

Joubert and the 1855 Fourpenny Carmine

Edited by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL from an original article by A G Rigo de Righi. First published in the Philatelic Bulletin in February 1973, it is reproduced here to commemorate the centenary of this groundbreaking postage stamp.

It is probably a matter of some debate whether the designer or the engraver contribute more to the beauty (or the dullness) of a stamp design. Few, however, can dispute that Jean Ferdinand Joubert de la Fertè was the most accomplished and influential of the postage stamp engravers of the mid-nineteenth century. Not only was he directly or indirectly responsible for the classic heads of Queen Victoria on the De La Rue issues from 1855 onwards, but his engraved portraits were used as the central themes of innumerable Colonial and Foreign issues printed by De La Rue.

A refugee from post-Napoleonic France, Joubert settled in England in 1840 after having exhibited in the Paris Salon of that year. His superlative craftsmanship soon won him recognition in this country. He was awarded two silver medals by the Society of Arts in 1847 and such well-known Royal Academicians as William Etty and E J Poynter entrusted him with the engraving of their works. Joubert exhibited his own work at the Royal Academy on many occasions.

Joubert's Earliest Stamp Engraving Work In April 1853 the Board of Inland Revenue decided to introduce adhesive stamps for the payment of stamp duty on drafts and receipts. Since it was not practicable for reasons of accommodation to produce these directly at Somerset House, Thomas De La Rue was given the work on a four-year contract from August 1853. The central portion of the design of these new adhesive fiscals was a profile portrait of Queen Victoria. There is some evidence to show that a staff engraver of De La Rue engraved the relatively coarse head of the 1853 stamps (since they charged for the engraving). However, in December 1853 Joubert was commissioned directly by Ormond Hill on behalf of the Inland Revenue to engrave a head on an oval ground. This may be the head of which a recess die proof, signed by Joubert, is in the R M Phillips collection.

The 1855 Fourpenny Die Joubert's next commission was his most famous, the head for the GB Fourpenny carmine of 1855, the world's first surface printed postage stamp. On the evidence of the original invoices (in the De La Rue Private Day Books), the printers were not this time responsible for the engraving, and it was Joubert who was appointed and subsequently remunerated by the Board of Inland Revenue. It is perhaps also significant that Joubert's original 1855 master die was preserved in

official archives and is held in the collection of the British Postal Museum and Archives (BPMA). It would appear to be the only surface-printed die of the mid-Victorian period to have survived.

The R M Phillips collection in the BPMA contains a fine succession of die proofs of the 1855 Fourpenny covering progressive stages. These vary from an early marked proof of the duplicate head die, to the same die complete with the frame and lettering before and after the striking of the leads used to make up the Electro frames from which the actual printing plates were 'grown'. Joubert's 1855 head die was also used for the first surface-printed 6d value, but the design for the 1/- stamp of 1856 required a head on an oval instead of a circular background.

The invoice in the De La Rue Day Books shows how this was done. It reads "Taking from the Original 4d die a punch from which was removed a portion of the background lines in order to substitute an elliptical for the circular border – retouching the same in other parts... – encircling the head to equal the original".

The R M Phillips collection includes die proofs of the 1/- stamp and an essay for this value, using the same 'elliptical' head, but with elaborate ornamentation in the corners and between the inscriptions.

From 1856 until 1877 Joubert worked as De La Rue's Chief Engraver, specialising in the Queen's heads which were the central feature of the design of the many British and Colonial surface-printed stamps produced by De La Rue.

An unsuspected facet of Joubert's skill and inventiveness is revealed by a portrait of him held by De La Rue, It is a photograph, taken about 1860, and "burnt in on enamel for permanence" by a process invented by Joubert himself. The gradation of tones and the strength of the image in the original photograph are as fresh and clear as the year they were printed.

(880 words)