of the later issues, is superbly clear and distinct. The Somerset House printings of the four lowest values have all, exclusively, the G v R Script Type I watermark, where a variation of the cypher "bit" shows the top loop of the "G" open and well apart from the "v" (at that time already obsolescent for stamp printing), appearing on the postage dues always sideways to the right. Harrisons printed on the slightly different Type II paper, with the top loop of the "G" well rounded and placed over the left downstroke of the "v", the stamps showing the watermark sideways either to the left or to the right, but more frequently in the former position.

The perforation of the Somerset House printings is by two-row comb from the lower margin, i.e. the long side of the sheet, through the top margin, except only the 1s., "V.23". Harrisons were less discriminating in this respect and perforated either from the lower margin through the top or, in reverse, from the top margin through the lower margin, but only in very few instances for any specific control exclusively one or the other.