

6. Britain's Smallest Stamp and the First 1½d, 1870

John Easton (*British Postage Stamp Design*, published by Faber & Faber, 1945) described Britain's 'mini' halfpenny stamp as 'a greater freak' than the new three-halfpence value – 'a miniature head floating in a small white circle, miniature letters in each corner and figures of value of huge proportions on the flanking panels'. Rather harsh criticism, you may think, but it was an extraordinarily small stamp, less than half the normal size of contemporary definitives, and it lacked the quality of its distinctive forebears. Perhaps most surprising was the long life of the basic 1d. unit for various postage rates – inland and overseas – and the fact that a ½d. denomination was not required until 1870.

Originally intended to be green in colour, the issued ½d. stamp was printed in rose-red from fifteen plates numbered between 1 and 20 (the plate-numbers appear in the frame adjacent to the figures of value), in sheets of 480 stamps arranged in 20 horizontal rows of 24. The lettering (lower corners) ran from AA to AX in the top row down to TA – TX, the letters being repeated in reverse in the upper corners. One edge of the sheet, left or right, was invariably left imperforate adjacent to the A or X vertical rows so that a stamp from those rows would normally have one side imperf. The watermark comprised the words 'half penny', extending over three stamps, and may be found inverted or reversed, or both, or apparently omitted (due to faulty registration of the paper in relation to the printing press).

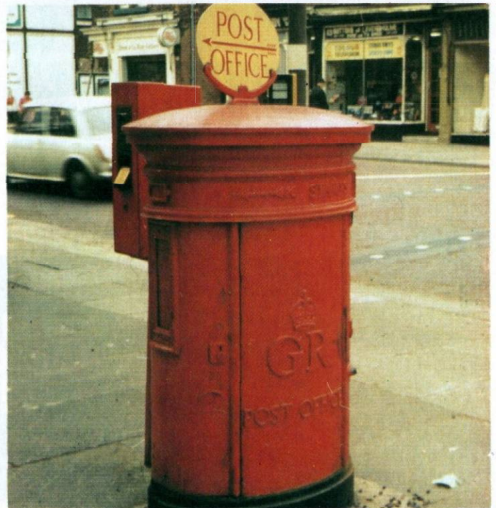
This diminutive ½d. stamp was issued on 1st October 1870. It makes a fine subject for a specialised study with the scope of different plate-numbers, shades of the rose-red colour, postal use (with blocks of four particularly desirable), used on cover, varieties of perforation and watermark, and the existence of essays, die proofs and colour trials – items for the connoisseur. The stamps were printed by Perkins, Bacon and Company.

Mr. Easton's 'freakish' reference to the three-halfpence stamp, also issued on 1st October 1870, was inspired by the attempt to convert the design into a shield which contained 'feeble lettering and worse ornament'. It was in the normal size and colour – rose-red (again) – of the contemporary

'Penny Red', and was first mooted ten years prior to issue, in 1860. In that year, the 1½d. stamps were 'prepared for use but not issued' in a rosy mauve colour – the anticipated change in postal rates did not take place and the majority of the stamps were later destroyed. Only a few copies have survived in unused condition. Perkins, Bacon printed the issued 1½d. stamps in sheets of 240 (20 rows of 12) with the usual lettering sequence in all four corners. A remarkable lettering error – OP-PC for CP-PC – was inherited from the abortive 1860 'rosy mauve' stamps: it occurred on plate 1 (not recorded on the stamps). Plate 3, incorporated in the design, was introduced in 1874.

JAMES WATSON

Posting Boxes



No. 18. This oval shaped pillar box was introduced experimentally in 1932 to provide the means of purchasing stamps at the point of posting. The stamp machine can be seen incorporated into one end of the box, whilst the posting aperture is at the other end. The box was made in two sizes by Derby Castings Ltd, this one being of the larger type. Very few of these boxes can still be found and the one shown is at South Levenshulme TSO, Stockport Road, Manchester.