

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 28

The George V Downey Heads

by David Thompson (*From STAMPS Magazine, March 26, 1988*)

On first inspection, via the pages of a simplified catalogue, for instance, the so-called Downey head stamps of King George V offer very little of interest to the collector. True, Scott assigns the two denominations a total of 10 numbers, but one must dig far deeper than those relatively common varieties before the full story of this ill fated issue can be revealed.



Scott 151



The W & D Downey photo



Scott 152



Eve stamp design with inserted Downey head and background around the head retouched to provide a white background, used to create the Henschelzinc blocks for the Inland Revenue to provide "advance proofs" in various colors.

It is well known that George V was an avid stamp collector, and it was his own idea that his portrait on the first stamps of his reign be presented three-quarter face, rather than the simple profile to which the public had grown accustomed. The photograph the king had in mind, depicting him in Admiral's uniform, had been taken by the court photographers, W&D Downey.

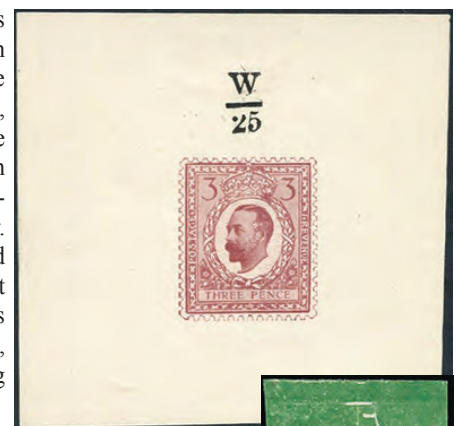
This was copied by the artist/ sculptor Bertram Mackennal, his first attempt at designing a stamp, then passed on to one J.A. Harrison,

Production of the dies and plates was entrusted to the Royal Mint; however, it had very little of the necessary equipment, and with the date of issue (Coronation Day, 22 June 1911) fast approaching, [the Royal Mint] was forced to send to the United States for certain machinery. Still things did not run smoothly; photographs are notoriously unsuitable for typographic work, and stamps produced from the original dies often appeared blotchy.

The stamps were printed by Harrison & Sons (no relation to J.A., incidentally), having taken over the contract from De La Rue in December 1910. They also won the contract to produce Post Office Savings stamps (which again used the Downey head photograph), again after undercutting De La Rue.

The first proofs of the new stamps, in black on fine wove paper and glazed card, were produced in the autumn of 1910, with color essays following over the next year. These were submitted in two stages, the first being denominations between 1/2d and 3d, the second completing the series up to 1/.

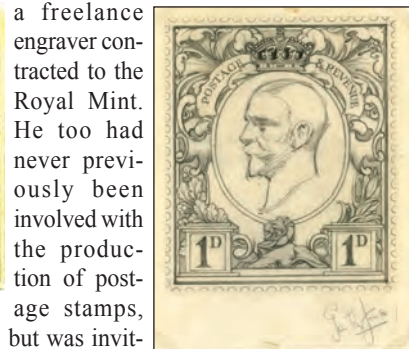
Various colors were experimented with, the 1/2d and 1d appearing in green and red respectively (in which colors they were eventually to be is-



1911-12 3d small format half-tone Essay in dull purple on proof with hand struck "W/25"



One of three designs submitted by C. W. Sherborn, rejected by the King. From the British Postal Museum Archives (BPM)



One of three designs submitted by A. Garth Jones, rejected by the King. (BPM Archives) (Mackennal was currently involved in designing the new coinage).



February 1911 print of J.A.C. Harrison's engraver's sketches of GA. W. Eve's "Wreath" design for the 6d. (BPM)

Simultaneously, a competition was held, with invitations being sent to three further artists: C.W. Sherborn, A. Garth Jones and C.W. Eve (the Royal Mint also submitted designs). Mackennal, in fact, refused to enter the competition and was persuaded to submit a design only upon payment of a fee, hardly surprising, in view of the eventual fate of the stamps. It has since been suggested that his design was accepted because it had cost money.

1911 (March) 1/2d die 1A finished proof with reversed "5A" above design, in green on watermarked paper



sued), the 2-1/2d in both green and blue, the remaining denominations in a variety of different colors and shades yellow, indigo, black and so on.



March 1911 Color essays printed by Inland Revenue based on colors of foreign stamps supplied by the British Post Office, in this case, U.S. stamps. Also printed were equivalent colors in the previous, Edward VII series.



Engraver's sketch die for the unissued 2d, without face value, uncleared die proof in black on thick unwatermarked wove paper

April 1, 1911 die proofs of the 1/2 and 1d values in the issued colors, from the un-hardened dies (BPM)

To Be Continued



Color scheme D, with the complete range of values, from 1/2p to 1/. For the 8d through 10d the denomination was not changed.

1911-12 1d die imperforate color trial in scarlet on gummed watermark Crown paper



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30 Years Ago in STAMPS:

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 29 The George V Downey Heads

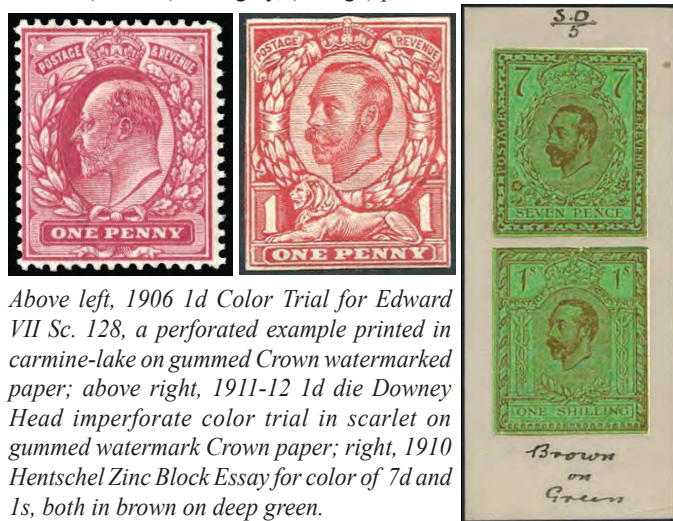
by David Thompson (*From STAMPS Magazine, March 26, 1988*)

[The plates for the various issued and unissued Downey Heads] were produced from ordinary, rough printing blocks rather than photographs, the inspector of stamping at the Inland Revenue preferring this method to the lengthier process of waiting until the photographic plates were ready.

One particularly fascinating stage of development had stamps both of George V and his predecessor, Edward VII, produced, first in the colors used on issued Edwardian stamps and then in those intended for George's, for comparison purposes (an unfair test; the quality of the Edward die proofs far exceeding that of the new zinc blocks, a failing particularly noticeable on the handful of imperforate se-tenant pairs which were also submitted).

Seven of the proposed denominations were produced in this form:

- 1/2d (Edward), green (George) bright green;
- 1d (Edward) scarlet, (George) rose;
- 2-1/2d (Edward) ultramarine, (George) indigo;
- 3d (Edward) purple on yellow, (George) orange;
- 4d (Edward) orange, (George) sage-green;
- 6d (Edward) dull purple, (George) violet; and
- 7d (Edward) slate-grey, (George) pale blue.

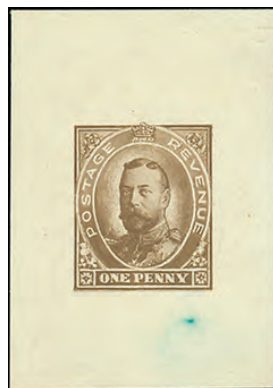


Above left, 1906 1d Color Trial for Edward VII Sc. 128, a perforated example printed in carmine-lake on gummed Crown watermarked paper; above right, 1911-12 1d die Downey Head imperforate color trial in scarlet on gummed watermark Crown paper; right, 1910 Hentschel Zinc Block Essay for color of 7d and 1s, both in brown on deep green.

November saw Hentschel & Co. deliver zinc block essays, using photographs both of the original design, and later, modified versions produced by Eve.

Further essays for the 3d and 7d, in two sizes and using slightly different frames than before, followed in December, printed by the newly developed then still unpatented "Printex" method (described today [in 1988] as a primitive form of photogravure).

1911 Perkins Bacon Printex method 1d essay type B in sepia on glazed paper



1911 Perkins Bacon Printex method 1d essay type A in carmine-pink on thick wove paper

1/2d, carmine pink on the 1d. These were, of course, never intended to supplant the now-familiar colors.

To Be Continued



1911 1d die proof color trial in deep red instead of issued yellow green.

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30 Years Ago in STAMPS:

**The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 30
The George V Downey Heads**

by David Thompson (*From STAMPS Magazine, March 26, 1988*)

The eventual history of the two issued denominations has been well-documented over the years. Three different dies were to be employed on both the 1/2d and 1d as certain deficiencies were noted and eradicated; three watermarks also were used; leading to the previously stated total of five major varieties of each denomination (minor varieties, such as master plate flaws and watermark errors, of course, see this total vastly multiplied).



Left, Downey Head 1912 die 1b 1/2d green, S.G. (Gibbons) Specialized N3(1)c; right, 1912 die 2 1d deep bright scarlet, S.G. Spec. N12(3).

1912 1d scarlet Die IB booklet pane, watermark Simple Cypher overprinted SPECIMEN complete with binding margin S.G. 336; Specialized NB5u.



1912 die 2 watermark multiple cypher 1d scarlet imperforate interpanneau block of four



1911 1/2p Very Deep Green shade, Die 1B (Sc. 151 var.; S.G. 325 var.; S.G. Specialised N2(7)).



1911-12 die 1B watermark Crown 1/2d very deep green corner strip of three with "A 11" control, used with c.d.s. cancellations.

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30 Years Ago in STAMPS:

The Postage Stamps of Great Britain, Part 31 The George V Downey, Profile Stamps

by W. W. Ward (From STAMPS Magazine, March 26, 1988)

As with the Edwardian issues, the proposed designs for the Georgian stamps were submitted to the new monarch. Several of them were either drawn or alterations suggested by the King himself. The first two values to appear were the 1/2p and 1p, but they could scarcely be called a success and suffered much derision from the cartoonists of the day. The penny stamp suffered most on account of the emaciated appearance of the British lion. The newspapers in their editorial treatment were exceedingly savage and the following from John Bull is typical of the newspaper comment:—

"Barring those at the foot of the Nelson candlestick in Trafalgar Square, there never was such a lion as that on the stamp. The artist must have gone to a pet spaniel for its body, and to a spring chicken for its soul."

[We previously covered this issue, the "Downey Heads" designs. Shown here, for a look at the lion, is one example. JFD.]

[Regarding the three-quarter profile chosen by King George V] Under the title "The New Stamp", a contributor to the Evening News wrote as follows on June 28, 1911:—

*Who is this whose face I see
On this garish penny stamp?
Is it someone known to me?
Much I wonder as I damp
The adhesive that I better
May affix it to my letter.
Is it Mr. Samuel,
P. M. G., who saves the cash?
As I do not know him well
I declare it would be rash
To proclaim this blurry gent meant
For his counterfeit presentment.
Is it Asquith, Haldane, Grey,
Or, more probably, John Burns?
Really, now, I couldn't say,
I decide on all by turns,
But as each one is selected
He is just as soon rejected.
What! You say it is the King?
Do not talk such stuff, I beg.
No, I tell you, no such thing.
Don't you try to pull my leg,
For I saw King George quite lately
And he can't have changed so greatly!*



Sc. 152



Sc. 151

One famous caricature by the well known cartoonist-humorist, Alfred Leete, will ever rank as a philatelic souvenir as good as any "take-off" of the Mulready envelopes. It represented the penny stamp with a keeper from the Zoo, handing a sirloin of beef on a fork to the lion, whilst the wreath represented bunches of bananas.

The half-penny value had an allegorical design of Dolphins, symbolical of the maritime nation and the sailor monarch. Although a monarchy, Britain is a democratic country, else those two first Georgian stamps would have caused many prosecutions for "lese majesté."

In six months' time King George, according to his portrait on the

stamps, had visited his tonsorial artist and had a "trim up," whilst the lion had evidently benefited from Mr. Alfred Leete's feed, and likewise looked sleek. The redrawn type was, however, short lived and new designs made their appearance with the head larger and in profile, the Zoological department left out, and the wreath smaller, consisting now of laurel leaves on the left and oak leaves to the right. This design was used for the 1p and 2-1/2p values.

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