

ARCHER'S PERFORATION. AN INTERESTING DISCOVERY.

(By H. F. JOHNSON)

An unused pair of 1d. reds printed from the original die, watermarked small crown and perforated 16, recently came into the writer's possession. Examination proved them to be printed from Plate 8.

This plate was finished and registered on the 31st July, 1840, and was employed for printing stamps both in black and red. On the 8th Sept., 1841, the plate was destroyed as no longer fit for use.

On Dec. 4th, 1840, Rowland Hill wrote to Mr. J. B. Bacon, of Messrs. Perkins, Bacon & Petch, "asking him to make an immediate trial with the steel plates and crown paper of two blue colours (A) a plain, and (B) Prussian blue plain, and of red No. 16 G." On Dec. 15th, 1840, twelve sheets, four in each colour, were forwarded. These twelve sheets Mr. E. D. Bacon has almost conclusively proved to have been printed from Plate 8.

Archer's experiments were made during 1847-53. His original invention was for separating the stamps by means of rouletting, two machines on different principles being constructed for this purpose. Both machines were abandoned as of no practical use, and they are merely mentioned here inasmuch as they were the initial efforts that led to the invention and perfecting of the perforating machine.

His so-called "perfected machine" was tried about the end of July, 1849, but proved to be unsuccessful. Further alterations were made, and on May 16th, 1850, it was about to be brought into use. It is recorded that about 5000 to 6000 sheets of stamps were experimented on.

The stamps known to have been perforated by Archer were generally well perforated and evenly centred. Stamps from Plates 90 and 92 to 101 have been identified as having been perforated by him. Records show that these plates were in use while Archer was making his perforating experiments. It is therefore safe to assume that stamps printed from plates in use during this time would be drawn upon, thus accounting for the many different plates known.

One of the difficulties with which Archer had to contend was the difference in the length of the sheets, caused either by the shrinkage of the paper or by the varying lengths of the plates. This difficulty was obviated by alterations in the adjusting power of the machine, and the making of new plates to produce sheets of stamps of uniform length. Prior to this difficulty being overcome, old stock may well have been examined and measured with a view to getting sheets adaptable to the machine, thus accounting for the possible use of sheets from Plate 8. Stamps from other early plates may also have been used by Archer, and if so, have yet to be discovered.

That old stock was in existence and presumably in store was proved by Mr. J. B. Bacon's evidence given before the Select Committee on Postage Label Stamps on April 20th, 1852. In the course of his examination he pro-

duced two sheets of stamps, one "gummed," which he stated was "taken" ten years previously, and one ungummed freshly "taken", in order to show the extreme variation in the length of the plates. This ten years interval would bring the production of the earlier sheet very near to the period of use of Plate 8.

It will be noticed that all "Archer's" are from plates prior to Plate 132, i.e., with the first type of check letters. Several examples of perforated stamps printed from plates with the second type of check letters are known used late in 1853 and early in January, 1854, prior to the Government issue on the 28th Jan., 1854. It is assumed that these were probably from trial sheets perforated for testing the Government machines.

It has been stated that some of the sheets perforated by Archer were gummed after perforation, the argument used in favour of this contention being that unused specimens shown gum on the face of the stamp round the edges of the holes. In the case of Plate 96 (of which a large block existed) the writer has examined a number of specimens, all of which have this appearance, due, in his opinion, to their having been "stuck down" at some time and afterwards having been "damped off." The "damping off" would probably account for the gum penetrating through the holes to the face of the stamp, and also for the many frail and broken perforations which were common to this block before it was separated into smaller blocks.

Archer in his evidence before the Select Committee of 1852 stated that the machine clogged when the sheets were put in on the first day of the trial, owing to the gum on the sheets being wet. He also stated that the difficulty of the machines clogging with the gum was overcome at a later date. This question of gumming has been dealt with rather fully here, in order to disprove the erroneous statement frequently put forward that a genuine unused "Archer perforation" must show traces of the gum on the face of the stamp, the effect produced by gumming after perforating.

Ample proof is given in the evidence before the Select Committee that perforating took place after gumming, and there is not even a suggestion of a contrary practice.

To return to our discovery; the writer is satisfied that the pair of stamps here illustrated was perforated by a comb machine gauging 16, and that it was printed from Plate 8. He is further of the opinion that the perforation was done by Archer, inasmuch as its characteristics are identical with Archer's work on stamps printed from Plate 96, with which they have been compared.

The question now arises — how to account for the use of stamps from Plate 8 about ten years previously.

It is contended that one (or more) of the four experimental sheets printed in red from this plate, referred to above, was by some chance ordered to be further experimented upon to the extent of being perforated; or that one sheet (or more) from Plate 8 was taken from old stock, found to be of suitable length for Archer's machine, and duly perforated.

It may be mentioned that, before coming into the writer's possession, the pair of stamps was purchased a few years since in an old curio shop in Mecclesfield for a trifling amount. (Reprinted from *The Stamp Lover*).