

NOTES ON THE LOCALLY ENGRAVED AND LITHOGRAPHED ISSUES OF MAURITIUS, 1848-1859.

A Paper Read Before the Royal Philatelic Society.

By M. P. CASTLE.

The study of the formation of the locally engraved and printed plates of the first issues of Mauritius has not presented so many difficulties as in the case of analogous productions in other portions of the globe. In the instances of New South Wales and Philippines, for example, the first issues of which were all hand-engraved, hundreds of specimens, each differing in type, are necessary for the reconstruction of the sheets as printed, while in the present case but fifty specimens are requisite to complete the several plates of the engraved stamps. Moreover, the design is very bold, and, particularly in the early stages of the existence of the plates, the differences are so marked as to be capable of ready discernment by any collector. Beyond this there has been, as regards the engraved issues, no complication caused by retouches or partial freshening up of the original designs. The plate of October, 1859, known as the "Large Fillet," was, as is well known, re-engraved on the almost vanished lines of the 2d of 1848, but is to all intents and purposes a fresh engraving.

During his residence in Mauritius, Major E. B. Evans was enabled to gather from official sources practically the complete history of these very interesting stamps, and it is largely due to the energy and philatelic ability of our fellow member that the story of the stamps of Mauritius has been enabled to be presented in such a satisfactory manner. The papers that embodied the result of Major Evans's researches were published in the *Philatelic Record* for 1880 (Vol. II), and were revised and read before the Philatelic Society, London, on May 22 and December 11, 1896, and January 8, 1897. These papers will be found reproduced in the Society's work on the Stamps of the British Colonies in Africa (see Vol. II, pp. 120 to 152). As this work is available to every student of philately, it will hardly be necessary for me to do more than epitomize in the briefest manner the information therein given. The information acquired by Major Evans is, as I have stated, very full and, except in one instance, very precise, and I shall therefore be able to impart but slight additional points of interest as regards the engraved stamps. In the case of the lithographed stamps of December, 1859, the history of these stamps is but briefly given, and there is still something to be learned thereon.

The Native issues—to use their time-honoured cognomen—of Mauritius consisted of the following issues:—

- (1.) 1d and 2d. September 2, 1847. Inscribed with the words "Post Office." Engraved by Mr. J. Barnard.
- (2.) 1d and 2d. May (?), 1848. Inscribed with the words "Post-paid." Engraved by Mr. J. Barnard.
- (3.) 2d March, 1859. Head of Queen, with small fillet. Engraved by Mr. J. Lapirot.
- (4.) 2d October, 1859. Head of Queen, with the large fillet. Reengraved on the 1848 2d value by Mr. Sherwin. (The 1d value was prepared but not issued.)
- (5.) 1d and 2d. December, 1859. Head of Queen, with Greek border. Lithographed by Mr. Dardenne.

ISSUE I. POST OFFICE.

The fame of the first issue of these stamps, the celebrated "Post Office," is world-wide, and they undoubtedly stand, if not for actual rarity, by general consent, as the two most important stamps of the British Colonial Empire. Their history is too well known to require restating at my hands: in the

society's work on *British Africa* (Vol. II, pp. 152-159) an interesting article is given by Mr. E. D. Bacon, giving an account of them and the number of the copies then known (twenty). Since that period several copies have been found, and, subject to correction, I believe the total number now known to exist is twenty-five or twenty-six. Among these is the superb unused copy of the 2d, sold at auction by Messrs. Puttick and Simpson a few years since, and I am confident that we all rejoice to know that this, the finest specimen in the world of this great rarity, should be in the collection of our honoured President, H. R. H. the Prince of Wales.

My study of the Mauritius stamp has practically been confined to the issues of 1848 to 1859, and, failing the discovery of any little nest of these rarities, or the spontaneous presentation to me of copies by generously-minded brother philatelists, I have been reluctantly—been compelled to confine my collection of this issue to photographs of those in the hands of more favoured collectors. I now submit those illustrations that I have been able to get together, and I venture to hope that the Royal Philatelic Society will also be ultimately able to acquire for their collection a complete set of photographs of all the known copies.

ISSUE II. POST-PAID.

These two stamps remained in issue about eleven and a half years, and, as is well known, during this lengthened existence they betrayed the most remarkable divergences in their printings. I do not think there is any parallel case of such long-continued use and absolute deterioration of the plates in the issues of any other country. The nearest approach thereto is in the instance of the 2d Sydney View, but this stamp was only in use about a year and a half, and the successive re-engraved plates had each only a life of a very few months, while the other two values of that issue do not present anything like the wearing out of the plate that is found in the case of the issue of Mauritius now under consideration. The population of that island is of course but small, and the quantities used were, compared with New South Wales, relatively insignificant, which will doubtless go far to account for the long period of the existence of these two plates. My object in taking up the collecting of these stamps was to endeavour to trace out and—to use the modern word—specialize the various successive states of the Plates of this issue, as when I started on their pursuit, some six years since, I did not remember to have ever seen any "highly specialized" collection of these stamps or one wherein the same care had been bestowed as in the case of the stamps of other well-known countries. I have now, however, had the advantage of seeing Mr. H. J. Duveen's superb collection of these issues which has been recently remounted, and forms a pleasing exception to the rule above referred to.

It goes without saying that in dividing up these stamps into their different phases of existence, and the wear of the plates being gradual, there can be no broad line of demarcation, so that one group necessarily leaves off where the next begins. I think, however, for the purpose of the specialist, and even for the general collector, that this issue may be divided up into five periods of existence. The catalogues give but three states of the plate, but nowadays, when so much consideration is devoted to the smallest variation of perforation or the

most minute differentiation in a surcharge, I think that even the collector "according to catalogue" may well extend his list of wants to these ten varieties of the 1d and 2d of the first issue of these remarkably interesting stamps.

The design consists practically of three leading features—the Head of the Queen, the inscriptions, and the background, and in all these three there occur, with the use of the plate, consistent deterioration of the dies. I find, however, that the best test of the state of the plate, or the one generally adopted, is that of the presence or absence of the diagonal and vertical lines of the background, and I have therefore divided my specimens in accordance therewith—as follow and as exemplified by the specimens that I submit for your consideration:

State I, 1848-53.

Background composed of full vertical and diagonal lines.

State II, 1853-55.

Background showing portions of vertical and full diagonal lines.

State III, 1856-57.

Background showing no vertical lines and diagonal lines practically full.

State IV, 1858-59.

Background showing only diagonal lines partially.

State V, 1859-60 (early).

Background showing diagonal lines quite gone in parts, notably bordering on the inscription.

In dividing up the different periods which denote these relative states of wear, I can of course only claim this arrangement as tentative and as being supported as far as possible by dated copies. I have allotted the longest period to State I for the reasons, that the design, being deeply cut, did not for some time show any appreciable wear, and that in the earlier days their use was at first doubtless far more limited than ten or twelve years later. This is abundantly borne out by the relative scarcity of the specimens of the earliest and early states of the dies.

The earliest impressions of all were undoubtedly printed upon a thickish soft yellowish wove paper, similar to that used for the Post Office issue, and not found on any stamps except those in the very earliest state of the die. There are impressions of the twopenny in a very heavy dark slaty blue, which present almost the appearance of a solid background, and show the head and neck of the Queen deeply shaded. These are known among collectors as "premières gravures," and are deservedly classed as very rare stamps, especially unused. I am, however, inclined not to consider these impressions as indicating any earlier stage of printing than those I am showing as State I. If these 2d only were the undoubted first impressions, there should be a corresponding 1d which I have never seen quoted, or described in a collection, and I am inclined to believe that the richness of the impression is practically due to the colour and quantity of the ink used in the process of printing. These dark blue stamps are, however, assuredly as early as any Post-paid, and are very desirable and rare specimens, but I do not think that they can be separated from the other specimen of the first state of the plate except under the designation of "dark blue—heavy impressions." I show one copy almost in this colour which I have compared with the splendid specimens in the collection of Mr. Duveen, and as regards the state of the plate it is absolutely identical with his copies. I may say that I consider the 1d far more difficult to find

than the 2d, especially in fine condition, while unused it is of the greatest rarity. Mr. Duveen, it will be remembered, showed at the London Philatelic Exhibition a matchless block of four of the 1d, unused, a photograph of which is shown in my collection.

I should add, in support of what I have said on the question of "earliest state," that it will be seen by stamps shown in a later issue, how very materially the redundancy of ink may affect the apparent state of the wear of the plate. State I of these stamps also, in my view, includes those which immediately followed the preceding, but were printed upon a slightly bluish and harder paper varying in substance. This paper undoubtedly did not absorb the impression so readily as the soft yellowish paper, but, allowing for this, I am of opinion that the specimens practically represent the same entirely undeteriorated state of the plate. A specimen of the 2d on a cover, dated September 1, 1853, in my collection will be found to corroborate the opinions previously expressed.

States II to V are found printed upon similar paper to that last mentioned, ranging in shade from whitish to greyish and bluish, and varying in texture, especially in the later stages, when the paper is found frequently quite thin and more bluish. Specimens in all these stamps may be found on yellowish white paper, though relatively scarce; they, however, in my view, only denote variations in the colour of this presumably locally produced paper, and are of course entirely different from the soft yellowish paper found in the earliest stage.

It will be seen that there are several varieties of obliterations, the latest used being a circle containing the word "PAID," but I do not pretend to have made a special study of this point, although I fully recognize its interest. I should add that pairs of the 2d are always scarce, and that, except the latest stage of the 1d, unused specimens of both values are rarely to be met with. The variations of the types are well known and will be found fully noted over the specimens on the sheets now submitted.

ISSUE III. MARCH, 1859.

This stamp is generally held to be the greatest libel upon her late Majesty Queen Victoria's portrait that has ever been perpetrated, and is, in fact, known to our neighbours across the Channel as the *tête de singe* issue. Mr. Lapiro's work is far inferior to that of Mr. Barnard, and, moreover, the lines are far less deeply cut. The plate hence wore out very rapidly, and, as suggested by Major Evans in his article, it was probably due to an appreciation of this fact that the preceding 2d of 1848 was re-engraved as a stand-by.

As before, I have adopted the background as showing best the dividing stages of wear, which I classify as follows:—

- (1.) Design showing full, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal lines.
- (2.) All lines partially worn away.
- (3.) All lines defective and disclosing spaces that are practically bare.

As regards the paper, it is generally thin and is found in two shades, grey and blue; but specimens may be met with in the former colour that are appreciably thicker in texture.

There are two notable varieties in the plate, i. e. No. 9, which has a circle in the centre of the ornament in the lower left corner (this variety is mentioned in *British Africa*), and No. 8, which has the letter "N" of "PENNY" reversed—i. e. the central stroke slants upwards from the lower left: the outer line of the right-hand corner ornament is also duplicated. A similar variety also occurs in No. 12 as to these lines, but they are more distinct.

The earliest impressions of these stamps are rarer than is generally imagined, while the latest impressions, if with small margins, as is frequently the case, are probably the commonest of the native-printed stamps. I call attention to a pair of these stamps, the left-hand one of which, owing to defective inking, presents the appearance of at least one more stage of wear.

ISSUE IV.

This stamp, known as the large fillet, printed from the plate re-engraved by Mr. Sherwin, was undoubtedly but little used, and was most probably prepared to supplement the preceding plate pending the preparation of the following issue with the Greek border. The stamp has always been rare, nor have I ever seen any specimen with any traces of defect beyond slight imperfections caused by partially inadequate inking. The paper is uniformly of a thinnish, blue nature. The only type varieties are those with the period as described in *British Africa*.

ISSUE V.

"Lithographed locally by Mr. Dardenne upon thick white to yellowish laid paper, the laid lines being horizontal and wide apart." Except a description of the design this is the only information given us in *British Africa*, nor can it be said to err on the side of redundancy. I understand from Major Evans that he was unable to ascertain the size or formation of the sheets, or in fact any further information as to this issue; we shall hence have to supplement our knowledge of this issue by the study of the stamps, and the principal point of these notes is to call attention to the paucity of our knowledge hereon, and to endeavour to indicate on what lines inquiry should be made. One point on which all information is lacking as to this, and indeed all native-produced issues of Mauritius, is the numbers of impressions struck off, and it would be especially interesting with regard to Mr. Dardenne's handiwork to know what was the proportion of 2d to 1d. It was probably ten to one, as the penny is immeasurably rarer in used condition, the reverse being the case as to the unused as regards the normal shades. There is no indication of the number of specimens on each sheet, but I believe it must have been considerable—possibly twenty-four, but more probably twice that number. I have measured ten horizontal pairs and found the measurements between the stamps different in nine cases, while of vertical pairs I have measured seven, six of which differed. I show moreover a vertical strip of four and seven varieties having varying but permanent defects in the lithographs, by aid of which the "types" can be distinguished. Beyond this, owing to defective wiping of the stone at a later period, blots of corroded ink were allowed to remain, and by the aid of these further "type" varieties can be identified. It is therefore fairly evident that there was a considerable number of specimens on each sheet. In default of larger blocks I have been unable to elucidate the matter further than this. The margins are so wide between each stamp that I have not been able to fix upon those most useful aids in reconstructing a plate, i. e. outside stamps. It will require the accumulation of an enormous number of unsevered specimens to prove the formation of the sheet; but other equally difficult tasks have been accomplished in the philatelic world, and now that attention has been called to the fact I am in hope that some future student may accomplish what I have but commenced.

I am enabled however to mention one point that I think is entirely novel, and I am confident will be deemed of philatelic importance and interest as re-

gards this issue, viz., that the plate, or rather stone, has been retouched. I present for inspection two singles and a pair of the twopenny value, which clearly show that the designs have been retouched in two marked variations; and I further show four other specimens having less important—but still, to my mind—unmistakeable retouches. These are all illustrated, being Nos. 1, 1a, 2, 3, 3a, 4, and 5.

No. 1 has white lines at the back of the neck continued to the base and on the right upper side of the head, while the shading of the neck has been redrawn at the back. The first stamp (Illustration 1) shows a large white space at the back of the neck; this, however, apparently is caused by a flaw in the paper. It still leaves, however, visible portions of the white line, the neck shading, and the white stroke upon the head. The illustration does not show these details so clearly as the stamp itself, but there is no doubt but that 1 and 1a represent the same "type" on the stone.

No. 2 has a white line at the back of the neck, marked, but differing from No. 1, as it is not continued to the base of the neck. The shading of coloured lines on the neck has been redrawn in coarse lines.

No. 3 and No. 3a have the nostril redrawn; there are also short vertical white strokes above the back of the neck, and the coloured shading of this has also been apparently touched up.

No. 4 has an irregular faint wavy line extending for about three-quarters of the distance at the back of the neck.

No. 5 has a faint white line extending from the hair to the base of the neck at the back.

There are possibly other varieties of these retouches, but these are all I have been enabled to find despite my most strenuous search for a number of years past. The specimen (Illustration 6) of this value is a defective impression arising doubtless from over-inking of the stone, making the hair and crown into nearly a solid mass of colour. I have not found any retouches of the one penny value, and, as before mentioned, the use of this value was relatively small, and the stones probably did not therefore require any retouching. Illustration No. 7 shows, however, a distinctly defective transfer, the lower left portion of the stamp being cut away. Illustration No. 8 shows a heavy impression somewhat resembling the 2d (No. 6), though not so much inked; the shading on the neck and hair has, however, a very blobby appearance. As to the order of issue I place these stamps thus:—

1d.

(1) blood-red.

(2) rose-red.

(3) vermilion.

Both the former are immeasurably rarer than the latter, and in unused condition are as rare as almost any native-produced stamp.

2d.

(1) slate-blue.

(2) blue, pale to bright.

The slate-blue is far the rarer of the two, and as I have found none with the ink spots or retouches before mentioned, and further, as the design is more clearly and distinctly printed than the normal blue shades, I have no hesitation in assigning it priority of issue. I have never seen it unused.

It will be seen that this lithographed issue affords good ground for philatelic research, and I shall be a grateful recipient of any information from my fellow students which may help us to elucidate what is practically the only unsolved problem in connection with the remarkable issues of stamps engraved, lithographed, and printed in the island of Mauritius—*London Philatelist*.