

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST ISSUE OF POSTAGE STAMPS.

THE question of prepayment of postage by means of adhesive stamps received a good deal of attention during 1851-2. New South Wales, the mother, and Victoria, the daughter of Tasmania, had both introduced the system in 1850 with evidently satisfactory results.

The first active movement towards the adoption of the system is found in Paper No. 69 of the Legislative Council of Van Diemen's Land, Second Session, 1852 (13th October, 1852), entitled, "Report from the Select Committee on the Proposed Assimilation of the Postal Arrangements of this Colony with those of the Mother Country, together with the Minutes of Evidence taken before them, and other Papers," which states that "on Friday, July 9th, 1852, the Colonial Secretary, pursuant to notice, moved the appointment of a Select Committee to take into consideration so much of His Excellency's speech as relates to the assimilation of the postal arrangements of this Colony with those of the mother country, by reducing the postage on letters, abolishing the privilege of franking, and making prepayment compulsory."

The Committee brought the leading features of the proposed system into review under the following heads:

1. Reduction of the present rates of postage to one-half.
2. Compulsory prepayment by means of stamps.
3. Mode of dealing with ship letters inwards, considered in relation to prepayment.
4. The privilege of franking.

As to the first consideration, the Committee were strongly in favour of reduction, particularly in the town rate, which at the time was 2d.

Prepayment by means of postage stamps they considered essential to the proper and economical working of the Post Office Department. It would put an end to a complicated system of small accounts, involving great labour to the Department and extensive correspondence between the chief Department and the country Post Offices. It would dry up the source of innumerable abuses; it would cut away almost the whole of the evil of the franking system. The Committee had considered it their duty to examine every possible modification of the system of prepayment, so as to determine whether any portion of the full measure of "compulsory prepayment by means of stamps" could safely be postponed, so as to admit of partial adoption until stamps could be obtained, or until the public became habituated to the system in question, and had come to the conclusion that prepayment must be absolutely enforced in all cases.

As to the third consideration, the Committee recommended the total abolition of the *inward* postage on ships' letters as being necessary for the preservation of the integrity of the rule as to prepayment.

The franking privilege seemed to have been extensively abused. At that time not only did the public officers frank official letters, but they *received* them free. Consequently, any person who pleased to write to the head of a public department complaining of some fancied wrong, or asking for some piece of information for his own exclusive benefit, or even if he were to write an abusive or anonymous letter, he virtually enjoyed the franking privilege. He dropped his letter into his local Post Office without payment; and as the officer to whom it was addressed received it in his official, not his private capacity, it came within the protection of the official privilege. If a man had to stamp his letter, the effect would be to check much frivolous and some malicious correspondence. However, as to the franking of official correspondence by the head of the department, the Committee considered it a matter of indifference whether it were done by means of a stamp or by the signature of the official. The public officer who would write "On Public Service only" upon a private letter would not scruple to use a stamp for the same purpose, so that the mere introduction of franking by means of a stamp would not check that particular abuse; although in the other case of letters addressed to officials it would not only curtail the amount of unnecessary and objectionable correspondence, but would actually add to the revenue. If confined to public departments, the Committee thought that the privilege of franking could be kept within safe limits.

The Committee finally submitted a modified plan, as follows:

1. The present rate of postage on inland letters to be retained (4d.).
2. Except as to the district or town postage, which it was proposed should be reduced to 1d.
3. The franking privilege to be retained as to letters emanating from the public departments.
4. Postage on ship letters inwards to be abolished, and
5. Prepayment by stamps to be required in all cases, except official letters under the third head.

The outcome of the Report of this Select Committee was the introduction and passing of "An Act to regulate the Conveyance and Postage of Letters," 17 Vict., No. 6 (August 31st, 1853), which enacted:

(Sec. 6.) The rates of postage on letters for delivery within the limits of the city or town in which such letters were posted should be 1d. for every $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.; and on all letters for delivery beyond the limits of the city or town, or for transmission by ship to any place beyond the limits of the Colony, 4d. for every $\frac{1}{2}$ oz.

(Sec. 7.) The rate of postage upon packets containing merchandise, &c., and without any writing, should be 6d. for every 4 ozs.

(Sec. 11.) Newspapers should be conveyed free.

(Sec. 15.) Empowered the Lieutenant-Governor to exempt from postage all letters and packets which should be *bonâ fide* on the public service only, and be addressed to or franked by such public officers of the Government as such Lieutenant-Governor should from time to time for that purpose specify and name. From which last section it will be seen that the recommendation of the Select Committee with regard to letters addressed to public officers was not adopted in its entirety.

(Sec. 16.) The Postmaster-General or Inspector or Inspectors of stamps under the Act should, with the approval of the Lieutenant-Governor of the island, from time to time cause stamps to be made and sold, indicating such amounts of postage as might in that behalf be directed by such Lieutenant-Governor.

(Sec. 17.) Provided that if any person should fraudulently forge, or imitate, or assist in forging or imitating any stamp made under the authority of the Act; or should offer, utter, dispose of, or put off any forgery or imitation of any such stamp with intent to defraud, such person should be guilty of felony, and on conviction thereof should be subject and liable to imprisonment, with or without hard labour; or if a male, to be worked on the roads or other public works of the Colony for such term not exceeding seven years, as the court before whom such person should be tried should think fit to award.*

In June, 1853, the Secretary of the Post Office, writing to the Colonial Secretary (who at the time was the ministerial head of his Department) with reference to the estimates of expenditure for 1854, remarks, "The second item—viz., £450—is wholly contingent upon the adoption of the proposed new system of prepaying the postage of letters by means of adhesive stamps."

In the report of the proceedings of the Legislative Council contained in the *Hobart Town Advertiser* of Thursday, 21st July, 1853, under the heading "Postage Bill," the following interesting particulars appear:

"*Time of Act coming into Operation.*—The Colonial Secretary also mooted this point, stating that the Government had sent home for the requisite stamps, &c., and it would be eight or ten months before they arrived; but if the Committee thought it desirable that the Act should come into more speedy operation, he thought he should be able to make arrangements. The stamp could be engraved here without any difficulty, if the Committee desired it; he believed in the adjoining Colonies stamps were made on the spot.

"Mr. Chapman considered that as this was a useful measure, and likely to be acceptable to the community, it should come into operation on the 1st November.

"Mr. Walker wished to know the probable expense of the stamp here.

"The Colonial Secretary said the expense would not be considerable; the proposition he had before him was, that a plate containing twenty heads should be engraved, the expense not to exceed 30s. per head, and the expense of striking them off would be 30s. for every 20,000. It was ultimately determined that the Act should come into operation on the 1st November next, or at such earlier date as His Excellency by proclamation shall appoint."

This report brought forth a protest in the form of this letter:

"HOBART TOWN, 21st July, 1853.

"SIR,—I perceive by the *Advertiser* of this date that the Colonial Secretary had suggested in the Council that the arrangement for printing the postage stamps would be to have 20 heads engraved at an 'expense not to exceed 30s. per head, and the expense of striking them off would be 30s. for every 20,000.'

"I beg to offer the following remarks, as I fear the arrangement above mentioned would not answer at all:

"1st. Supposing each plate to print 12,000 impressions (and it must be a good plate to print so many), each plate would only produce 240,000 stamps.

"2nd. If only one plate be engraved with a proportion of 1d., 2d., and 4d. stamps, the whole of the stamps would be printed in *one colour*.

"3rd. As it will of a certainty be requisite to print each separate value of a different colour it will involve (3) *three plates*.

"Supposing the whole of the Post-office Revenue not to exceed £3000 per annum, say £1000 each of 1d., 2d., and 4d. stamps, or only 1205 letters

* See Appendix C.

per diem, the number of stamps required for one year would be 440,000, nearly double that the plate could produce.

“No allowance appears to have been made for coating the stamps with cement, the common gum water not being sufficient.

“By lithography the whole number required for one year could be printed and cemented in two or three weeks at the rate of about £50 for every 500,000.

“I have, &c.

THOMAS BROWNE.

“*The Col. Sec.*”

Mr. Browne presumably was a lithographer!

On the 25th July, in response to a request from the Colonial Secretary, the Secretary of the Post Office furnished the following return of the estimated number of stamps required for one year for the purpose of issue under the new Post Office Act:

Act:	Number.	Value.
	700,000	Four Pence each.
	100,000	Six Pence each.
	150,000	One Penny each.

The stamp of Six Pence designed for prepaying packets was never prepared, as the small number required scarcely warranted the expense of an additional plate for that value.

The arrangements for providing postage stamps for use under the new Act appear to have been carried out verbally; no formal contract was entered into, no record exists of tenders for engraving advertised, or of any communication by letter with the printers, Messrs. H. and C. Best, although from the Colonial Secretary's statement in Committee of the Legislative Council on the Post Office Act, he had obtained a written estimate of the probable cost of engraving stamps. The sole exception is a letter forwarding the account of the above firm for engraving and printing for payment, hereafter referred to. Nor was there any record of the stamps having been submitted for the approval of the Governor as required by the Act.

The only letter which can be found bearing upon the subject is the following:

“COLONIAL SECRETARY'S OFFICE,

“31st August, 1853.

“SIR,—Arrangements having been made with Mr. Best of the *Courier* office to print the postage stamps required under the new Postage Act, I am directed to request that you will name a confidential clerk whose duty it will be to attend at the printing office while the stamps are being printed, and to take charge of the plate and impressions after they are struck off.

“You will have the goodness to give him particular orders never to lose sight of the plate, and to take special care that the stamps struck off each day are deposited in a place of security, and it will be your duty to see that these instructions are carried out.

“It will be necessary that the officer appointed to the duty before mentioned should attend at the *Courier* office from 8 in the morning till a late hour in the afternoon, except while the printers are at dinner.

“I have the honor to be, Sir,

“Your very obedient servant,

“W. CHAMP, *Col. Secy.*

“*The Secretary, General Post Office.*”

From this letter we ascertain the fact that the stamps were printed by Messrs. H. and C. Best at their office—that of the *Courier* newspaper—and it may fairly be assumed that, being the only engravers and printers of any known ability, besides having performed engraving work for the Government before, they were privately sent for, interviewed, and instructions verbally given for the preparing designs and engraving plates.

In pursuance of the Act the following notice appeared in the *Hobart Town Gazette* (the official organ) of Tuesday, 27th September, 1853 :

“GENERAL POST OFFICE,
“6th September, 1853.

“Notice is hereby given, that the new Post Office Act of 1853 will come into operation on the First day of November next. That on and from that date all Letters and Packets (Newspapers alone excepted) posted at any of the Post Offices of this Colony must be prepaid by means of adhesive stamps.

“That the stamps will be sold at Hobart Town, in large or small quantities as may be required, at the General Post Office ; Messrs. Walch and Sons, Elizabeth Street ; and Messrs. Huxtable and Co., Murray Street ; at Launceston Post Office, and the most respectable booksellers in Launceston ; and at the various Post Offices throughout the Island.”

On the 12th October, 1853, supplies of stamps were issued to Postmasters throughout the Colony.

The *Colonial Times* of Saturday, 15th October, contains the following item :

“POSTAGE STAMPS.—The new stamps have been issued, and can be obtained of the different agents. They are very neatly executed. Their use is not to come into operation till the first of November next.”

On Tuesday, 25th October, 1853, regulations for the guidance of the Post Office Department, under Act of Council 17 Vict. No. 6, were published in the *Gazette*. The only item having reference to the stamps was the following :

“PRICE OF STAMPS.—The stamps will be of the following rates ; viz. :
Penny Stamps.—1d. each. | Fourpenny Stamps.—4d. each.

The most reliable and interesting record, however, is the printing account of Messrs. H. and C. Best, which I give in full :

“VAN DIEMEN'S LAND,
“THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT.

No.	<i>“Her Majesty's Government Dr. to H. & C. Best.</i>	£	s.	d.
1853.	To engraving plate for 4d. postage stamps, 24 Heads at	36	0	0
Sept. 30.	30/- each			
”	cp. printing 11,100 Impressions of plate in Red ink at	22	4	0
	4/- per hundred			
”	Paper for do.	2	0	0
”	Engraving plate for 1d. postage stamps, 24 Heads at	36	0	0
	30/- each			
”	cp. printing 2749 Impressions of plate in Blue ink at	5	10	0
	4/- per 100			
”	Paper for do.	0	6	0
”	Engraving 66 obliterating stamps with turned handles,	34	13	0
	&c., complete at 10/6			
”	Making 60 cedar boxes (for obliterating stamps) and	18	0	0
	filling with composition, at 6/- each			
”	Turning 62 handles for balls, and stuffing, lining, and	18	12	0
	composition for do., at 6/-			
”	60 Tin boxes for Printing Ink for do.	3	0	0
”	Printing Ink for do.	3	0	0
”	Re-engraving 4d. plate, 24 Heads at 25/-	30	0	0
		£209	5	0

“Amounting to Two hundred and nine pounds and five shillings.

“£209 5s. 0d.

“Received from Peter Fraser, Esq., Colonial Treasurer, the sum of ”

The next accounts from Messrs. H. & C. Best are as follows :

"No. 166.		THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT.	
1854.		<i>Her Majesty's Government Dr. to H. & C. Best.</i>	
Feb. 15.	To cp. ptg. 800 impressions of postage stamps from 1d. plate.		
" 18.	" " 1275	do.	do.
" 21.	" " 716	do.	do.
May 4.	" " 3500	do.	4d. plate.
July 6.	" " 400	do.	do.
" 7.	" " 425	do.	do.
" 8.	" " 275	do.	do.
" 10.	" " 425	do.	do.
" 11.	" " 425	do.	do.
" 12.	" " 250	do.	do.
" 13.	" " 150	do.	do.
" 14.	" " 385	do.	do.
" 15.	" " 200	do.	do.
		9226 Impressions at 4/- per 100 . . . £18 9 0	
		To paper for do. 1 12 6	
"Correct. F. C. Smith.		20 1 6"	

"No. 129.		THE POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT.	
1854.		<i>Her Majesty's Government Dr. to H. & C. Best.</i>	
Aug. 19.	To 4 boxes for composition, and composition for do.	1	12 0
Sept.	" cp. printing 1300 Impressions of 1d. and 1750 of 4d. Postage Stamps, 4/- p. 100	6	2 0
Nov.	" do. do. 3480 Impressions of 4d. stamps, at 4/- per 100	6	19 2
1855.			
Jan.	" do. do. 1255 Impressions of 1d. and 850 of 4d. Postage Stamps	4	4 2
Feb.	" do. do. 1815 Impressions of 4d. stamps, at 4/- per 100	3	12 7
March	" do. do. 1077 Impressions of 4d. stamps, at 4/- per 100	2	3 1
April	" do. do. 1325 Impressions of 1d. and 2575 of 4d. Postage Stamps, at 4/- p. 100	7	16 0
May	" do. do. 450 Impressions of 1d. and 1882 of 4d. Postage Stamps, at 4/- p. 100	4	13 3
June	" do. do. 425 Impressions of 1d. and 1590 of 4d. Postage Stamps, at 4/- p. 100	4	0 7
	" Paper for 19,549 impressions of Postage Stamps	3	13 0
		£44 15 10	
"1855. <i>The Post Office Department Dr. to H. & C. Best.</i>			
July 18.	To cpps. 425 impressions of 4d. stamps at 4/- per 100	17	0
July 19.	" do. do. do. do.	17	0
July 23.	" do. do. do. 450 do.*	18	0
	" Paper for do.	6	0
		£2 18 0	

From these four accounts it appears that one plate of the One Penny and two of the Four Pence were engraved. It is not necessary to give any detailed description of the type of these stamps, as autotype illustrations of the entire sheets will be found among the plates annexed to this work. (*Illustrations. Plates A, B, and C.*)

* Query 1d.

The twenty-four "heads" of the One Penny plate were separately engraved, and consequently show slight variations of type. The impressions were printed in blue, on ordinary white wove paper, without watermark. This paper varies a little in quality and thickness, and these differences affect the shade of colour of the impression. Those printed on the slightly harder paper are generally of a lighter blue shade, and show the finer lines of engraving very clearly and distinctly; while those printed on the softer paper are deeper blue in shade, and the fine cross-hatching forming the groundwork of the central oval presents a somewhat blurred appearance.

Of the two plates of the Four Pence, *Plate B* is printed on paper somewhat similar to that of the One Penny, but varying more in substance; and there is also a variety on thinner paper, showing narrow laid lines close together. In colour, it is found in shades of orange, deepening to reddish, which sometimes becomes brown by some subsequent oxydizing process. The account of September 30th mentions "red" as the colour of the 11,100 sheets first printed.

Plate C was printed almost uniformly on a thick white wove paper, but a few examples have been met with on laid paper with the lines wide apart. From the fact that this latter variety has only been met with in an unused state, and is printed in a very superior manner, showing all the finer lines with great distinctness, I incline to the opinion that it was a proof impression struck on a better class of paper immediately after the engraving was completed. The colours of *Plate C* are varied from pale to brownish-yellow, and orange to bright orange-red. The laid variety is found in a shade of orange, inclining to yellow. These marked varieties in shade doubtless arose from the careless mixing of colours for the frequent printings, as well as from subsequent fading or oxydizing.

The impressions from *Plate B* were first issued for use, and apparently supplied all demands up to January, 1855, from which date impressions from both plates are found in use contemporaneously until January, 1856, those from *Plate C*, however, predominating. The next issue described had been put into circulation in September, 1855; but many of the outlying Post Offices still held a stock of the octagonal Four Pence, which would account for their use to such a late period.

The gum used on all impressions was very thick; in fact, more like glue than gum. It was manufactured by Henry Hinsby, chemist, and applied at the Post Office in a most lavish manner. It crackled when dry, and occasionally caused fracture of the brittle paper.

All three plates were engraved on copper, the plates being from Messrs. Hugill, 8, Peterborough Court, Fleet Street, London.

On the back of the finer *Plate (B)* of the Four Pence appears the commencement of a fresh plate, which was doubtless intended for a stamp either of Two Pence or Six Pence. It consists of twenty-five unfinished types, in five rows of five, of the following design: Circle in centre, to contain head of Queen, surrounded by circular band, containing the legend "Van Diemen's Land" above, in the type of the Four Pence, and space for value below—all enclosed in single-lined square frame, with hollowed corners, as in the One Penny, but cut deeper; the spandrels were to have been filled in with dots on a fine-lined ground. All the types have the name, but in none is there any trace of a value. There is a very scratchy head to left in one type, evidently inserted by some unpractised hand, subsequently to the abandonment of the plate. One spandrel only is filled in in one type.

It is a matter of some uncertainty as to which plate of the Four Pence was first engraved. Impressions from *Plate B* certainly were the first to be pressed into service, but this is by far the finer and better executed of the two plates; and it seems improbable that the engraver Coard, who executed both, would produce an inferior article in his second attempt, having the completed first from which to take a transfer and improve upon.

There is no record of enquiry made as to the necessity for this second plate and the consequent additional charge of £30, but as the order for engraving in the first instance seems to have been verbal this is not remarkable. It is probable that one plate was found insufficient to print the required quantity within the limited time.

We have seen that arrangements were made with Best to print at the *Courier* office about the 31st August. His account is dated September 30th, but from the following letter it seems evident that it was not paid before January, 1854:

“GENERAL POST OFFICE,
“19th January, 1854.

“SIR,—I have the honour to transmit herewith an account, amounting to Two hundred and nine pounds and five shillings, from Messrs. H. and C. Best, for engraving the plates, and printing the stamps required for the purpose of supplying the public, in order to carry out the new system of prepayment of all postage on letters forwarded through the Post Office Department of this Colony. And I have to request the favour of your furnishing the Auditor of Civil Accounts with the necessary authority for the payment of the same. “(Sd.) F. C. SMITH.”

“*The Hon. the Colonial Secretary.*”

The official return of postage stamps printed under the direction of the Postmaster-General from the 1st of October to the 31st December, 1853, inclusively,* gives exactly the same number of stamps as that charged in Best's account of 30th September, viz., 65,976 (=2749 impressions of 24) of the One Penny and 266,400 (=11,100 impressions of 24) of the Four Pence, and no further printing took place till February, 1854.

The Post Office Act was dated 31st August, 1853 (the date of royal assent by the Governor, Her Majesty's representative), and a supply of stamps was required for issue to postmasters throughout the Colony in time for the first of November, when the Act came into operation; and the Secretary of the Post Office was instructed on the 31st August to provide a clerk to superintend the printing of the stamps. From these data it appears that orders must have been given to Best to prepare the plates on the very date of, or even prior to, the passing of the Act.

A month, however, must have elapsed before anything was done, because Best's first charge was for the Four Pence plate engraved on 30th September, and between that date and the 15th October, little more than a fortnight, a supply of stamps was printed and in the hands of the agents; in fact, the first issue to postmasters took place on the 12th October. From the accounts subsequent to that dated 30th September, the average number of impressions printed per day appears to have been about 430. At this rate it would take a full month to print 11,100 impressions from the one plate without making any allowance for the One Penny, of which 2749 impressions were struck.

* See Appendix A.

Hence it may be taken for granted that the two plates of the Four Pence were engraved between the 30th September and the 31st December, 1853; the second one perhaps was supposed to be necessary for expediting the supply to meet the anticipated demand. But from the fact that impressions from the one plate served all purposes for fourteen months, this idea was doubtless discovered to be erroneous.

Both plates of the Four Pence, as well as that of the One Penny, are still in the Post Office, but defaced in the manner described in the chapter on reprints. Neither plate of the Four Pence shows any marked signs of wearing, which would necessitate the engraving of a fresh one.

From the foregoing accounts it will be seen that Messrs. Best struck off 10,295 impressions in all from the One Penny plate (246,980 stamps), and 33,854 impressions from the plates of the Four Pence (812,496 stamps). The official monthly returns* give the number of One Penny stamps received from Best as 257,880 and 801,696 of the Four Pence. However, the last entry (23rd July) in the second account of 1855 probably means 450 impressions of the One Penny (10,800 stamps), which would balance the number of stamps with the slight discrepancy of 100 One Penny stamps. Mr. Lithographer Browne's estimate of 12,000 impressions as the outside performance of any copper-plate was incorrect, as over 33,000 were printed from the two plates.

I have seen a number of specimens of the One Penny and those from both plates of the Four Pence, showing a small triangular piece punched out; but there seems to be no record that this has any special official significance. It has been suggested that the mark was introduced as a kind of official check, but I have not been able to obtain any information upon the subject. I have a letter bearing two separate stamps of Four Pence, one of which only bears the mark. The barbarous custom of mutilating the Four Penny stamp by clipping it to its octagonal shape was much in vogue. The stamp vendors apparently found time to hang heavily on their hands, and the official scissors being idle like themselves, the result was the mischief that, according to Dr. Watts, is invariably the provision of his Satanic majesty for such cases. This mutilation not only occasionally extended to the One Penny, but later on we find the Six Pence and One Shilling of 1857 similarly treated, while even the strictly rectangular stamps were not always exempt from this process of trimming.

It appears that a stamp of the value of Ten Pence, bearing the name of no country, which was circulated in the philatelic world about 1864, was assigned to the 1853 issue of Van Diemen's Land. Shoals of letters were received at the Post Office, Hobart, applying for specimens of this suppositious Ten Penny stamp; and at first the Secretary was content to repudiate any knowledge of the stamp in question, but as the enquiries came in greater frequency, he became more emphatic in his replies. He writes to the well-known philatelist, Dr. Viner, under date 22 April, 1864: "You must be mistaken in supposing that you have seen any stamp whatever belonging to this country of the value of Ten Pence. I assure you *not one* ever existed. The mania for collecting stamps has, I regret extremely to say, reached this Colony. I do not approve of it, and am of opinion that it ought to be stopped by legal enactments." And yet a little later

* See Appendix A.

(14th January, 1865) we find this same gentleman applying for permission to expend 10s. of the Government funds in the purchase of an album wherein to affix the postal issues of foreign and colonial governments for official reference!

SYNOPSIS.

ISSUE NOVEMBER 1ST, 1853.

1 penny, light blue (shades), on medium white wove paper, varying in thickness. Brownish gum. Imperforate. 24 varieties of type. (*Illustration, Plate A.*)

4 pence, orange to reddish, on white wove paper varying considerably in thickness. Brownish gum. Imperforate. 24 varieties of type. (*Illustration, Plate B.*)

Variety. On thin paper, showing narrow laid lines close together.
4 pence, orange.

4 pence, pale to brownish-yellow, and orange to bright orange-red, on thick white wove paper. Brownish gum. Imperforate. 24 varieties of type. (*Illustration Plate C.*)

Variety. On laid paper with wide vertical lines.
4 pence, orange.