

Distribution and Use of United Kingdom One Penny (1d) Perfins 1868-1880

This exhibit is intended as a study of Great Britain Penny Reds Commercial Perfins. The first Perfins were used on Penny Reds in 1868. The examples shown are a representative selection of stamps from 1868 thru 1880. Let us begin with a few definitions:

Perfin—A perfin is a number of little holes applied to stamps as security against theft in the form of letters, numbers or shapes. On March 13, 1868 Mr. Joseph Sloper of United Kingdom was granted the right to develop, what today are called Perfins. The name Perfin comes from combining two words **PER**Forated **INS**ignia or **PER**Forated **INI**tials.

Penny Reds first went to press March 1, 1864 and ended December 4, 1879 producing 14 billion individual stamps, using 151 different numbered plates from 71 to 225. (See photo 1 showing an enlargement of these plate numbers.) The last plate number, 225, became the rarest being in use for only 3 months, as new stamp issues were released (excluding a single sheet made on plate 77). The stamps were printed in sheets of 240 stamps arranged in 20 rows, each row with 12 stamps. This 12 by 20 sheet configuration was chosen because there are 12 pennies per shilling and 20 shillings per pound therefore at the post office a postman could tear off one row of stamps for a shilling or sell a complete sheet for one pound. As a method to deter forgery, each of the 240 different positions on the sheet bore a unique letter combination. The initial in the lower left corner designated the horizontal row location, these were in alphabetical order, from A to T; the initial in the lower right hand corner designated the vertical column, left to right, A to L.

Because the United Kingdom assigned each town post office a specific number, by researching the stamps postmarks it has been extremely helpful in identifying the name and address of the Perfins Companies.

Many of the larger companies had several different perforating machines and several examples are shown here. The orientation of the perfin design, as seen from the front of the stamp, can be inverted, reversed or both, as the sheet of stamps was sometime folded before applying the perfin. For identification purposes an example of each perfin design is included adjacent to the stamp. The orientation of this identification is provided upright so the intended initials can be determined.

Several items in the exhibit are currently listed as scarce. With the increased interest, new examples are being discovered on a regularly basis, making it likely that the rarity rating will be downgraded in the future.

For many years, Perfins have been regarded as damaged stamps and consigned to the trash bin. Today they have become a specialist study.