

Victoria Head Plating – Presentation for the Reedsport Stamp Club

The Penny Black, Red, and Blue - August 3, 2024

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We all share this madness. We experience it with our fascination with the 1840-41 Penny Black, Blue, and Red developed by Sir Rowland Hill which were produced as the first postage stamps of Great Britain. We all want at least one in our collection though I agree more is better! This document is in no way a definitive guide to the collecting of Victoria Head stamps. It does share some key understandings that a collector must grasp before jumping off the cliff in the difficult task of stamp plating. After 1848 and before 1883 it was a standard practice to engrave the stamp with its plate number. After 1883 plates made their way into history with new printing methods.

The story starts out with difficult plating, then simplifies with plate 71 in 1848 with the engraving of plate numbers on the stamp. This became standard practice until 1883. The Penny Red issue of 1848 included marked plates between 71 and 225, one of which, number 77, only two copies are known.



Plate or plating, a term used with the first stamp of 1840, was developed to help identify printing plates used to print postage stamps. Measurement of wear from the printing process could be identified on each stamp. The plate and plating identify:

1. The details specific to a plate-positioned stamp.
2. The marked plate number of an issued design.

The progress of wear on the plates to determine when they required replacement.

Black Penny Plate 1a

The Monarch – Queen Victoria

“God bless the Queen of England.” Victoria was born in 1819 and reigned over England from 1838 until she died in 1901 when her son Edward became King in January 1901. Victoria is the Great-great-grandmother of Queen Elizabeth II. Victoria and Prince Albert had nine children with a spread of 17 years. Queen Victoria is believed to have died from hemophilia, a blood clotting genetic disorder, “the royal disease” that she passed on to three of her nine children. There were six attempts on Victoria’s life between 1840 and 1872.



The First Imperforated Issues

In 1840, the original Penny Black postage stamp was produced from Plates 1a through 11, representing the use and wearing out of the printing plate, forming cracks and flaws during the printing process. This aided in the accountancy process for the Postal system. The plates included 240 individual copies of the postage stamp produced with each sheet printed. Plate 1a, the very first plate wore out before the stamp was placed into use production and had already been replaced with Plate 1b. None of the stamps issued as the Penny Black had a specific plate number printed onto them but did have a plate position letter identified. The actual plate has special identifying characteristics as follows. This list is not extensive but includes some general identifiers to locate the correct plate. Websites are now available to compare plate positional letters to confirm plates for the hardcore collector.

Plate	Date registered	Number of stamps issued
1a, 1b	15 Apr 1840	10,052,400
2	22 Apr 1840	7,659,120
3	9 May 1840	4,786,800
4	19 May 1840	6,701,760
5	1 June 1840	8,616,480
6	17 June 1840	9,095,040
7	8 July 1840	8,137,680
8	31 July 1840	7,180,320
9	9 Nov 1840	3,840,000
10	9 Dec 1840	1,920,000
11	27 Jan 1841	168,000

Stamps Issued per Plate



Tupenny Blue

The Fundamentals of Plating a Penny Black

I'd love to say they are easy, initially, it is not, but the information that follows is what I found to be most valuable when plating Penny Blacks. Things to look for that help determine the correct plate include:

- Plates 1a and 1b have identifying 'ray flaws located at the upper corners of the stamps. Plate 1a was reconstructed to create plate 1b. The ray flaws are in the position of 10 o'clock and 7 o'clock. They always have red Maltese cancellations.
- Plate 2 may have ray flaws, but it also has guidelines that make it recognizable.
- Plate 3 has a very thin baseline.
- Plate 4 is covered with white and black spots.
- Plate 5 has weak margins and breaks in the side frame. Some penny blacks canceled in London could have been postmarked with a Maltese in black ink on these later stamp plates.
- Plate 6 has limited distinguishing marks and requires comparing the position of check letters.
- Plates 7-10 have the 'O' flaw. The O flaw gets wider from plates 7 to 10.

•Plate 11 is grey toned versus deep black. Only 700 sheets of plate 11 were printed. The stamp will not be found with a red Maltese cross postmark.

The shape and position of the letters appear to be the easier identifier and websites are dedicated to the plating of the penny black for comparison.

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	CB	CD	CE	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI	CJ	CK	CL
DA	DB	DC	DD	DE	DF	DG	DH	DI	DJ	DK	DL
EA	EB	EC	ED	EE	EF	EG	EH	EI	EJ	EK	EL
FA	FB	FC	FD	FE	FF	FG	FH	FI	FJ	FK	FL
GA	GB	GC	GD	GE	GF	GG	GH	GI	GJ	GK	GL
HA	HB	HC	HD	HE	HF	HG	HH	HI	HJ	HK	HL
IA	IB	IC	ID	IE	IF	IG	IH	II	IJ	IK	IL
JA	JB	JC	JD	JE	JF	JG	JH	JI	JJ	JK	JL
KA	KB	KC	KD	KE	KF	KG	KH	KI	KJ	KK	KL
LA	LB	LC	LD	LE	LF	LG	LH	LI	LJ	LK	LL
MA	MB	MC	MD	ME	MF	MG	MH	MI	MJ	MK	ML
NA	NB	NC	ND	NE	NF	NG	NH	NI	NJ	NK	NL
OA	OB	OC	OD	OE	OF	OG	OH	OI	OJ	OK	OL
PA	PB	PC	PD	PE	PF	PG	PH	PI	PJ	PK	PL
QA	QB	QC	QD	QE	QF	QG	QH	QI	QJ	QK	QL
RA	RB	RC	RD	RE	RF	RG	RH	RI	RJ	RK	RL
SA	SB	SC	SD	SE	SF	SG	SH	SI	SJ	SK	SL
TA	TB	TC	TD	TE	TF	TG	TH	TI	TJ	TK	TL

Table of plating positions for the Penny Black

FUN FACTS!

The 2nd Penny Blue, identified by the addition of 2-thick lines, the 2-pence was produced by only 2-plates.

The Penny Reds issued in December of 1840 were printed from Plate 1b, 2, 5, 8, 9, and 10 same as the Penny Black.

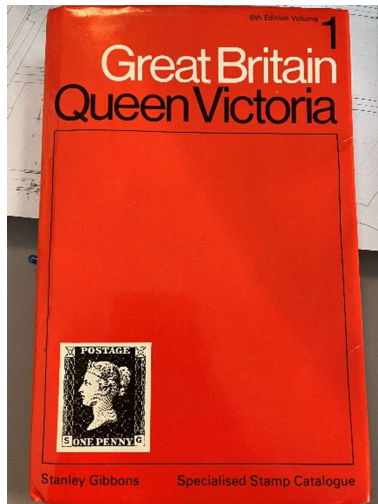


Blue Pence, 2-thick lines



Penny Red

Deeper into the plates of the Penny Black, Red, and Blue

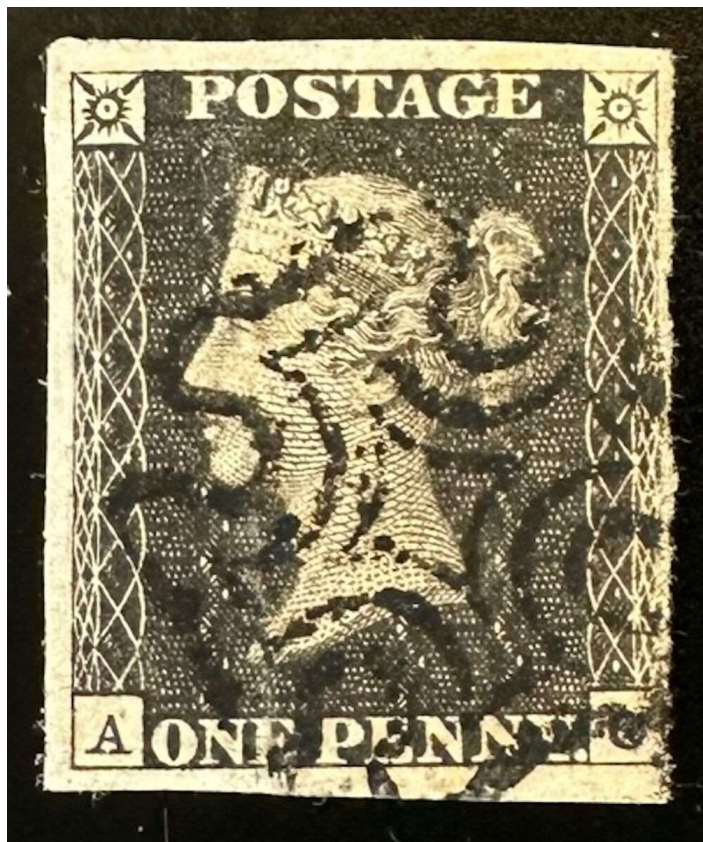
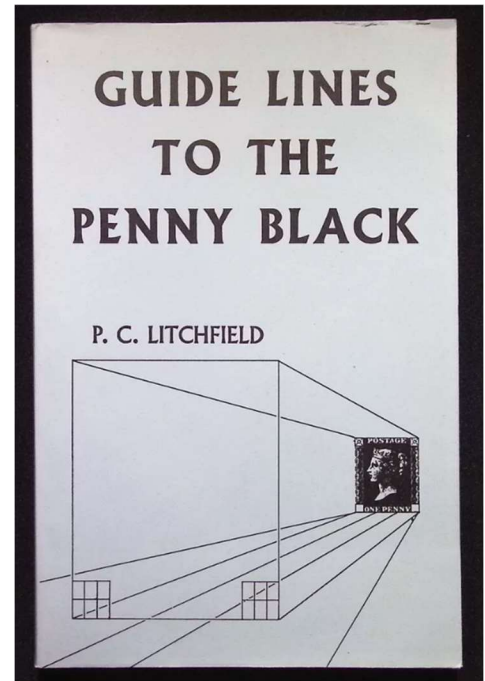


Stanley Gibbons is considered a good guide, “Great Britain Specialized Stamp Catalog, Volume 1 Queen Victoria” that provided detail of the ray flaws and letter positioning varieties. Copies of the book are not easily obtained but are available when purchasing from resources in Great Britain.

The 6th edition shown was published in 1979, but the information is still relevant as a

reference guide. This copy was originally £8.50, available on eBay for \$16.00.

“The Postage Stamps of Great Britain Volume 1” by Seymore is considered better, but “Guide Lines to the Penny Black” by Litchfield is considered the best. PDF copies are available for under \$20 or the original book is priced at \$50 and higher.



Penny Black Test – Which plate am I?

1. Black Maltese Postmark
2. Position A-C, The A is low centered. The C is slightly low.
3. Background white and black spotted.
4. Is there any ‘O’ flaw?
5. Ray Flaws?

Analysis

Black Maltese – August to November 1940 and after Feb. 1841

Spots – Plate 4 or later

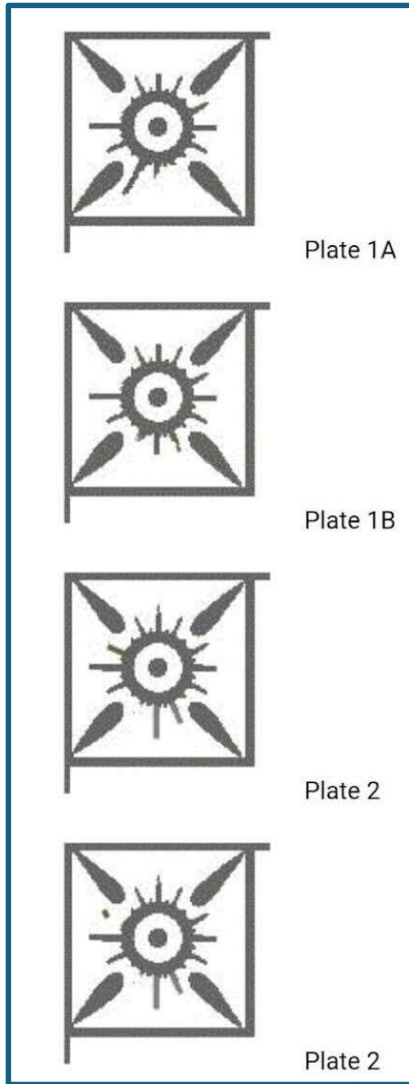
No ‘O’ Flaws, Eliminate plates 7-10

No Ray Flaws, Eliminate plates 1-2

Baseline Typical, Eliminate plate 3

Grey color, Eliminate plates 4-6

Low A confirmation with Litchfield text. p.104.

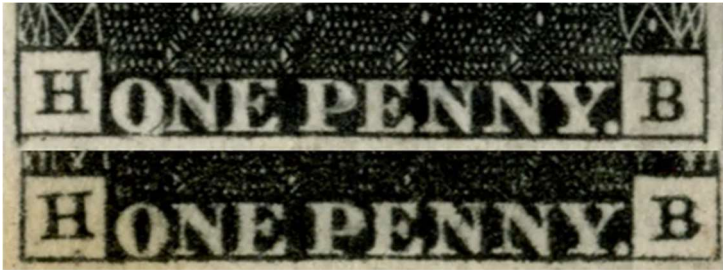


Ray Flaws - As plates wore down, printing errors in the rays at the top of each corner's stamp became a defining feature of the stamp's plate position. Plates 1A, 1B, and 2 commonly show this variable.

Spots – The first 10 plates are black stamps. The 11th Plate was printed in grey. Starting with Plate 4, the stamp background started showing black and white spots.

'O' Flaws

The letter 'O' in the word 'One' is distorted with a bulge or connects to the bottom edge of the white section of the stamp.



Lower Letter Positioning

Litchfield's identification methodology utilizes the letter's position: Centered, left, right, slightly either left or right, or high and low. This is the most definitive method to identify these early plates.

Perforations

The invention of the perforation, following the first 1840 and 1841 issued stamps, included a perforated stamp edge to more easily tear stamps apart. Perforated holes, 14 and 16 perforations per inch were

punched into the stamps. In addition, the following issues included watermark variables, blue paper versus white paper issues, and the redesign of Queen Victoria's profile.

To help find cracked plates, the post office put the plate numbers on the stamps following the original Penny Black, Blue, and Red issues. They started with the penny reds plate 71. Plates 69 and 70 were damaged and never issued. Plate 77 was never issued but several were used and have shown up in circulation. This design alternation eliminated the 'ray' at the top corners of the stamp and replaced it with positioning letters. A small number is inscribed in the open web of the stamps side lattice identifying which plate the stamp originated. Sometimes this number is obliterated by the postmark.

The Blue 2 pence, perforated design, Plate 9 – 15 contained the first plate numbers hidden in the lattice.

Conclusion

Collecting Penny Blacks costs between \$55 and \$250 a stamp, and catalog between \$350 and \$500. Identifying the plate increases the value considerably.