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Natal: The 1877 ½ HALF Surcharges

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The first requirement for a Natal half-penny stamp arose through a change in tariffs on overseas postage. This resulted in a provisional issue, employing a surcharge, printed locally on the De La Rue 1d (SG66 and SG67). This stamp was introduced on February 13th 1877 and was confirmed in the Natal Government Gazette (Mann p 46) of February 20th 1877 through a Post Office notice: *“as Half-Penny Postage Stamps have now been provided, it is requested that all correspondence for foreign countries may be correctly stamped in accordance with the recently published Tariffs”*. According to Mann (p64), 23,760 stamps were surcharged; based on 240 stamps per sheet, this equates to 99 sheets. As the middle and first stamps depicted in Figures 1 and Figure 6 respectively indicate, the surcharging was made on both SG66, 1d dull rose and SG67, 1d bright rose; given that the dull rose occurs 21 times in the 23 stamps in the author’s collection, this suggests that most of the sheets (around 90) might have been of the dull rose and 9 of the bright rose. Stanley Gibbons lists the stamp with 6 varieties, as SG85, SG86, SG87, SG88, SG89 and SG90. The name of the printer is not known but is likely to have been either P. Davis & Co. or Messrs. Keith & Co.

Per Mann, the printing of “HALF” and “½” was done in two separate exercises. He suggests that the reason for the two surcharges was that the “½” was probably not found satisfactory, hence the need to confirm the value more clearly through the addition of “HALF”. This makes sense, especially when examining the types of “½”, several of which are very small and could be overlooked by the user. What is strange however is that no thought was given to adding a “d” after the “½” or even a “PENNY” below the “HALF”; furthermore, why was no line deleting the “ONE PENNY” at the foot of the stamp included? Perhaps the answer lies in the urgency with which a supply of the half-penny stamps was required.



Figure 1: SG85 Type (a) ½ is 4.5 mm high, “2” has straight foot



Figure 2: SG86 Type (b) ½ is 4 mm high, “2” has straight foot



Figure 3: SG87 Type (c) ½ is 4 mm high, "2" has curved foot



Figure 4: SG88 Type (d) ½ is 3.5 mm high, "2" has straight foot



Figure 5: SG89 Type (e) ½ is 3.5 mm high, "2" has curved foot



Figure 6: SG90 Type (f) ½ is 3.5 mm high, "2" is smaller and has straight foot

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A Note on the descriptions of the 6 Types depicted above

The 6 Types identified above are based on those described by Stanley Gibbons. However there is a lack of clarity in the wording actually used by Stanley Gibbons regarding Type (f), which leads I believe to an incorrect conclusion. This arises from the SG wording where Types (d), (e) and (f) are described as:-

Type (d) "½" 3 ½ mm high, "2" has a straight foot

Type (e) As last but "2" has curled foot

Type (f) As last but "2" smaller

This is highly ambiguous and the wording "As last" in Type (f) seems to refer back to Type (e) i.e. implying that type (f) has a curved foot and a smaller "2". However a search for this particular form of the "½" has proved fruitless, and given the quite distinct surcharge appearing in Figure 6 above, it seems that the SG description should read:

Type (f) As Type (d) but "2" smaller

This clarification is borne out if one refers to the original reference (Bacon 234-235) in which the descriptions first appeared and on which Stanley Gibbons wording is apparently based. In this publication, 7 Types were described, the first two of which are just variations of Type (a). The wording for Types (d), (e) and (f) is much clearer and reads:

E. "½" 3 ½ mm high. The "2" has a straight foot

F. Like E, but the "2" has a curled foot.

G. Like E, but the "2" is smaller

Typeset

The typeset used for the "HALF" is very similar to that employed in an earlier 1876 overprint of the word "POSTAGE" (applied to 1d, 6d and 1/- stamps), most likely by the same firm of printers. This can be seen by examining enlarged versions of the two fonts.



Figure 7



Figure 8

As the images in Figures 7 and 8 indicate, the "A" is virtually the same in both printings, while the "F" has a very similar style to that of the "E". The decorations on the letters are also very similar.

Based on a review of 40 examples of the stamp, the shape of letters of "HALF" shows some variation, although in most cases they are fairly uniform. The most noticeable variations, some of which can be seen in the above figure 8, are:

- Smaller "A" occurs occasionally
- Raised "L"
- Dropped "H" and "F" as in Figure 8
- Broken bases and decorations on "A" and "H"

Given the small quantity of sheets which were surcharged it seems likely that the variations arise from the placing of the letters in the forme and the inclusion of letters which were already worn. The depth of colour in the surcharge varies from a very light grey (probably due to insufficient pressure in printing), a uniform black and one example (shown as the second stamp in Figure 1) where the colour is very dark and the letters and numbers extremely thick, most likely the result of over-inking.

The different fonts used for the “½” are actually quite difficult to identify without magnification, so the following enlarged figures will help to demonstrate their differences. Type (a) generally appears as a bold figure and is the most commonly encountered. The reason for this is covered in the next section. Types (b), (c) (d) and (e) are often not very clearly printed and are also frequently overlaid with the “HALF” surcharge, making it hard to identify and measure the length of the “½”. The 4mm length can best be described as a measurement in the 3.75mm to 3.90mm range, while that of the 3.5 mm is effectively a range between 3.45mm and 3.55mm. The small “2” in type (f) is quite distinctive when encountered in an actual stamp, but not as easy to identify when examining illustrations of sheets and part- sheets. The following ‘blown-up’ figures should assist readers in appreciating the differences between the fonts more readily.



Figure 9: Type (a) 4.5 mm straight foot



Figure 10: Types (b) and (c) - 4mm straight and 4 mm curved foot



Figure 11: Types (d) and (e) - 3.5mm straight and 3.5 mm curved foot



Figure 12: Type (f) 3.5mm straight foot and smaller “2”

In some cases of the straight foot surcharge the leg at the right of the “2” is slightly curved; this, together with a slight lightening of the black ink in the foot can give the impression that the surcharge is curved, when in fact it is straight.

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Figure 13: Block of 16 from the upper left pane with central wing margin, all with Type (a)



Figure 14: Block of 4 Type (a) from the left of the pane with wing margin

The two preceding figures show two blocks which are both made up of the Type (a) surcharge, giving some idea of how prolific this is in the print set-up.

Plating the Left Upper Plane of 60 stamps

4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight	4 ½ mm straight
3 ½ mm straight	3 ½ mm curved	3 ½ mm curved	3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ mm curved	3 ½ mm curved
3 ½ small 2 straight	4mm curved	3 ½ small 2 straight	4 mm straight	4mm curved	4mm curved
3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ small 2 straight	4mm curved	3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ mm small 2 straight	3 ½ mm straight
3 ½ mm straight	3 ½ mm straight	3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ small 2 straight	3 ½ small 2 straight

Figure 15: The Proposed Plating

Key to the Plating



Type (a) occurs 36 times



Type (f) occurs 14 times



Type (e) occurs 4 times



Type (c) occurs 4 times



Type (d) occurs once



Type (b) occurs once

The plating shown in Figure 15 has been based on Mann (p64-65), the two blocks in Figures 13 and 14, a complete pane (Dickson) which was a somewhat grainy black and white print, a block of 20 (Klugman pp153-154) and a complete pane (Klugman). While not claiming this plating as the definitive version, nonetheless the feeling is that it's close to the actual set-up of the plate. Mann's study, while identifying the straight and curved forms of the "½", unfortunately doesn't distinguish between the height of the fractional numerals, other than to describe the higher values as 'approx. 4mm high' and those with the small "2" as being '3 ½ mm'. The 4½ mm Type (which, per Mann, is the most prolific, occurring 36 times in rows 1 to 6) matches the proposed plating in Figure 15. The 3 ½ mm Type with the small "2" has a Mann count of 15 against the 14 in this proposed count (Mann defines 13 of these as Type II, with the description "*Fraction much smaller; the "2" is especially small with a straight tail*"; he adds to these a single Type IIa – "*Small "2" but no ball*" and a single Type IIb – "*As Type II but with larger numeral 1*". However there is one stamp at (7,1) which has a somewhat larger base than the others in Mann's 15 which qualifies under the Gibbons Type (d). There are 8 curved Types in Mann's count, but no heights given. After exhaustive measurement of the available examples, a split of 4 at 4mm and 4 at 3.5mm was arrived at in the plating figure. The single straight "2" at location (8,4) with height 4mm agrees with Mann's description at this location, namely "*1 and 2 both larger*".

Mann identifies 10 different Types (6 basic types and 4 sub-types) which broadly include the 6 Stanley Gibbons types, but his extra type and sub-types are difficult to match against the stamps, especially as they are based on a personal judgement of features rather than exact measurements. Examples of Mann's descriptions are: "*2 with no ball*", "*larger 2, more regular in shape*", "*slightly taller*", "*larger numeral 1*" and so on. Most collectors are likely to be more comfortable with the Stanley Gibbons types, although even these are not easy to apply in all cases: differentiating between the 3 ½ mm with a small "2" and the single stamp with a standard "2" really comes down to personal judgement, while the measurement of 4mm is has been applied to stamps whose "½s" lie in a range from 3.75mm to 3.90mm.

Readers who have other blocks in their possession and who disagree with the plating are more than welcome to email their objections (preferably with highly detailed scans).

Mann apparently had two full panes of 60 from different parts of the sheet to examine and concluded that the numeral overprints were identical on both, which strongly suggests that the original setting of 240 was separated into 4 panes and one setting used to print each. As no alternative set-up has yet emerged it seems very likely that this method was in fact the one actually used.

A very useful result of the plating is that of explaining why Stanley Gibbons (2015 Catalogue), while providing a price for all of the unused types, only prices SG85(a) and SG88(d). However there is a problem with this pricing: SG90(f), the stamp with the small "2", which is likely to be more prolific in used condition (as one might expect from the 14 in the plating), is surely the one that can be priced and not SG88(d), the stamp with the standard "2", which only has 1 representatives on the plate and which would be very scarce in used condition.

A used example of SG89(e) is shown in Figure 5. Although this doesn't have a certificate it appears reasonably authentic. The Klugman Collection has two examples of what appears to be SG89(e). SG85(a) which made up 60% of the printing, can be found used fairly readily, as does SG90(f). Used versions of SG86(b), SG87(c) and SG88(d) have yet to make an appearance. Used pairs and higher multiples don't appear to exist. Given the frequency with which the 6 Types occur on a pane, the original numbers of each (out of 23,760 printed) can be determined, namely:

Type (a)	14,256
Type (b)	396
Type (c)	1,584
Type (d)	396
Type (e)	1,584
Type (f)	5,544
Total	23,760

Applying the 1%-2% survival estimate to the scarcer types suggests that there may be 4 to 8 each of Types (b) and (d) surviving, and 32 to 48 each of Type (c) and Type (e). The difficulty in measuring the numeral heights and identifying the Types suggests that the majority of the scarcer stamps may be hiding in collections, so readers may find that it's well worth the effort of re-examining their collections and carefully measuring the height of the surcharges.

Covers

Covers with any of the 6 Types are scarce. The only covers which have emerged in recent times are three illustrated in the Klugman Collection, which are shown in the following three figures.



Figure 16: Cover from Durban, sent on 3rd March, 1879 showing 4 ½ mm surcharge



Figure 17: Cover from Verulam, sent on 27th December, 1878; showing curved foot, 3 ½ mm surcharge. This is to date the only recorded use of the curved foot ½ on cover

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Figure 18: Cover from Durban, sent on 18th June, 1877; 4 ½ mm surcharge

Unused stamps

Sheets and blocks of the unused stamps have surprisingly survived in some quantity. Dickson (pp80-81) reports that three and possibly four complete panes have survived and illustrates one of these. Apart from this there are a number of blocks such as one in the Klugman Collection (20 stamps), and those shown in Figure 13 (16 stamps) and in Figure 14 (4 stamps). The reason for these large pieces still being available may lie in the fact that the surcharged issue was very short-lived, with a further surcharging of the Natal 1d yellow revenue stamp with the wording "POSTAGE/Half-penny" on 7th October, 1877. It seems likely that there still remained a supply of unused "½ HALF" surcharged stamps, which for some reason the Post Office didn't put into circulation and which were subsequently released to collectors. Alternatively it's also possible that during the stamps' currency, far-sighted collectors or dealers bought up panes and large pieces. Either way, it's due to this that the plating and detailed examination of this issue has been possible.

Errors

One major error exists, namely an unused stamp with a double "½". This is listed in the Royal Philatelic Collection, but unfortunately there is no information as to the height of the numerals. A minor error caused by a misplacement of the "HALF" occurs, with the letters spread over two stamps.

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