

The Development of Victorian Postal Stationery

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2. The Mulready Replacement

The public outcry against the unpopular Mulready design, almost immediately following its release on 1 May 1840, was so great that Rowland Hill wrote in his diary on 12 May "I fear we shall be obliged to substitute some other stamp for that designed by Mulready, which is abused and ridiculed on all sides".

The New Stamps

Prior to May 1840 Charles Whiting, an eminent and well respected engraver, had been commissioned to prepare essays for a stamp design which it was intended could be used for stamping privately produced envelopes. The new stamp incorporated the head of Queen Victoria which had been prepared by William Wyon and was based on his engraving of the bust of the young Queen which he had produced for an 1837 medal commemorating her first visit to the City of London. It was surrounded by an engine turned border created by Arthur Deacon, another talented engraver who worked for Wyon. Engine turning was a relatively new art then and produced intricate but regular patterns which were extremely difficult to reproduce without employing the original equipment. Set into this border was the stamp value reading POSTAGE ONE PENNY.

Although the start of the stamping to order facility was delayed until 1855, it was quickly seen that the new stamps which were in the course of production would be needed to replace the much maligned Mulready envelopes and lettersheets, and the new dies were hurried to completion.

Envelopes impressed with the new 1d stamp, printed in pink, were released on 26 January 1841, followed by 2d envelopes in April of the same year, using basically the same design as the 1d, but struck in blue. Apart from the colour, the only difference between the two stamps was the value, which for the 1d stamps was printed in the upper half of the border and for the 2d stamps in the lower half.

The 2d envelope was not a frequently used item and few printings were made in this value.

However, the 1d pink envelopes proved to be very popular with the public and were sold in tremendous numbers and in various sizes throughout the remaining 60 year period of Victoria's reign. One can only speculate how postal stationery might have developed had these been the original envelopes rather than the Mulready replacements.

The basic design and colour of the 1d pink stamp remained unchanged during the remaining 60 years of its use, although minor changes were made to it from time to time, including in 1866 when the lock of hair hanging from the back of the Queen's head became more bunched, giving up its earlier loose curls.

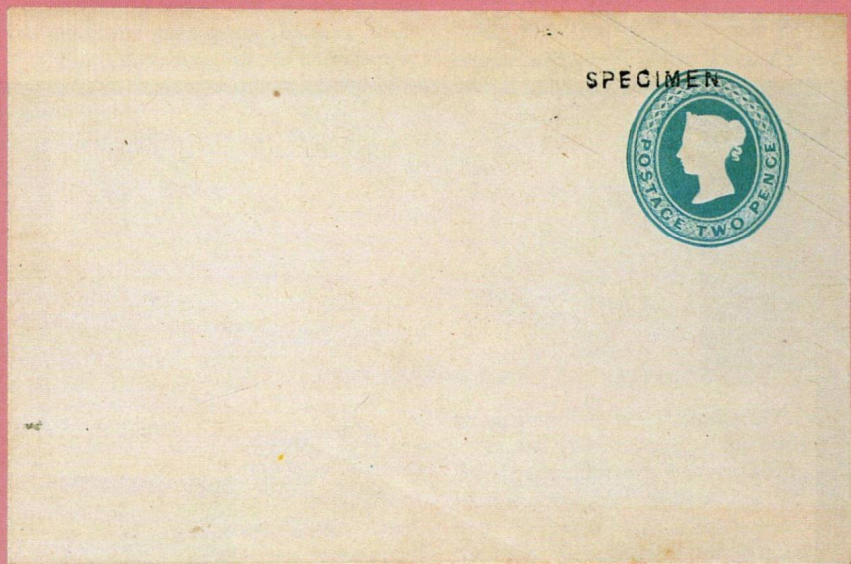
In 1841 the Post Office was still concerned about the possibility of the envelopes being forged with consequent loss of revenue, and the new penny pink and twopenny blue envelopes continued to be printed on John Dickinson's silk thread paper. After stocks of the paper which had originally been prepared for the Mulready issues had been used up, new paper was prepared incorporating different combinations of coloured thread, a practice which continued for a further 25 years.

In the beginning envelopes were sold without gum and were normally sealed by the writer using red wax, into which he often pressed his seal. By the 1850s gum had been added to envelope flaps and wax seals were no longer required for normal letters. However to maintain their appearance, from 1851 an embossed pink seal was added to the flap of 1d envelopes, this practice continuing until 1878 when the use of seals had gone out of fashion. No seals were printed on the 2d envelopes as no further printings of this value were made after the original stock of envelopes had been prepared in the early 1840s.

New Security Measures

From 1857, in addition to using silk thread paper, the Post Office incorporated dates within the border of embossed stamps printed on stationery envelopes with the intention that these should also act as a security measure. How they expected this to be effective is a mystery to

Top: The Mulready replacement, the Penny Pink envelope printed on Dickinson's silk thread paper



Bottom: The twopence envelope was not frequently used and printings from 1840 remained on sale until the 1880s

us today. The idea of including within the border the date on which stamps were printed came from the use of revenue stamps over which the Government had been equally suspicious of forgery and revenue loss for many years. These revenue stamps had to be applied to legal documents on the date on which the documents were signed and their reuse was very easy to detect if the date on the stamp was at variance with that of the document. However, all stationery postage stamps could be freely used at any time throughout Victoria's reign. Thus as a security measure the date in the postage stamp border was totally ineffective.

Eventually the PO's fears about forgery and fraud were allayed, especially from 1855 when it became possible to have private envelopes stamped at Somerset House, these using normal paper without watermark or other security devices. The PO gradually stopped using anti-forgery measures starting with silk thread paper which they abandoned in 1866, followed by the replacement of date plugs with florets in 1881.

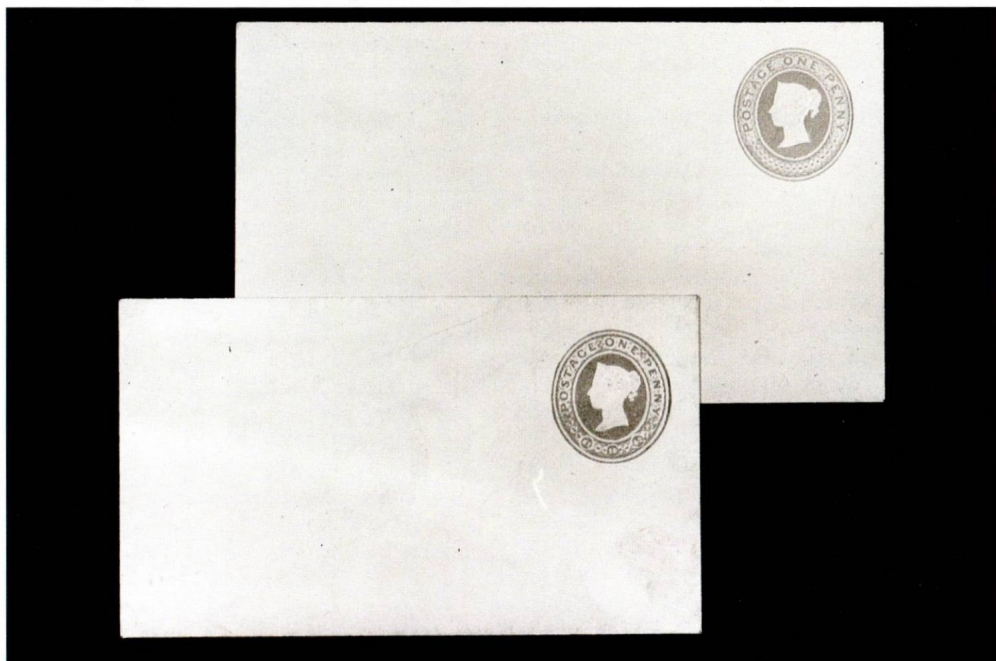
Envelopes for New Postage Rates

In 1875 agreement had been reached between the member countries of the Universal Postal Union that the basic overseas letter rate should be standardised at 2½d or the equivalent in the

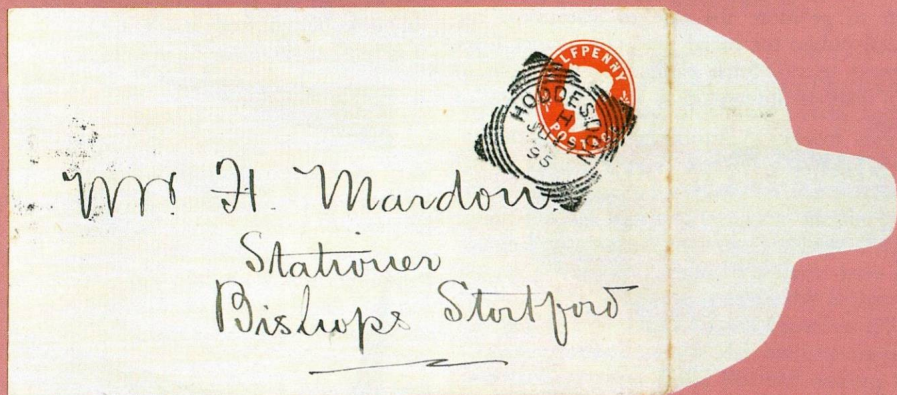
The two styles of hair lock used on Penny Pink stamps

member countries' currency. But 17 years elapsed before the PO recognised the need for a stationery envelope to satisfy this rate and two sizes of envelope were prepared, each impressed with the 2½d stamp already in use for stamping private envelopes. The envelopes were manufactured from De La Rue's "Extra Tough Paper" which was much stronger than the normal envelope paper, yet without a significant weight increase. They were released on 11 February 1892, but sales did not reach expectations and the issue by the PO of overseas rate envelopes was never repeated.

The printed paper rate, or book post as it was then known, was intended for sending printed matter through the post providing envelopes were left unsealed. This created the need for a ½d envelope for the basic printed paper rate and on 1 January 1893 the PO released entirely new envelopes in two sizes incorporating a special ungummed tuck-in flap. These enabled the envelope contents to be inspected in the post to confirm that only printed matter was enclosed and they could then be quickly re-sealed. The envelopes were impressed with the same ½d stamp as that which had been developed for the private postcard, but were printed in a bright orange colour. The public quickly took to using these printed paper rate envelopes and they remained in use for many years.



Top: The 2½d envelope valid for the basic overseas letter rate to nearly all countries in the world from 1892



Bottom: The ½d "Bag" envelope for printed papers with special tuck-in flap

New Stamp Colours

At the first full Congress of the UPU, held in Paris in 1878, it was agreed that to make it easier for member countries to distinguish between other members' postage stamps, all stamps would be printed in similar colours using green for the basic international printed paper rate, blue for the international letter rate and red for international postcards. Some of Britain's stamps did not meet this colour coding, including the stationery stamp for the overseas printed paper rate. Despite this, the PO did not make any effort to change the colours of any stamps to

bring them into line with the UPU agreement.

At the 1897 Congress in Washington these colour requirements were made mandatory for all members, and so finally at the very end of Victoria's reign in 1901 the colour of the stamp used on all stationery for printed matter was changed to green. Having finally conformed to the UPU colour scheme, Britain generally maintained this system until it became too complicated for most countries to adhere to and was abandoned by the UPU in 1952.

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