

Yesterday in Stamps:

The Mulready Envelope

by **H. E. Radasch** (From STAMPS Magazine, August 20, 1938)

*Listen collectors and you shall hear,
Of the Mulready covers of yesteryear.
In 1840, on the 6th of May
Were required all letters to prepay.
Hardly a collection is known today
To have a cover of this type to display.
(With apologies).*

In 1940 the centenary of prepaid postage will be celebrated. While the one penny black is well known, little is known of the events that lead up to this and to the part played by the Mulready. Very few collections contain specimens of this early postal paper and many collectors never heard of the Mulready envelopes and covers.

Great Britain was, apparently, the first country to have prepayment of postage. Late in 1839 the authorities were considering the use and introduction of a system of prepayment of postage owing to the difficulty and inconvenience of collecting upon delivery, as many correspondents left the payment to the recipient of the letter. The use of stamped covers, stamped paper and of stamps, to be used separately, was discussed and finally the Lords of the Treasury invited suggestions and proposals bearing in mind four points:—

1. Convenience as regards public use.
2. Security from forgery.
3. Facility of being checked and distinguished in examination at the Post Office, which of necessity must be rapid.
4. Expense of production and circulation of the stamps.

Designs for stamped covers were not called for. Over twenty-seven hundred proposals were received but only four were considered. Three forms were adopted—1, adhesives; 2, an envelope; 3, a stamp embossed upon any kind of paper sent to the Post Office. Messrs. Perkins, Bacon and Co. were to produce the adhesive.



William Mulready

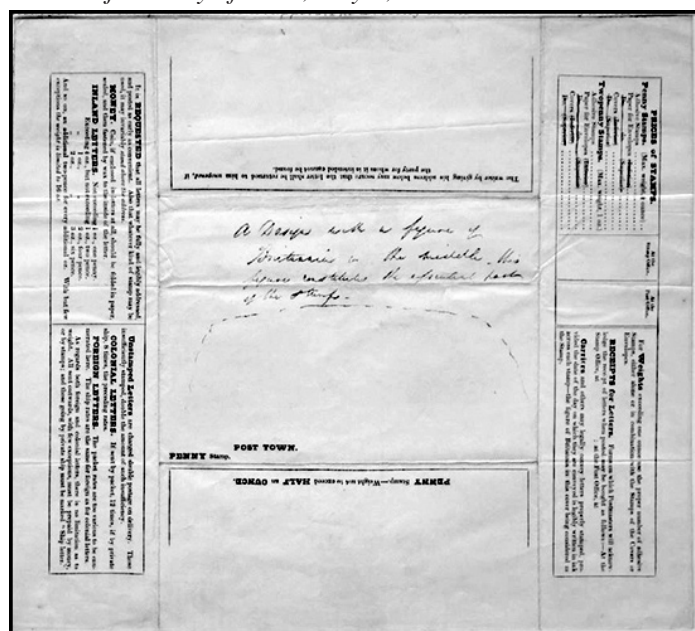
H. Cole was to obtain a design for a cover. On December 13, 1839, he called in William Mulready; he produced the highly poetic design that was afterward adopted and called the "Mulready." A brass plate was made and finished by April, 1840, by John Thompson. Proofs were received April first and were submitted to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Francis Baring, on April second. Upon April third a proof impression was sent to the Queen.

Upon her approval stereotype plates were cast and on April 10th specimens of the covers were submitted to and approved by the National Gallery. Upon April

14th printing began and upon April 29th Mr. Baring called the attention of one of the officials to the necessity of instructing the officers to strike the obliteration on the Design of Britannia on the cover in order to prevent their being covered by a label and used again. On May first the stamps and covers were issued to the public but their use was not authorized until the sixth.



A Mulready envelope with a Penny Black, cancelled on their joint Day of Issue, May 6, 1840.



A Mulready lettersheet essay, with notes by Rowland Hill, who developed the concept of prepayment of postage using stamps (the Penny Black), envelopes and letter sheets.

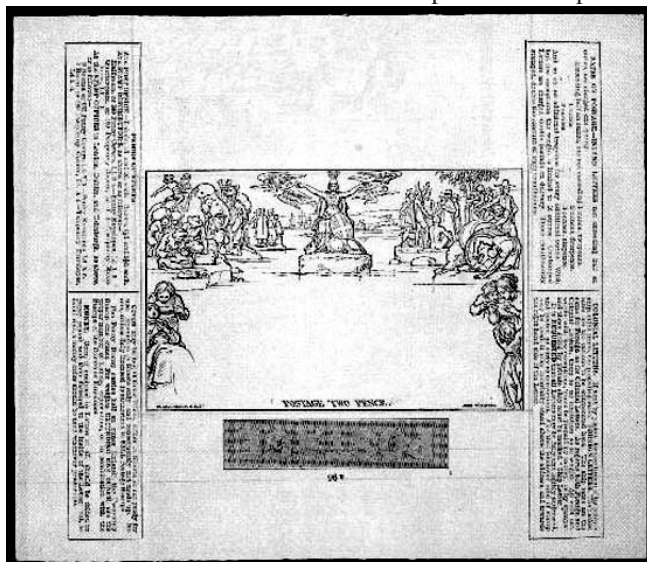
The appearance of the Mulreadys created quite a lot of adverse comment. By May twelfth it was already decided that they would use some other stamp for the Mulready design; the latter had been so abused and ridiculed on all sides. The actual first day of issue was May first but the first day of official use was May sixth. Within a week it was withdrawn. The bulk of the



A caricature of the Mulready envelope. Above, a colored engraving (shown in color on our front cover) by John Leesch; below the same design as printed, used May 24, 1840



issue was destroyed in especially designed stoves. This applied especially to the envelopes and two pence covers. Many of the one penny covers were sold to various firms and they were permitted to have their advertisements printed upon the inside. The chief purchasers were Banks, Assurance Companies, both fire and life; Cities and Counties for Tax notices, and Jell's Commercial Envelope. The abandonment of the Mulready was not due entirely to the design but mainly to the fact that the public found adhesives more convenient. The British public is not partial to



An unused 2p Mulready lettersheet. See next column for the left and right instructions for the use of stamps and lettersheets.



A 1p Mulready letter sheet used on May 6, 1840, the first day of authorized use. See page 4 for the front of this Mulready and the instructions at left and right.

<p>PRICES OF STAMPS. At a POST OFFICE.—Labels, 1d. and 2d. each. Covers, 1d. and 2d. each. At a STAMP DISTRIBUTOR, as above, or as follows:— Halfpenny, or 80 Penny Covers, 1d. 4.—Penny Envelopes, 1d. 1 2. Quartern, or 120 Penny Covers, 1d. 1 4.—Two-penny Envelopes, 1d. 1 6. At the STAMP OFFICES in London, Dublin, and Edinburgh, as above, or as follows:— 3 Sheets of 80 Penny Covers, 1d. 7 6.—Penny Envelopes, 1d. 5 6. 1 Sheet of 80 Penny Covers, 1d. 3 6.—Two-penny Envelopes, 1d. 3 6.</p>	
<p>RATES OF POSTAGE.—INLAND LETTERS not exceeding half an ounce, are charged one penny. Exceeding half an ounce, but not exceeding 1 ounce, two pence. " 1 ounce " 2 ounces, four pence. " 2 ounces " 3 ounces, six pence. And so on an additional twopenny for every additional ounce. With but few exceptions the weight is limited to 16 ounces. Unstamped Letters are charged double postage on delivery. Those insufficiently stamped, double the amount of such insufficiency.</p>	<p>COVERS may be had at these Prices, either in sheets, or cut ready for use. Envelopes in sheets only, and consequently not made up. No one, unless duly licensed, is authorized to SELL Postage Stamps. The Penny Stamp carries half an ounce; the Two-penny Stamp one ounce. For weights EXCEEDING ONE OUNCE, use the proper number of Labels, either alone, or in combination with the Stamps of the Covers or Envelopes. MONEY. Coin, if enclosed in Letters at all, should be folded in paper, sealed, and then fastened to the inside of the Letter; but to avoid risk, a money order should be used whenever practicable.</p>
<p>RATES OF POSTAGE.—INLAND LETTERS not exceeding half an ounce, are charged one penny. Exceeding half an ounce, but not exceeding 1 ounce, two pence. " 1 ounce " 2 ounces, four pence. " 2 ounces " 3 ounces, six pence. And so on an additional twopenny for every additional ounce. With but few exceptions the weight is limited to 16 ounces. Unstamped Letters are charged double postage on delivery. Those insufficiently stamped, double the amount of such insufficiency.</p>	<p>COLONIAL LETTERS. If sent by packet, twelve times; if by private ship, eight times the preceding rates. FOREIGN LETTERS. The packet rates are too various to be enumerated here. The ship rates are the same for Foreign as for Colonial Letters. As regards both Foreign and Colonial Letters, there is no limitation as to weight. All sent outwards, with few exceptions, must be prepaid by money, or by stamps; and those sent by private ship must be marked "Ship Letter". It is REQUESTED that all Letters may be fully and legibly addressed, and posted as early as convenient. Also that whatever kind of stamp may be used, it may invariably stand above the address, and towards the right hand side of the Letter.</p>

stamped envelopes as it uses very few; this may have misled the authorities into believing that the design had caused the trouble.

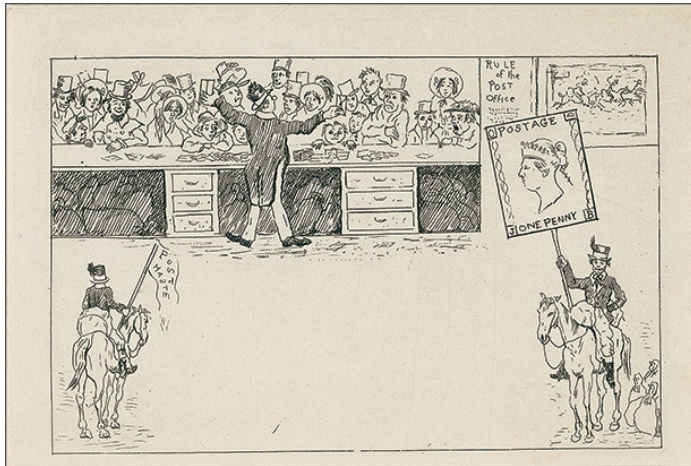
The wrappers are correctly called covers and these and the envelopes were printed in sheets of twelve and later cut apart. There are three pink threads in each cover, above the design in the one penny and below the design in the two pence covers.

The Mulready was ridiculed and freely caricatured. The caricatures were by noted artists of the time and were employed by certain firms to draw designs for the caricatures. Some are quite large but most of them are in envelope form on white wove paper and some are colored. Some were postally used and these are quite rare and bring a good price.

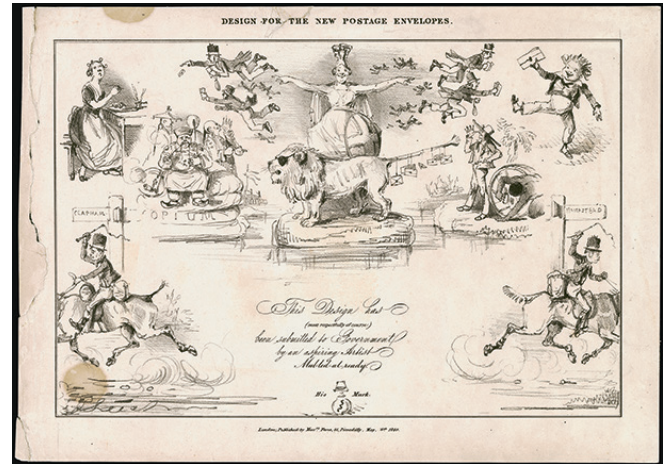


A 1p Mulready envelope addressed to William Scott, son of Sir Walter Scott, in Scotland, cancelled on May 22, 1840.

Additional Images



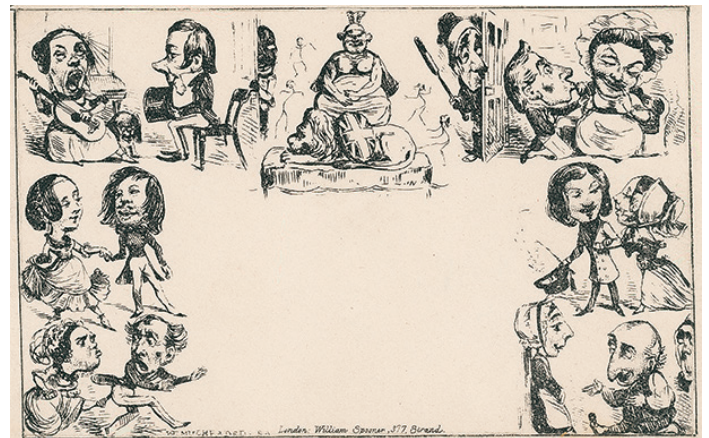
A Jacob Bell "Rules of the Post Office" Large Die Proof with disgruntled post office patrons lined up at the counter, Penny Black depiction at right has initials "JB", the basis of attribution to Jacob Bell.



A Fores Comic No. 1 Mulready Broadsheet Caricature, intricate design showing a variety of whimsical vignettes drawn by John Leech, with his signature "Leech in a Bottle" at bottom.



A Jacob Bell "Canine" Mulready Caricature



William Spooner's No. 1 Envelope, Large Die Proof. Complete design [showing various scenes of courtship].



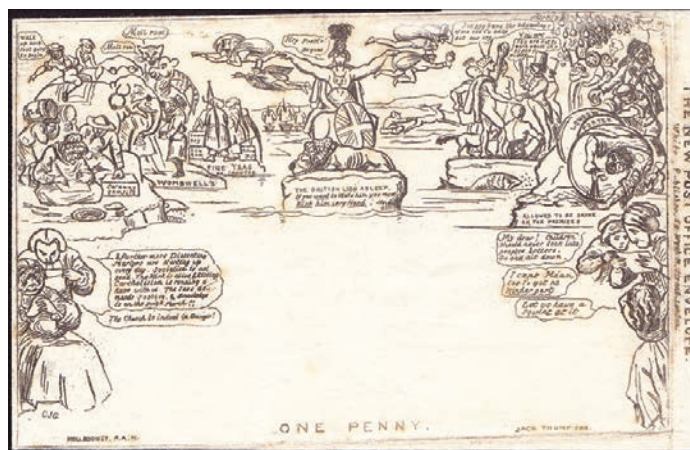
J. W. Southgate's Envelope No. 3, "Peg Leg Sailor", depicting a sailor with two peg legs at right and one with a peg leg at left which he is holding in his hand, indistinct 1840 red tombstone-style datestamp at right and used to Gloucestershire, with a manuscript notation.



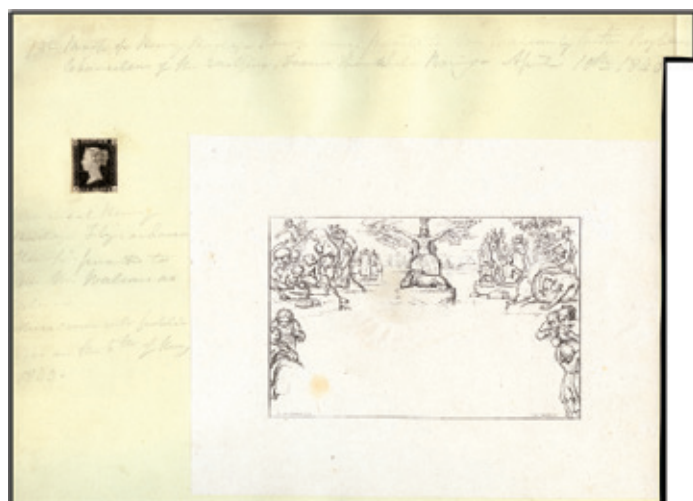
Spooner's No. 6 Envelope, Large Die Proof. [Using your pdf magnifier, you may be able to read the comments from letter recipients.]



The front of the Mulready FD on page 2



Mulready envelope caricature by Thomas White.
Use your pdf magnifier to read the messages.



Below, the fabulous "May 2nd" cover, with the Penny Black used to prepay postage on May 2, 1840, four days before the official date on which they were to be used. Upon receipt of the cover with the stamp, the addressee then turned it back and used the Mulready on May 4, still two days before the declared date on which it was to be used. If you look closely, to the left of the 2 MY cancel, you can see some of the red bleed-through from the Maltese Cross on the Mulready side.

The Earliest Dated Penny Black in Existence, this unique document from the archive of Robert Wallace is a die proof of the Mulready envelope, without value tablet, printed in black on India paper, mounted on stout paper along with an unused Penny Black from plate 1a, lettered AI, with endorsement in pencil by Robert Wallace MP: "1st Proof of Penny Postage Stamp Cover(?), presented to Mr. Wallace by the Right Honourable Chancellor of the Exchequer, Francis Thornhill Baring, April 10th 1840." along the top, with "Universal Penny Postage Fly or Loose Stamp, presented to me as above (the 10th April). / These came into public use on the 6th May 1840" hardly visible below the Penny Black.

The Penny Black affixed comes from the plate completed on April 8th 1840, which was put into production on April 11th and officially registered on April 15th. This stamp, from the first row of the sheet, quite probably comes from the first sheet printed. April 10 was the day when the Mulready design was approved by the Council of Royal Academicians.





2d Mulready envelope, sent to India uprated with five 1840 2d blue plate 1 (two pairs and a single), cancelled by the orange maltese cross of Bristol, Clifton dateless cancel alongside, one of the great Mulready covers



1840 (Jul 15) 1d Mulready lettersheet, sent from London to Henry Barefoot of the East India Co. "Aboard Her Majesty Ship" at Ellsmear (?), cancelled by red Maltese Cross.



1841 (Apr 14) 2d Mulready lettersheet, sent from Glasgow to New York, uprated with strip of four 1840 2d blue plate 1, tied by red Maltese Cross cancels, also with red "BOSTON / SHIP" circular date stamp.



The Mulready was issued on cream paper in two different colors to distinguish the denominations: One Penny (black ink) and Two Pence (here, blue ink), and in two different formats - unfolded envelopes and unfolded letter sheets. As the prior postal rates had been based not on weight but on the number of sheets of paper, and an envelope counted as two sheets, doubling the rate. Note that there is no stamp or indicium in the design, merely the postage value printed at the bottom (below the manuscript address).



The "Stewart" Cover to Nova Scotia, one of the "Crown Jewels" of Mulready and Penny Black Covers, an 1840 (May 16) Mulready 1d lettersheet, sent from London to Nova Scotia, uprated with thirteen 1840 1d blacks from plate 1a (originally franked with 15), each tied by red Maltese Cross, with "Britannia" not cancelled according to regulations. Several handstamps including oval "Paid Ship Letter/ London" datestamp and boxed "Pur In: After / 7 O'Clock At Night", New York Transit, and finally struck with blue "S. Andrews / N.B." circular handstamp with manuscript rate on arrival.