

Varieties of the Penny Black Plates 1 - 11

Purpose: This exhibit illustrates '*varieties*' of the world's first postage stamp, Great Britain's Penny Black. The intaglio or line-engraved printing method was used to produce eleven different plates. This complex and pioneering process depended largely on human skill and it is not surprising therefore that numerous digressions from the ideal and perfect reproduction of the original design occurred. These recurring differences or '*varieties*' are illustrated in this exhibit.

Importance: A system of processing and delivering mail worldwide grew from this one small stamp. It made possible a system of predictable written communication, a subject of global importance. Also, as the first adhesive postage stamp, it can be said to be the source of our philatelic passion.

The Penny Black design is in itself a masterpiece, simple yet elegant. The image, depicting Queen Victoria at age 15, was taken from a medallion created by William Wyon in 1834. Only 350 of these medals were produced in bronze.



Of Interest: This exhibit includes examples of red stamps printed from "black" plates. Printings in red ink were made from seven of the black plates before the final printings in black and thus are listed under the Penny Black plates. These early red printings were necessary due to a shortage of black stamps prior to the final transition to the Penny Red.

Exhibit Plan: This exhibit is arranged by plate number (1 - 11). The following varieties can be found on the these plates:

1. Worn Plate indication - Plate 1a
2. Ray Flaw (exaggerated or missing rays in the top corner stars) - Plates 1a, 1b, 2, & 11
3. Retouches
 - A. Recutting (deepening or recutting of a weak or absent detail) Plates 1b, 2, 4 & 11
 - B. Extended Frame Lines - Plates 2, 4, 5 & 10
 - C. States of Repair (progressive repairs on the same plate) - Plate 5
 - D. Non-coincidental re-entry (to repair damage or wear) - Plates 4 & 5
4. Burr Rub (removal of ridges of metal created by pressure of the transfer roller) - Plate 1b
5. Double Letters (from original production or repairs to check letters) - Plates 1b & 2
6. Guidelines & Guide Dots (markings to assist in roller alignment) - Plates 1b, 2, 4, 6, 8, 9 & 11
7. Constant Variety (small variation existing throughout a stamp's printing) - Plate 3
8. Matched Pair (both black & red stamp printings of particular plates) - Plates 1b, 9 & 11
9. "O" Flaws on the "O" of "One" (a progressive defect on the transfer roller) - Plates 7, 9, & 10

Items of special significance are boxed in RED