

The Secret of the Crawford Sheets

What happened to the stamp find in the General Post Office of Dublin?

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IN HIS ARTICLE, THE EARL OF CRAWFORD KT - A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH, *The London Philatelist* December 2002 Supplement, Ron Negus gave us a fascinating picture of probably the most important collector in the early years of the 20th century. Unfortunately, there were very few details given of the Crawford collection itself. However, from the Great Britain section, the three Crawford sheets were repeatedly mentioned: The large part sheet of the 1840 One Penny Black; that of the never-issued 1840, VR One Penny Black official stamp, as well as the huge 1840 Two Pence Blue piece. Until now information about these sheets has been sketchy. The author, in his search for details of the Crawford part sheets, wanted to know: what size were the part sheets and which sheet positions were included? From which printing plates did the One Penny Black and the Two Pence Blue originate? What has happened to the Crawford sheets or parts thereof to the present?

The importance of the three Crawford part sheets for British philately is evidenced by comparison with the size of the largest multiples known today of these stamps issued in 1840. Philately today recognises the largest preserved block of 43 One Penny Blacks as the *St Maur Blacks*. In comparison, the Crawford part sheet was more than four times larger, consisting of 175 stamps. The St Maur Blacks were discovered in 1931 in the estate of Col Harold St Maur of Stover Park, Newton Abbot in Devon by his son, Major R.W.M. St Maur, in a suitcase, along with all sorts of *objets d'art*. The block came on the market for the first time in 1959 at a Harmers auction in London. R.M. Phillips of Brighton acquired it. After Phillips left his collection to the nation as a donation for the establishment of a Postal Museum, the St Maur Blacks could be admired in the National Postal Museum in London until its closure a few years ago.

A part sheet of 48 stamps of the 1840 Two Pence Blue, Plate 2 became renowned as the *Buccleuch Find*. Here there is also a great discrepancy; the Crawford part sheet with 168 stamps having been almost four times larger. Sir Walter John Montagu-Douglas Scott, the eighth Duke of Buccleuch found the blue block of 48 in an old travel writing set, alongside quills, pencils and sealing wax.

The largest preserved multiple of the never-issued official stamp VR One Penny Black is a block of 36 consisting of three horizontal rows of 12 stamps. The Crawford Part Sheet of the VR One Penny Black was six times larger, comprising 219 stamps.

The Original Discovery

The year was 1905 and the first cars were driving through the streets of Dublin. Stamp collecting was very popular in England and Europe through all classes of society. Without doubt, there were considerably more stamp collectors in Europe at that time than there are today.

The General Post Office in Dublin was still under the jurisdiction of the postal administration in London. During renovation work in the rooms of the Dublin GPO, an old shelving wall was removed. Behind this, workers found an old, long-forgotten cupboard. Together with the postal officials the cupboard was opened. What did it contain? First of all, several thousand unused One Penny and Two Pence Mulready envelopes and letter sheets in complete sheets of twelve came to light. And then the real sensation: what was presumed to be a complete, or at least an almost complete sheet of each of the first stamps in the world: the 1840, One Penny Black and Two Pence Blue, as well as one of the never-issued Official stamps, the One Penny Black, with the letters VR in the top corners.

The stamp find was carefully recovered. The Dublin postal officials did not quite know what

should be done with the discovery. So it was decided to hand the sheets over to the main administration of the postal authorities in London.

At that time, the officials in London had more contact with the great philatelists and stamp dealers. They realised the vast importance the discovery of their colleagues in Dublin would have for GB philately. Neville Lacy Stocken recalls in his book, *Stamps of Great Price - The blue book of Philately* in 1932:

“I had been called upon by two officials of the London GPO and shown these stamps (no mention was made of any Mulreadys) some little time before Lord Derby (then Post Master General) had sent for Mr Phillips [author’s note: the then owner of Stanley Gibbons] to come and see them, and to the best of my recollection, two of the sheets were quite entire, only one (I think it was the VR) having had any stamps removed from it ... I did my best to persuade the officials to ‘do a deal’ and let me have them, mentioning that a very good price, running far into four figures would not frighten me from becoming a purchaser, but in vain, and although I extracted a half promise that should it be decided to put them on the market, I should get the refusal of them, I never heard any more of the matter until some time after, when Lord Crawford told me that he had acquired them. The question is – if I am right in my recollection regarding the size of the sheets when I saw them (and I am morally certain that I am) what became of the others between that time and when Lord Derby showed them to Phillips?”

Obviously, C.J. Phillips from Stanley Gibbons, had been able to talk the Post Master General, Lord Derby, into selling the sheets. Phillips probably acquired the sheets, so that he could then sell them on to Lord Crawford shortly afterwards.

One year later, in 1906, the large international stamp exhibition took place in Manchester. In Lord Crawford’s exhibit, the three part sheets were the finest pieces displayed. Until the present day, the Crawford collection is known as the most wonderful GB collection ever. Due to a lack of records or photos of the Crawford collection, this reputation is perhaps more imagined however, rather than being based on fact.

The Re-Discovery

For a long time, the author knew of the three sheets only as the legendary Crawford sheets, having no information as to the printing plates or the letterings of the stamps preserved. Where were the sheets now? One could assume that the sheets had been divided over the decades. But if that were the case, which of today’s known and unused multiples, had their origins in the Crawford sheets from the original find in Dublin’s GPO?

In 1999, the author chanced to visit the library of the Verein für Briefmarkenkunde 1878 eV Frankfurt am Main. While leafing through the 31 May 1906 issue of the *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal*, his gaze suddenly fell on a photo of three almost complete sheets of the 1840 issues (Fig. 1), One Penny Black, Two Pence Blue and of the VR One Penny Black. The word ‘unbelievable’ sprang to mind: these were the legendary Crawford sheets from the Dublin Post Office. Admittedly, the illustrations were worse than poor, compared with today’s standards and the corner letters on the stamps were unrecognisable. But with the help of the marginal inscriptions and by counting off the individual rows of stamps, the exact position of the stamps on the sheet could be reliably established.

The Secrets of the Crawford Sheets

Positions on the Sheets

In his book in 1932, Neville Stocken only repeats the figures of C.J. Phillips in *Stamp Collecting* Vol XXXIV, page 268, without giving the corner letters that are important for the position on the sheets: 1d black - 175 stamps, 2d blue - 168 stamps and 1d black VR - 219 stamps. With the help of the photos, the positions on the sheets were exactly determined:

1840 One Penny Black, 175 stamps consisting of 14 complete horizontal rows from B to O as

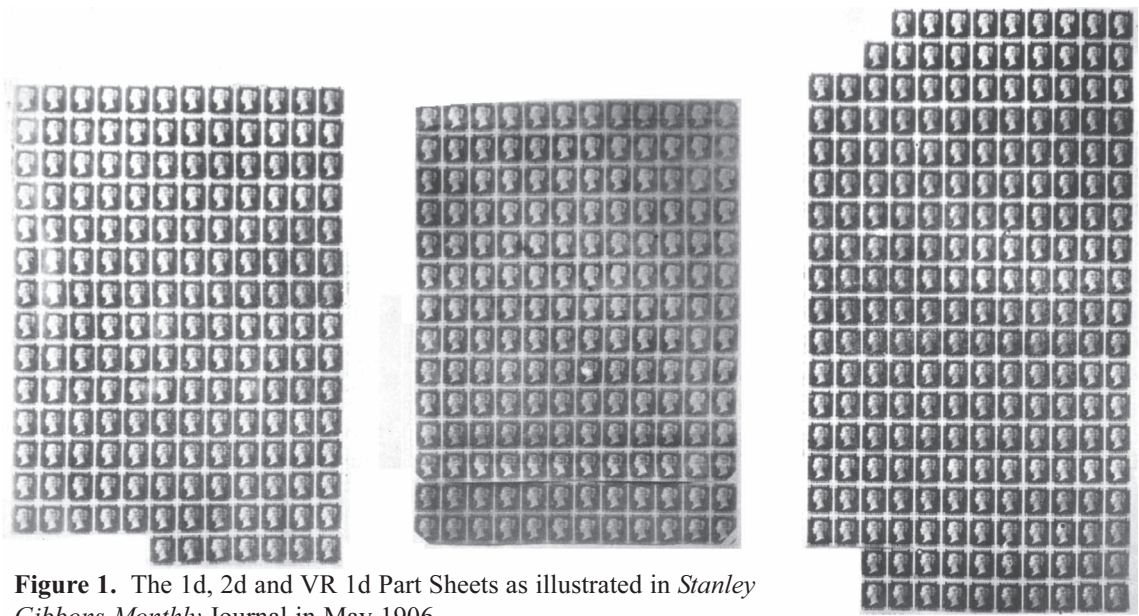


Figure 1. The 1d, 2d and VR 1d Part Sheets as illustrated in *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal* in May 1906

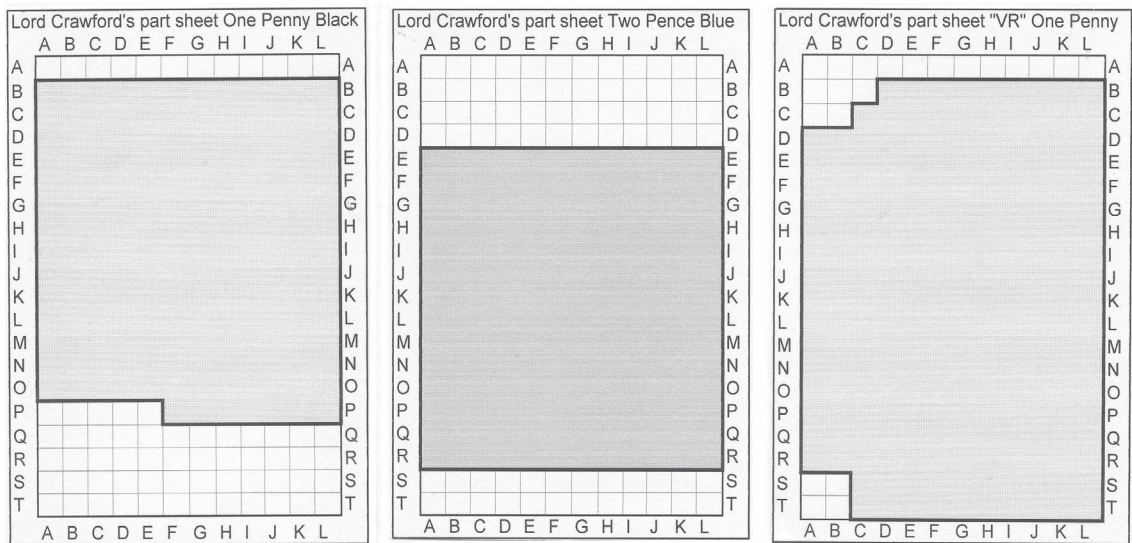


Figure 2. The positions of the Part Sheets in Post Office Sheets of 240 stamps

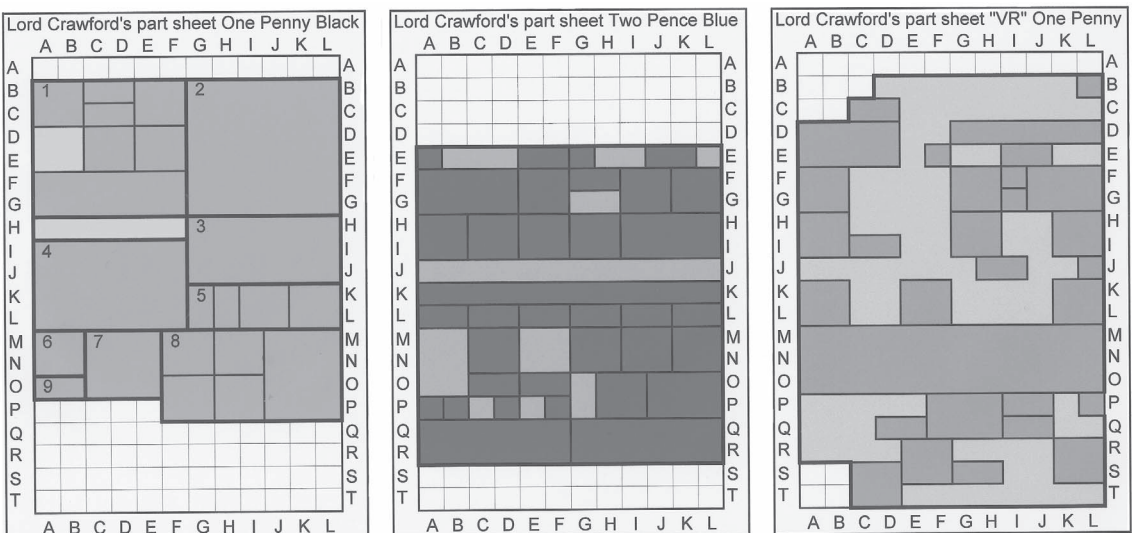


Figure 3. The later subdivision of the part sheets

well as slightly more than a half P row with stamps PF-PL present (Figs 2, 3 & 4).

1840 Two Pence Blue, 168 stamps consisting of 14 complete horizontal rows from E to R (Figs 2, 3 & 15). However, it is clear to see that both of the last rows Q and R had already been separated into a block of 24. In rows E, K and P, traces of horizontal creases are clearly recognisable.

1d black VR, 219 stamps consisting of the rows from B (nine positions from BD-BL), C (ten positions from CC- CL), the complete rows of D to R, as well as rows S (positions from SC-SL) and T (positions from TC-TL) (Figs 2, 3 & 10).

Identification of the Printing Plates

After the exact sheet positions of the corner letters of the Crawford part sheets had been identified, the next step was to identify the printing plates involved. For the official stamp VR One Penny Black, this was not difficult, since there is only Plate A. For the 1840 Two Pence Blue there are Plates 1 and 2. By checking today's known and unused multiples, it soon became clear that only Plate 1 could be involved. Unused blocks from Plate 1 are relatively common. Nearly all of today's known blocks of Two Pence Blue stem from the original block of 168 stamps. These are within horizontal rows E to R in the Crawford part sheet.

Determining the printing plate for the 1840 One Penny Black proved to be the most difficult task, but it has been established that this part sheet was printed from Plate 7. As with the block of the Two Pence Blues from Plate 1, nearly all of today's known unused Penny Black pieces from Plate 7 come from the original Crawford block of 175 stamps.

The Fate of the Distribution

Probably not long after the sale to R.B. Sparrow, the Crawford part sheets were sold on by him and finally cut into smaller blocks and multiples. *The London Philatelist* reported in January 1914:

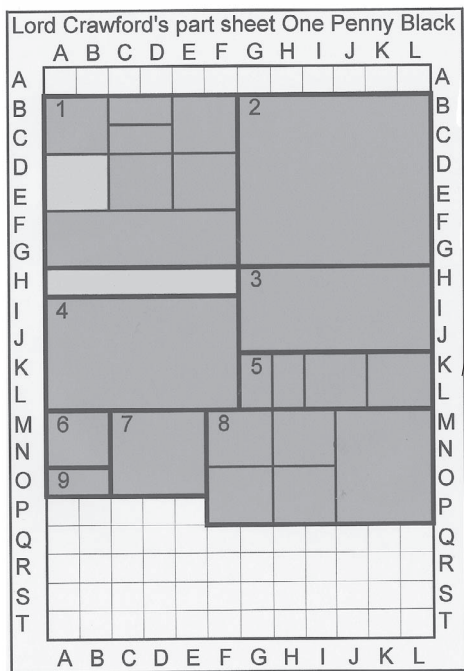
“The purchaser is Mr R.B. Sparrow, of Talybont-on-Usk, a gentleman whose name is known in philatelic circles, his late father having been for many years a well known philatelist. We understand that some portions of the Crawford collection, notably the remarkable accumulation of proofs and essays, will be incorporated with Mr. Sparrow's own collection, but that the vast majority of the stamps will be dispersed by sale to collectors.”

The following account tries to prove the origin of the various blocks of Crawford part sheets known today and to follow their paths through the hands of dealers and auctions over time. The distribution of the part sheets into smaller blocks is illustrated in Figure 3. The dark coloured areas mark the positions on the sheet that are known today. The light areas within the diagrams contain stamps that have not yet been located again.

1840 One Penny Black Plate 7

Out of the original 175 stamps in the Crawford part sheet, 165 of them can be traced in blocks and multiples that are known about today. They dovetail into the original area from 1906, which consists of 14 complete horizontal rows from B to O as well as the half P row (Figs 3 & 4) as follows:

1. BA-GF Block of 36: ex *A Baronet's collection* (Baron Anthony de Worms), illustrated in *The British Philatelist*, July 1938 with the block of 36 BG-GL as a rejoined block of 72. This block of 36 (BA-GF) has later been divided into:
 - BA-CB Block of 4: anonymous (R. Lowe auction 1958) Renato Mondolfo *Catalogo di offerta* (1969)
 - BC-CD Block of 4: anonymous (Gibbons auctions 1978, 1981, 1983) ex Rhone (David Feldman 1981) Gibbons (offer from Stock, 1996)
 - BE-CF Block of 4: ex Wills (Harmers 1989), ex TES (Christies 1995)
 - DC-ED Block of 4: anonymous (Harmers 1991), ex TES (Christies 1995)
 - DE-EF Block of 4: ex Atkinson (Christies 1990)
 - FA-GF Block of 12: ex Daisy (Christies 1996)



4a



4b



4c



4e



4d

Figure 4



5b



5c

5a



5d

5e



5f

Figure 5



2. BG-GL Block of 36: ex *A Baronet's Collection* (Baron Anthony de Worms) illustrated in *The British Philatelist*, July 1938 with the block of 36 BA-GF as a rejoined block of 72. Now in the National Heritage Collection.
3. HG-JL Block of 18: Royal Collection
4. IA-LF Block of 24: ex Seymour (R. Lowe 1952)
5. KG-LL Block of 12: ex Seymour (R. Lowe 1952) (Fig. 4a). This block has later been divided into:
 - KG-LH Block of 4: anonymous (various R. Lowe sales 1953/54) (Fig. 4b). Later vertically separated into pairs KG-LG and KH-LH (Fig. 4e).
 - KI-LJ Block of 4: anonymous (R. Lowe 1953), ex Cooley (Shreeves 1995) anonymous (Phillips 1997 and Spink 1997) (Fig. 4c)
 - KK-LL Block of 4: anon (R. Lowe 1953) ex Daisy (Christies 1996) (Fig. 4d)
6. MA-NB Block of 4: ex Ferrari (Gilbert 1924)
7. MC-OE Block of 9: ex Adams (R. Lowe 1956), ex Wills (Harmers 1989)
8. MF-PL Block of 28: ex Seymour (R. Lowe 1951) (Fig. 5a). This block has later been divided into the following multiples:
 - MF-NG Block of 4: anonymous (R. Lowe 1952 and Phillips 1988) ex Dale (Gibbons 1969), ex TES (Christies 1995) (Fig. 5b)
 - MH-NI Block of 4: anonymous (R. Lowe 1951 and Phillips 1994) (Fig. 5c)
 - OF-PG Block of 4: anonymous (Habsburg-Feldman 1989, R. Lowe-Christies 1990 and Spink 1997, (described in error as plate 8), ex Sayeed 2002 (Fig. 5d)
 - OH-PI Block of 4: anonymous (Harmers 1970), ex Griffiths (R. Lowe-Christies 1985) ex Fraser (Spink 2001) (Illustration 5e)
 - MJ-PL Block of 12: ex Maximus (St Gibbons 1970), ex Shaida (Harmers-Craveri 1992) (Fig. 5e)
9. OA-OB Horizontal pair: ex Praportchetovitch (Plumridge 1933)

1840 Two Pence Blue Plate 1

The reconstruction of this Crawford part sheet of 168 stamps is considerably more difficult. Obviously, compared to the One Penny sheet, it was divided into smaller multiples and single stamps. The reason for this could lie in the fact that, unused 1840 Two Pence Blue stamps (Figs 3 & 15) are considerably more rare and therefore more expensive than unused One Penny Blacks. That is why smaller multiples and single stamps were easier to sell. In addition, demand for rare, unused single Two Pence Blue stamps came from many collectors of traditional collections.

The Crawford Part Sheet of Two Pence Blues was badly creased by folds in the horizontal E, K, and P rows. This is clearly visible from the 1906 photos, despite the poor print quality. Perhaps smaller blocks were cut around these folded rows. Today the folds themselves are preserved mostly in individual stamps, pairs or strips.

The horizontal folds are also clearly visible in an illustration of extracts from the Crawford part sheet in Osborne's book, *Two Pence Blue Studies of Plates 1-15* on page 168a. Even in 1946, Osborne mentioned in his book that the sheet had already been divided into smaller blocks. The clearly visible creases may be philatelic defects but advantage has been taken of them to prove their famous origin by lining them up between pieces:

- The upper fold in row E is documented on the examples of positions EA, EF-EG and EJ-EK (Fig. 6).
- Also in the strip of 12, KA-KL (ex Charles Williams a947 and ex Daisy 1996) its origins from the Crawford Part Sheet is revealed by the clear horizontal crease: "...horizontal crease at top which cracks the surface..." as the strip was described by Christies in 1996 (Fig. 7).
- Both individual stamps PA and PB (Fig. 8a) come from the Enoch collection (1978). The strong horizontal creases are clearly recognisable, verifying their origins in the Crawford Part Sheet. The same is true for PJ-PL from the block of six OJ-PL (Fig. 8b).

The Official Stamp, VR One Penny Black Plate A

Here the situation is similar to that of the block of 1840 Two Pence Blue from Plate 1. Clearly the sheet is now cut into single stamps for the most part. (Figs 3 & 10). However, there is still a large multiple of 36 consisting of the horizontal M, N and O rows which has survived the decades unseparated (Fig. 9). This block represents the largest preserved multiple of this stamp today.

There is a further interesting characteristic for identifying the origins of the stamps and blocks from this Crawford part sheet. Stamps and blocks on the right hand side of the sheet show a characteristic gum residue on the edge of the sheet, next to the horizontal B to N rows. So these stamps are relatively easy to prove as originating from Crawford (Fig. 10).

The part sheet for the VR One Penny Black also showed clear horizontal folds. Rows E, J, L and Q are affected. As with the Two Pence Blue, the creases in today's known single stamps, pairs and blocks from the Crawford part sheet are clearly detectable. From row E, the stamps EF and



Figure 6



Figure 7 Only ends of the strip are shown

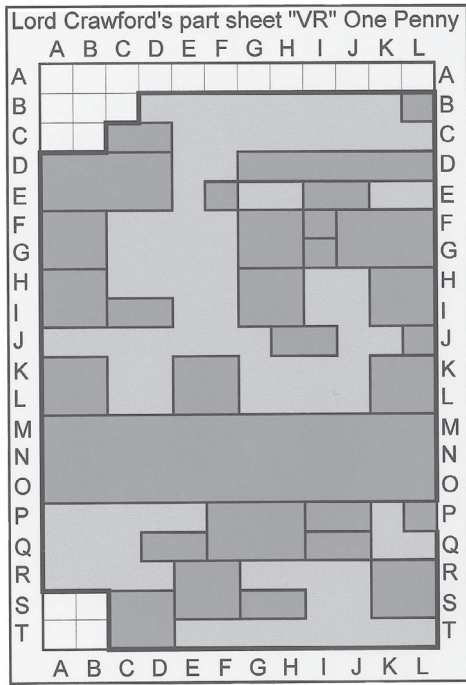


8b

The location of the creases in the Two Pence sheet. The lines indicate their position.



Figure 8a



10a



10b

Figure 10



10d



10c



Figure 9

EK are shown as examples (Fig. 11). From row J and row L, JH-JI were clearly folded (Fig. 12) as well as each of the lower two stamps, LE, LF and LK-LL from the block of four (Fig. 13).

The fate of the block of four SC-TD is interesting (Fig. 14a). Back in 1905, from the Crawford part sheet (Fig. 3) a block of four SC-TD had already been separated. This block was thereafter split into single stamps and a pair in the 1950s (Figs 14b and 14c).

Separation of blocks before their acquisition by Lord Crawford?

In 1932, Neville Stocken reported that he remembered seeing complete or nearly complete sheets when he first came across the Crawford part sheets. Before their acquisition by Lord Crawford, were a few items actually split off and sold separately by the top postal officials or the interim owner to C.J. Phillips from Stanley Gibbons?

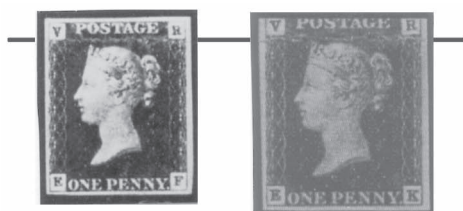


Figure 11



Figure 12

The location of the creases in the One Penny VR sheet. The lines indicate their position.

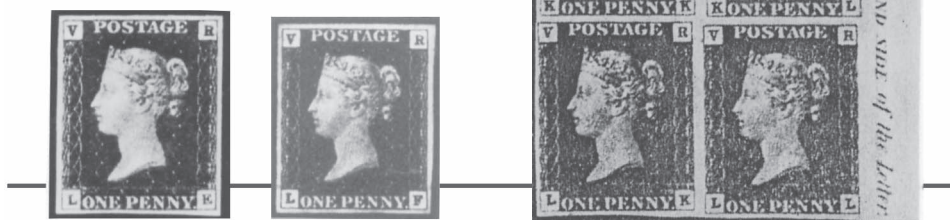


Figure 13

This assumption can be proved at least in the case of the Two Pence and the VR One Penny Black part sheets. The two known Two Pence blocks of twelve, QA-RF (Fig. 15a) and QG-RL (Fig. 15b) make up the two lower rows in the Crawford part sheet. Back in 1906, they had already been separated from the part sheet (Fig. 1). The scissor cut on the lower edge is very irregular. Therefore it is easy to identify the block of eight SA-TD (Fig. 15c), the block of four SE-TF and the block of eight SG-TJ (Fig. 15d) with the help of the characteristic edge lengths that were previously connected.

The corner marginal block of four SK-TL can be found in the Royal Collection. It may also originate from this sheet. On balance, today's known blocks from the S and T rows, certainly belonged to the Crawford Part Sheet, but were separated before the acquisition by Lord Crawford. Was the block of four, SK-TL perhaps a gift from the postal administration to the enthusiastic philatelist and future King George V?

From the part sheet of the VR One Penny Black, there is another block of four, SA-TB missing from the lower left hand corner of the sheet. This block of four was also separated before Lord Crawford's acquisition and is now in the Postal Heritage Trust (R.M. Phillips collection).



Figure 14. Showing the later splitting of the SC-TD block of four

How did the sheets come to be in the Dublin Post Office?

Here one can only speculate, but there are several points that allow at least a theory as to the original reasons for handing over the stamps to Dublin.

On closer examination of the different blocks of One Penny Blacks, from Plate 7, one can see small hand written notes at different places on the edge of the sheet: 24lb (Figs 5a and 16). They are comments about the paper weight. It is known that experimental printings using Plate 7 were carried out on paper with different weights. Some of these experimental printings from Plate 7 on various thicknesses of paper were used in the experiments to clean the cancels from the black stamps (Figs 17 to 19). Perhaps the find from the Dublin post office represents the stamps that were left over from the cancellation experiments? The following points support this theory:

- a) The cancellation cleaning experiments were carried out in June and July 1840, among others also by the Dublin chemist, Michael Donovan. Here Donovan needed original stamps for his tests. Are the sheets or part sheets that were found in 1905 leftovers that were no longer needed for these experiments?
- b) As well as tests on stamps of varying paper thickness from Plate 7, it is known that the same cancellation cleaning experiments were also carried out on the never issued 1840 VR One Penny Black Official stamps.
- c) In the Royal Collection, an irregular piece of ten One Penny stamps from Plate 7 can be found, lettered SA-SI and TA. On the left sheet margin of this strip, the handwritten note 24lb can be seen, which is very similar to the unused multiples originating from the Crawford sheet. Exactly the sheet positions for the strip of ten, SA-SI, as well as TA on the 24lb paper are missing on the Crawford sheet. This piece is illustrated by Gavin Fryer and Clive Akerman in *The Reform of the Post Office ...* (Ref. 1).
- d) Known documents, each bearing examples of the cancellation cleaning experiments for 24lb, 26lb and 28lb weights of paper, carry the comment 24lb, as well as individual One Penny Black stamps, with positions on the sheet from rows S and T (Figs 18a to 18c). All these positions are missing on the Crawford part sheet. Do all these stamps, as well as the block of ten from the Royal Collection, come from the original complete sheet of 240 stamps on 24lb paper? Were the stamps found in Dublin's General Post Office the unused remnants from the cancellation cleaning experiments?

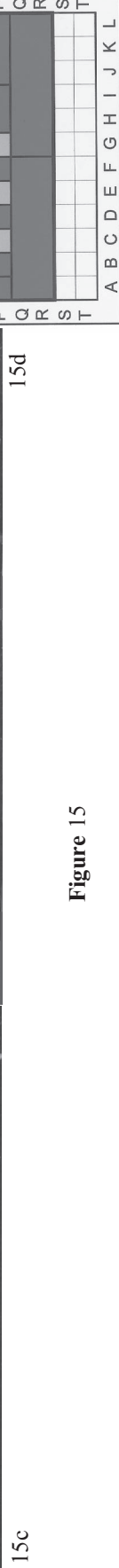


Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figures 18a, 18b and 18c

Conclusion

The part sheets from the Dublin Post Office must represent, without a doubt, the most important philatelic stamp find in GB-philately. With the acquisition of the sheets by the Earl of Crawford, they became famous in British philately as the Crawford part sheets at the beginning of the last century. After the death of the Earl of Crawford, the part sheets were split. Thereafter, the Crawford part sheets fell into ongoing oblivion. Details about the printing plates or the exact positions on the sheets were not passed on and remained unknown. With the help of old illustrations from 1906 and an examination of today's known blocks and multiples from these issues, printing plates and positions on the sheets have once again been established, 100 years after their discovery. These individual stamps and blocks from the Crawford part sheets, can now complete their philatelic pedigree with the fascinating and magical provenance: *ex Lord Crawford Collection*.

Reference

1. Fryer G. and Akerman C., *The Reform of the Post Office in the Victorian Era and its Impact on the Economic and Social Activity (Volume II)*, p813, RPSL, London 2000.

