

The Half-Lengths of Victoria 1850-59

Until October 1849 the Port Phillip District was administered by the colony of New South Wales (NSW). The British Government assented to separate the district to form a separate colony in July 1851 that would become Victoria. In anticipation of separation, NSW allowed the District to issue its own postage stamps coinciding with the introduction of the first NSW issues in January 1850. Most British colonies at the time relied on the design, production and printing of postage stamps by English printers. As there were only two months remaining in 1849, the Colonial Secretary in Sydney decided that all aspects of stamp design and production should be done locally. The first designs, called "Half-Lengths" because they depict Queen Victoria from the waist up, were printed and issued under three private contracts from 1850 to 1855.

The Half Lengths are notable as being the first stamps issued by the colony of Victoria and are unusual in that they are among the world's first lithographed stamps. They are among the few British Colonial issues produced completely outside the United Kingdom. The stamps were designed, printed and issued in three values: 1d, 2d, and 3d by three private companies in Melbourne:

1850-53: Thomas Ham 1d: 5 Printings; 2d 8 Printings; 3d 5 Printings
1854: J.S. Campbell 1d: 1 Printing; 3d 1 Printing
1854-55: Messrs. Campbell & Fergusson 1d: 3 Printings; 3d 3 Printings
1857 JSC and C&F printings rouletted by the G.P.O. Melbourne
1859 JSC and C&F printings perforated by F.W. Robinson

They comprise 26 printings, two of which were each officially rouletted and perforated between 1857-59. Produced from stones in sheets ranging from 30 to 400 subjects, the Half Lengths were printed in highly variable shades on three main types of paper. This complexity of stamp production was used in three postal-rate periods, resulting in a wide range of stamp-cover combinations.

The arrangement of this exhibit is chronological, first by printing contract, then by successive die states from which transfer groups were made, then by printing. Colour and shade varieties are shown for all printings. The stone layout and the number of stamps in each printing are given in the introduction for each separate printing. Transfer group positions are provided in brackets [] beneath each stamp. Each cancellation's town of origin is provided, e.g., "Melbourne 1". Information about rarity and provenance, where appropriate, is given under each stamp or cover.

This exhibit of the Half Lengths of Victoria contains examples from all the 26 printings, as well as the rouletted and perforated issues. Shade varieties are shown for each printing, represented by unused and used examples selected for colour, condition and rarity. Postal usages are shown for nearly all printings by covers selected to illustrate principle domestic and foreign rates, and the on-cover rarity of individual issues. Throughout the exhibit are more than one hundred items for which either the stamps themselves or their postal usage exists in numbers of ten or less: these are denoted by a bold black frame.

Personal study through auction catalogues and major collections from the last 80 years into the survival of unused examples and large multiples of the shades of each printing has clarified the relative scarcity of these issues in private hands from those in institutional collections. The items which are provided a rarity classification is based on this research.

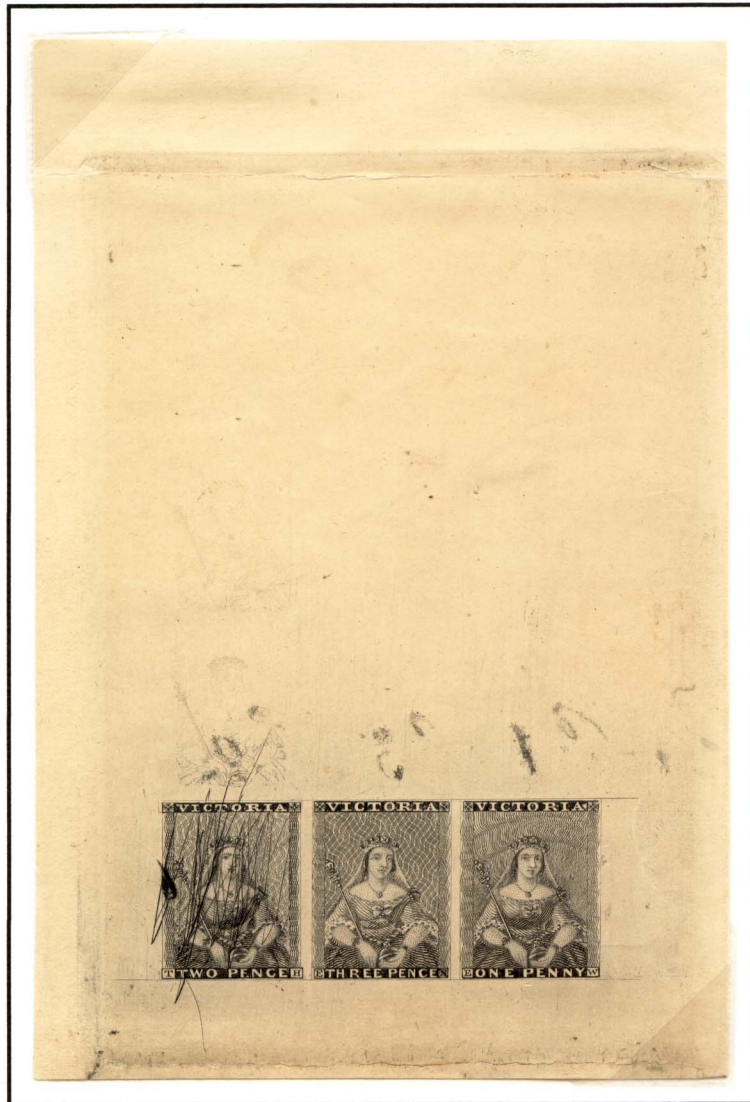
Principal References:

"The Half Lengths of Victoria" by J.R.W.Purves (1953)
"Victoria: The Half Length Portraits and the Twopence Queen Enthroned" by Charles Lathrop Pack (1923)
"The Stamps of Victoria" by Geoff Kellow (1990)
"The Half Lengths of Victoria: The Stamps and Postal History, 1850-59." by J.H. Barwis in prep., 2007
Auction catalogues of the collections of Ferrari, Hall, "A.P", Baetgen, Barelli, Boucher, Burrus, Caspary, Gartner, Harvey, Pack, Perry, Purves, and Wawn.

Essays and Proofs

It appears that no essays were prepared. Only two original die proofs exist, both from the original die. These are in the Royal Philatelic Collection (1d) and the Tapling Collection (2d).

The 1901 Reprint of the Die Plate



In 1901, a reprint of the die plate was made at the instigation of the Duke of York (later King George V). The plate had room for twelve positions, the three dies being positions 10, 11, and 12. Incomplete and faint engravings of the Queen's portrait appear in positions 4 and 7. The 2d exhibits damage in the left border which led to the abandonment of this value in late 1852, and was subsequently defaced by a series of fine scratches. Only five examples are recorded, one in the Royal collection.

Ex Pack, Purves

Printings from the First State of the Die

Ham's bond was not signed until December 28, 1849, leaving only three days to meet the planned issue date of January 1. Time constraints, the fact that the die was recut in early January, and the color variations seen all suggest that the first printings were intended as provisional.

Stones for the first printing of each value were laid down with direct die transfers, so their impressions in some cases rival the quality of intaglio printing. The first printings comprise fewer than 10,000 of each value, placing them among the world's rarest postal issues. The 2d and 3d second printings were also from the first die state, but only the 2d stone was made up with direct die transfers.

First Printing
January 1850
1d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham



Orange Vermillion [f]
Less than 20 examples
estimated to exist



Orange Brown
[c] Melbourne **1**
Ex Wawn, Purves, Perry



Orange Brown [29-30]
Geelong **15**
Less than 10 pairs recorded
Ex Pack, Harris Lock,
Purves, Perry



Orange Brown
[e] Geelong **15**
Ex Perry



Dull Chocolate Brown [20]
Melbourne **1**
Ex Perry



Dull Chocolate Brown
[Unknown type]
The only recorded
unused example
Ex Perry



Dull Chocolate Brown [g]



First State



Second State

Printed in three shades from a single stone of 30 subjects (5 x 6). This printing has not been plated; positions in brackets are Purves's "un-keyed" types. Of the approximately 9,600 printed, it is estimated that only 150 have survived. In early January, the 1d die was recut in the upper tablet to thicken and straighten the line above *VICTORIA*.

First Printing
January 1850
2d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in Lilac Mauve



[i]
Four unused
examples recorded



[1] Geelong 15



[Unknown type]
Ovens 5



[vi] Maidens Punt 12
Late usage



[2] Melbourne 1



[v] Broken River 4

Printed in Dull Lilac Mauve



[iv] Melbourne 1
Ex Wawn, Purves



[xiii] Bunnenyong 22



Stone A



Stone B

Printed in shades of lilac-mauve to mauve-lilac from Stone A, the first of two 2d stones of 30 subjects (5 x 6). Stone A stamps show a broader fourth white line above *C* of *PENCE*. This printing has not been plated; in brackets are the un-keyed types of Pack and Purves. It has been estimated that 7,200 stamps were printed.

First Printing
January 1850
2d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Lilac Mauve



2d Dull Lilac Mauve [v] and second printing 3d Blue [6] cancelled by Butterfly 3 on entire from Seymour to Van Diemens Land pre-paying the 2d inland and 3d ship letter rates.

On the reverse are datestamps for Seymour (11th August 1850) in blue; Melbourne (12th August 1850); and Launceston (17th August 1850)

This is a late usage of the first printing 2d. All the other twelve covers recorded are pre-paying the 2d inland letter rate, and this is the only cover showing multiple values.

Part of address restored not affecting stamps or cancellations.

Second Printing
January 1850
2d Stone B

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in Brownish Lilac



[8] Melbourne 1
Ex Purves



[17]
Ex Pack



[16] Melbourne 1
An unusual shade



[vi] Geelong 15

Printed in Grey Lilac



[18] Melbourne 1
Ex Boker



[xii] Melbourne 1
Ex Currie, Slade Slade, Perry



[vii] Melbourne 1
Ex Purves, Perry



[v-32] Fiery Creek 27
Four pairs recorded



First State



Second State

Printed from Stone B, this is the second 30-subject stone (5 x 6) used to print the first die state. Shades grade between brown-lilac and grey-lilac. This printing has not been plated; in brackets are the unkeyed types of Pack and Purves. It has been estimated that 7,800 stamps were printed. In early January, after this printing, the 2d die was recut to coarsen the background.

First Printing
January 1850
3d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Bright Blue



[5] Melbourne 1



[30] Melbourne 1



[1]
 Four unused singles recorded
 Ex Caspary



[2] Kilmore 2



[12]



3d Bright Blue [4] cancelled by Butterfly 1 on entire from Melbourne to England pre-paying the 3d ship letter rate.

On the reverse are datestamps for Melbourne; London (29th May 1850) and Plymouth (30th May 1850).

Fifteen covers are recorded bearing the first printing 3d.

Ex Purves, Baetgen



First State



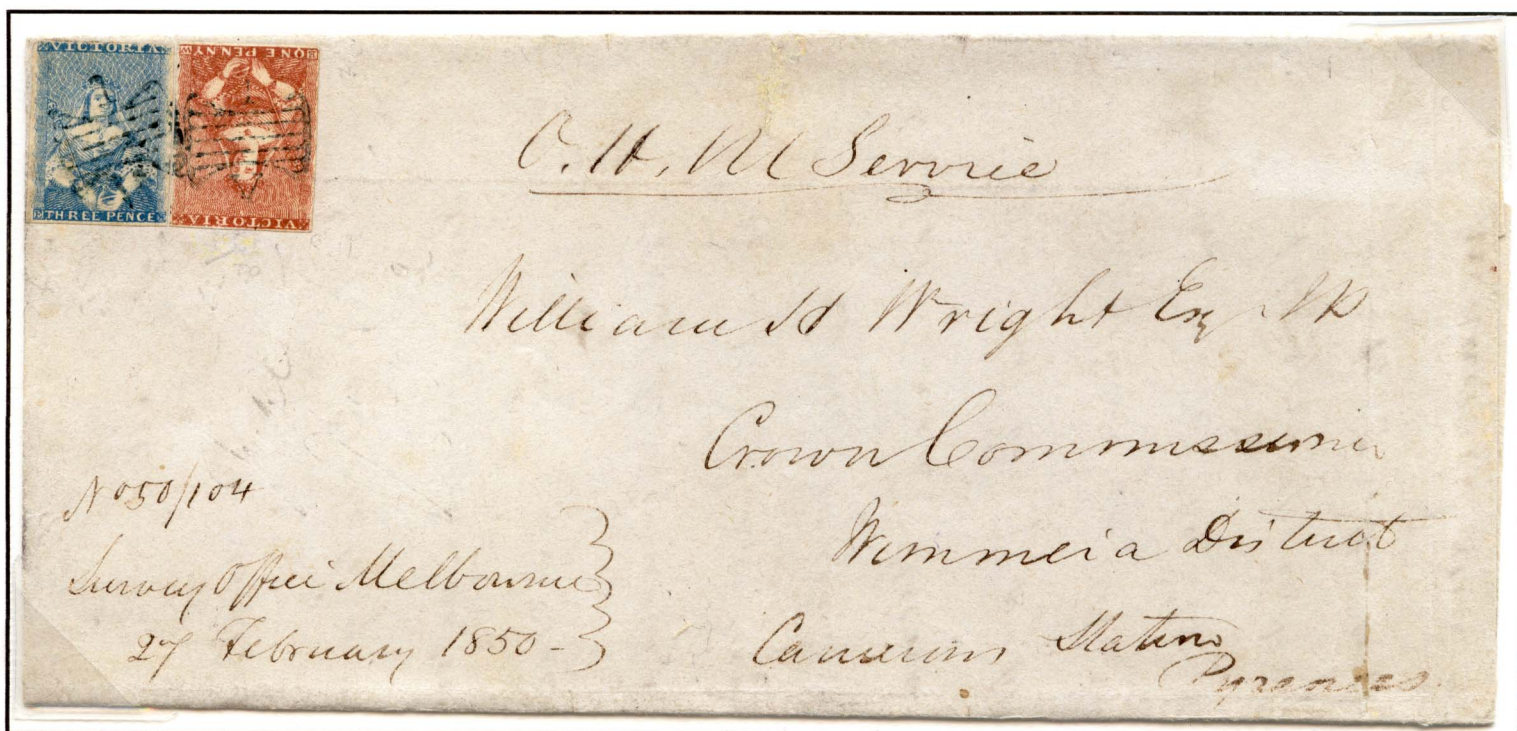
Second State

Printed in Bright Blue from a single stone of 30 subjects (5 x 6). This is the only first-printing value that has been plated. Purves's positions are in brackets. Of the estimated 9,600 printed, fewer than 200 can be documented as having survived. In early January the 3d die was recut to better define the outline of the orb band at left.

First Printing
January 1850
3d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Bright Blue



3d Bright Blue [15] and second printing 1d Red Brown [11] cancelled by Butterfly 1 on entire from Melbourne to Wimmera pre-paying double the 2d inland letter rate.

On the reverse are datestamps for Melbourne (27th February 1850) and Burn Bank (2nd March 1850)

Fifteen covers are recorded bearing the first printing 3d and this is the earliest cover known of the second printing 1d.

Ex Pack; Dale Lichtenstein

Second Printing
January 1850
3d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Blue



[6]
Ex Caspary



[13]



[6]



[6] Melbourne **1**



[12] Geelong **15**
Ex Slade Slade, Perry



[12]
Ex Pack



[10] Geelong **15**



[1-2] Melbourne **1**



[12] and fifth printing 2d Drab [2]
Cancelled by Wimmera datestamp
Ex Wawn



[4-5] Melbourne **1**
Ex Goodall, Perry

A stone of 120 positions was used to print an estimated 37,200 stamps (310 sheets). This was the first of Ham's printing stones created using transfers from an intermediate stone, a process that caused a significant loss of design detail compared to the first printing. Printed in shades of blue, including the bright blue used for the first printing, only plating can differentiate these two printings with certainty. Stamps were on issue from March 1850 until October 1851.

Second Printing
January 1850
3d

First State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Blue



3d Blue[5] and eighth printing 2d Drab [13] cancelled by Butterfly 31 on envelope from The Grange to England.

On the reverse are datestamps for The Grange (24th April 1851) and Shepton Mallet (7th October 1851)

Ex Perry



3d Blue pair [12-13] and fifth printing 1d pair [7-8] cancelled by Butterfly 26 on cover front from Chepstowe to London. The "Honduras" left Melbourne on the 29th of August 1851, arriving in London on the 8th of January 1852.

Two covers are recorded bearing pairs of two different values from the Ham printings.

Printings from the Second State of the Die

In January 1850 the dies of all three values were recut to complete their designs, as shown in the insets at the bottom of previous pages. New printing stones of 120 subjects were made up, all using transfers from intermediate stones. Subject spacing on the intermediate stones ranged from 1-2 mm

Second Printing
January 1850
1d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Red Brown



[21]

Three unused examples recorded
Ex Purves, Perry



[18] Geelong **15**



[11-12-13] Melbourne **1**

Two strips of three are recorded
Ex Pack, Harris



[20] Melbourne **1**



1d Red Brown pair [11-12] cancelled by Butterfly 15 pre-paying the 2d inland letter rate on envelope from Geelong to The Grange.

On the reverse is a datestamp for Geelong (3rd July 1850)

Pairs are the largest multiple recorded on cover

Ex Baetgen

Second Printing
January 1850
1d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Red Brown



1d Red Brown [24] and [5] with Third Printing 2d Grey Lilac [2] and [15] cancelled by Butterfly 1 pre-paying double the 3d ship letter rate on entire from Melbourne to Scotland.

On the reverse are datestamps for Melbourne (7th June 1850) and London (19th November 1850).

The highest recorded franking using the 1d Second Printing.

Second Printing
January 1850
1d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in Pale Dull Red Brown



[8]

Five unused examples recorded
Ex Caspary



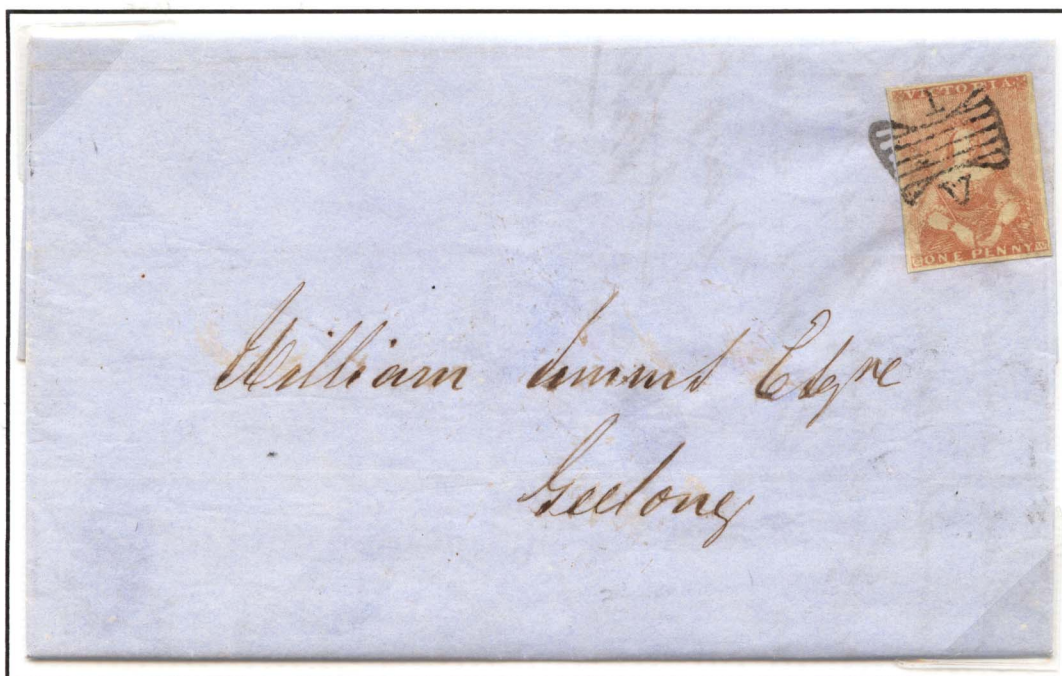
[2] Melbourne 1



[20] and sixth printing 2d Red Lilac [22]
Melbourne 1



[7] Melbourne 1



1d Pale Dull Brown [17] cancelled by Butterfly 1 on entire under paying the 2d inland letter rate by 1d from Melbourne to Geelong.

On the reverse are datestamps for Melbourne (7th May 1851) and Geelong (7th May 1851). Eight covers are recorded in this shade.

The upper edge of the top tablet was thickened and straightened by recutting the die. About 52,440 were printed from a stone of 120 subjects, laid down from an intermediate stone of 30 (5 x 6). The stamps were on issue from February to September 1850.

Third Printing
January 1850
2d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Grey Lilac



[1]
Ex Pack



[25]
Less than ten unused
examples known
Ex Green, Duveen, Perry



[3] The Glenelg 33



[19-20] Ballan 21
Ex Boucher, Purves, Perry



[13-14] Geelong 15



2d Grey Lilac [21] cancelled by Butterfly 15 on entire pre-paying the 2d inland letter rate from Geelong to Melbourne.

On the reverse is the datestamp for Geelong (4th May 1850) and Melbourne (5th May 1850)
Ex Pack, Gartner, Perry

The background was erased in the die and recut to coarsen the background. An estimated 46,500 were printed from a stone of 120 subjects. The stamps were on issue from January to April 1850.

Third Printing
January 1850
2d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in Dull Grey



[8]
Eight unused
examples recorded



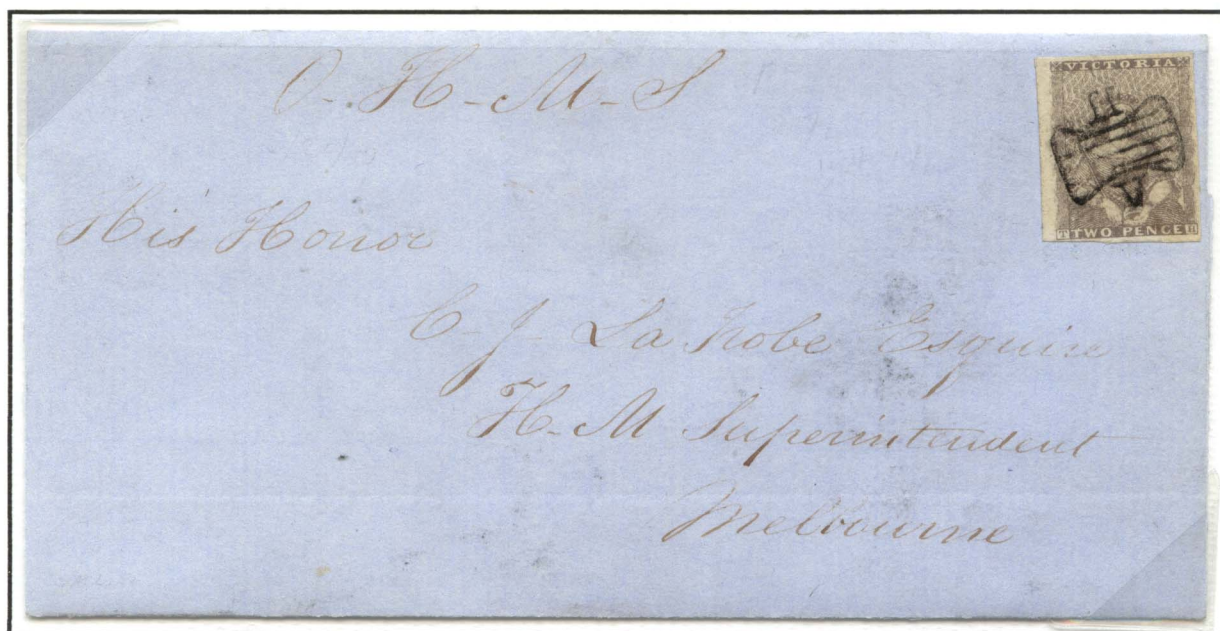
[15] Melbourne 1



[13] [27] and first printing 3d Bright Blue [4]



[27] Geelong 15



2d Dull Grey [21] cancelled by Butterfly 11 on O.H.M.S. entire addressed to the Lieutenant Governor of Victoria, Charles La Trobe pre-paying the 2d inland letter rate from Mount Macedon to Melbourne.

On the reverse are datestamps for Mount Macedon (22nd June 1850) and Melbourne (22nd June 1850).

One of two recorded covers from Mount Macedon.

Ex Pack

Third Printing
January 1850
2d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in Dull Grey



2d Dull Grey [7] [13] and second printing 1d Red Brown [13] cancelled by Butterfly 21 on envelope pre-paying the 2d inland and 3d ship letter rates from Ballan to Ireland..

On the reverse are datestamps for Ballan (29th May 1850); Melbourne (30th May 1850) and Market Hill (13th October 1850)

One of two recorded covers from Ballan.

Ex Baetgen

Third Printing
February 1850
3d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham

Printed in shades of Blue



[8]
Ex Boker, Perry



[8]



[9] Deep Blue
Melbourne 1



[6] Melbourne 1



[1] Geelong 15



[2] Geelong 15
Ex Perry



[8-9] Melbourne 1
Ex Purves, Perry



[4] with eighth printing 2d Pale Dull Brown
Seymour 46



[6-7-8] Melbourne 1
This strip of three is the second
largest multiple recorded
Ex Lee

In January the orb outline was recut on the die to better define its left edge. Approximately 60,000 were printed from a stone of 120 positions, laid down from an intermediate stone of 10 (5x2). Printing quality is poorer than the 2d third-printing, because more intermediate transfers were required to lay down the printing stone, and because a slightly more porous paper was used. The earliest known date of use is 14th June 1851.

Third Printing
February 1850
3d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham



3d Blue [4] , showing plate wear on the background at top right, cancelled by Barred Oval 1 on mourning envelope pre-paying the 3d ship letter rate from Melbourne to England.

On the reverse are datestamps for Melbourne (18th June 1852) and London (27th November 1852).

Retouches to the Printing Stone

This printing stone contains a large number of retouches, probably due to the small intermediate transfer group of ten. In all, 22 retouches have been identified, involving eight of the ten types.



[2] Geelong 2
Retouch
background
opposite crown



[5]
Retouch top
right corner



[5] Melbourne 1
Retouch top
right corner



[7]
Retouch to the
right of the
Queen's head



[8] Melbourne 1
Retouch bottom
left corner

Third Printing
February 1850
3d

Second State of the Die
Thomas Ham



3d Blue [9] and eighth printing 2d Cinnamon [25] cancelled by indistinct Barred Oval 48 on entire pre-paying the 2d inland and 3d ship letter rates from The Leigh to Scotland.

On the reverse are datestamps for The Leigh (10th February 1853); Melbourne (10th February 1853); and Collinsburgh (4th July 1853).

Two other covers are recorded from this correspondence.



Reconstruction of the intermediate stone of ten subjects used to create the third-printing stone of 120. Twelve transfers of this group were arranged as twelve rows of ten on the printing stone.