

## Great Britain and Peru philatelic heritage intertwined: A tale involving Perkins, Bacon & Petch (later Perkins, Bacon & Co.) between 1847 and 1863

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### Perkins, Bacon & Petch, Bank Note Engravers in London

The bank note engraving premises of Perkins, Bacon & Petch (PBP) saw the birth of the first printed adhesive label for postal use in 1840. Since the printing of the Black Penny several other line-engraved stamps were produced at 69 Fleet Street in London, but only one series was produced for a private corporation, The Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC). We owe this circumstance to the family ties between Joshua Butters Bacon and his cousin William Wheelwright, promoter of the PSNC, who obtained the exclusivity for PSNC steamers to carry governmental mail bags between ports serviced by the company in the South Pacific. In August 1847, Wheelwright enquired about the production of an adhesive label for use with letters carried aboard their ships. Dies of the two stamps, depicting a paddled steamship, have been found carrying W.S. initials for William Salter, head engraver at PBP at the time. The die for 1 real stamp was completed on September 25th 1847, the die for the 2 reales stamp three days later. The PSNC stamps never served their original purpose. By 1851 Peru and Chile had negotiated contracts with the PSNC, ending the company's right to receive and charge for mail correspondence and establishing annual payments to carry governmental mail bags.



Figure 1. 1 real Blue (Scott 1) and 2 reales Red (Scott 2). Stamps were produced in sheets of 160 stamps (10 horizontal, 16 vertical) for PSNC between October and January 1848 by PBP in London. The steamer heads Westward in the 1 real and Eastward on the 2 reales stamps. New with original gum. Half-ounce and one-ounce weights are in relation to dues applied for carriage by PSNC at the time..

According to Edward D. Bacon a first printing from steel plates rendered by November 16<sup>th</sup> 1847 a total of 44 sheets (160 2 reales stamps each) and 314 sheets (160 1 real stamps each) and were addressed to Alexander Hutchinson agent for the PSNC in Panama along with 12 obliterating stamps, obliterating ink and other articles for intended private postal use. A second lot with equal number of stamps was forwarded January 15<sup>th</sup> 1848 to the same agent, now in Callao, Peru. Although they were produced, later printings were not served to PSNC.

### Peru adopts the pre-paid postage and uses PSNC Stamps

By May 1856 Postmaster-General of Peru, José Dávila Condemarin, had already persuaded the Peruvian government to authorize a pre-paid postage scheme, but local production of stamps was not approved until October 1857 and the first stamp series were not made available until May 1858.

In the meantime, the PSNC manager, Jorge Petrie, offered to provide gratuitously the stamps which were kept at PSNC Callao offices since 1847. The stamps were handed over to Roberto Polack on the 11th of November 1857. A supreme decree document dated November 27<sup>th</sup> 1857, reported by Aldo Salvatecci, details that many stamp sheets were glued to each other, with several unusable sheets, which explains why only a small subset of remaining stamps (48.000 1 real stamps and 1.600 2 real stamps were deemed in good condition) were released to independent vendors for pre-paid postal trial service between Lima, Callao and Chorrillos. The PSNC stamps had a very short-lived postal history until March 10th 1858. There are only 3 covers known carrying 1 real stamps with dated cancellations (none with a Lima cancel) and 5 covers with undated cancellations. No cover is known carrying the 2 reales stamp. Paul Ascher, a member of the Société Philatélique Sud-Américaine of Lima wrote in 1890, that only 58 specimens were likely used.



Figure 2: 1 real Blue (Scott 1) and 2 reales Red (Scott 2) Lima dated cancelled stamps 13 days apart on January 13th 1858 and January 26th 1858, respectively. The stamps correspond to numbers 10 out of 31 and 4 out of 8 in their category, respectively, as per the census conducted by C. Wooster from the Peru Philatelic Study Circle.

On the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1860 the unsold stamps remaining in the hands of the Peruvian government were incinerated. Altogether, based on total value of stamps sold, we can deduct that only 7% of usable stamps were sold to vendors, who in turn may not have sold all their stock to users. Therefore, after that date, uncanceled stamps for collection could only come from stamps which remained in stock at local vendors or unsold stamps in custody at PBP. An additional component to the scarcity of these stamps is that PBP suffered a fire incident on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1857. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1857, a letter addressed to Inland Revenue, declares “about 3 reams much burnt” for both PSNC 1 real and 2 reales stamps in indicate they were destroyed on March 15th (along with 25 sheets of red Cape of Good Hope Triangular One Penny Stamps). A ream was 480 sheets of paper in those days, so this accounts for 70% of 1 real and all 2 reales stamps in the hands of PBP at the time (2060 and 350 sheets, respectively). Charles Wooster reports that most of the unused collected copies likely came from the few sheets salvaged from the fire.

### The paper used by Perkins, Bacon & Petch

Whereas government prescribed their own paper for British labels, the paper of PSNC stamps was actually chosen by PBP with cost considerations in mind. All the stamps produced in 1847-1848 for PSNC were printed on unwatermarked paper. Its possible that it corresponds to the white wove paper type described in paper damping assays which were conducted at PBP on September 3rd 1840 with a Penny Red plate.

An important part of manual printing involves damping of paper before it is laid on the inked plate. The white wove paper was dipped in Prussiate of Potash. E.D. Bacon reports that sheets of damped paper would not always be in the same condition of dampness as last worked sheets will be drier than first ones in a daily printing work cycle. Prussiate of Potash interaction with the alum in the paper (sizing was also highly variable) contributed to the characteristic bleuté of the PSNC series (stout bluish wove paper as described by E. Bacon) and other line-engraved stamps produced by PBP in the period, including British Penny Reds and Penny Blues produced in 1841 and the first stamps of Cape of Good Hope (COGH). Prussiate of Potash was also included in the red ink used at the time. This consequently increased the bleuté in Red stamps as is well known in PSNC 2 reales red stamps. Until 1857, when a new red color was introduced, the bleuté effect persisted in PBP printed work.

The lines of the gravure carry less ink, therefore the blue color is considerably reduced along those lines. When drier sheets of paper were used this led to the so-called Ivory Head effect which can be observed in the Penny Red and Penny Blue stamps, as well as COGH stamps. This is not found on PSNC stamps.



Figure 3. Shows the Ivory Head in Penny Red (SG10) and Penny Blue (SG14) stamps resulting from Prussiate of Potash impregnated in the paper with lesser abundance on the dense or thicker gravure of the line-engraved stamps.



Figure 4. Shows the back of a block of four COGH triangular One Penny stamps, also printed by BPC in 1853 (SG1a). A crease of the paper is very visible and attest to an irregularity of the printing process (possible irregular pressing of damped paper). The paper also shows the characteristic bleuté and a weak Ivory Head effect, particularly at sites of thick gravure.

Some authors have assigned the bleuté effect to the gum when applied to Prussiate of Potash impregnated paper. As pointed out by E.D. Bacon the effect is also visible on never gummed paper (as for example in the ungummed Red Penny Sheet printed on Dickinson paper exhibited by Pearson Hill at a meeting of the Philatelic Society in London in 1881). He equally pointed out that the gum may actually enhance the phenomenon as it wets again the paper, but it is not its cause.

### PSNC stamps design

In the letter addressed to his cousin dated August 17th 1847 Joshua Bacon states: “We can easily prepare what you want, but if we make entirely new designs and engravings as I suppose your numbers wanted would not be great, the stamps would be

very expensive, whereas I hope to arrange something both handsome and secure by a combination of dies now at hand at a reasonable rate”.

The oval background design was inspired, as with British stamps, from previous work with banknotes and is described as “lathe work” by J.B. Bacon in his letter to his cousin on August 25th 1847. It was produced by engine-turned engraving and is reported to be very similar to Bank of Jamaica Bills of Exchange produced 1836 by PBP. The so-called sidographic work was considered by PBP to be an effective way to prevent forgery. The same engine-engraving methods were later applied in 1854 by PBC for the background of the first stamps of Chile, New Zealand and South Australia. Noting the resemblance between PSNC and Ceylon Stamps, Kurt Kimmel & Patrick Pearson point out to Plate XXV of the Perkins, Bacon & Co. (PBC) Records at the Royal Philatelic Society in London. After the death of Henry Petch, in 1852, BPB had changed its legal name.



Fig 5. Ceylan's One Penny Blue (SG2a) and Two Pence Green (SG3) issued in 1857. The Two Pence stamp was superposed with the PSNC 1 real stamp and demonstrates the re-use, almost identical, yet trimmed, of the oval lace design of PNSC stamps.

The most important feature of the design, which was fiercely defended by PSNC before BPB, is the hand-engraved paddle steamship. BPB objections were that greater security against forgery could be obtained by having an engraved figure in place of a steamer. The Peyton Collection at the Smithsonian Institution displays dies which were submitted to PSNC consideration without success. One die includes a full picture of a steamer headed Eastwards, similar to one found in the PSNC 2 reales stamp. The final gravure kept the design of the vessel trimmed from the top and bow sides to fit into the oval background design





Fig 6. The steamer design was likely inspired from a painting found in the Liverpool office of PSNC, reproduced by Arthur C. Wardle in his centennial commemorative book published in 1940. The black and white photograph extracted from the book has been digitally processed (using DeepAI) to produce a colorized version which shows steamers Peru in the forefront and Chile in the background.



Fig 7. Shows the detail of the steamer stern pavilion as seen on PSNC stamps (Scott 1 and 2). The level of detail is such that the British Naval Ensign can be seen. A much finer print can be seen on a blue reprint of 1862 from the same plate on white vertically laid paper (where the steamer has the direction of the 2 reales stamp)

### PSNC stamps color

Given the dates of printing and comments provided by E. D. Bacon, PSNC stamp colors likely result from ink used at the same period for One Penny and Two Pence stamps of Great Britain. As previously mentioned, no mayor ink changes are reported until 1857.



Fig 8. Cancelled GB Penny Red (SG8 plate 26, first printed June 26th 1841), PSNC 2 reales (Scott 2, printed in 1847) and COGH One Penny Red (SG1a, printed in 1853).



Fig 9. Cancelled GB Penny Blue (SG14 plate 4, printed November 29th 1849), PSNC 1 real cancelled (Scott 1, printed in 1847) and Ceylon One Penny (SG2a, printed in 1857)

In 1861 PBC temporarily lost their contract to print stamps when it became known that J.B. Bacon gave copies of new issues, printer's waste and reprinted stamps to Ormond Hill and other friends of PBC management without permission from the governments whose issues were involved. Despite the above, and perhaps because PSNC was not a postal administration, several color reprints on different paper types were still produced by PBC between December 20th 1861 and June 6th 1863 at the request of William Just, Managing Director at PSNC in Liverpool, for the pleasure of collecting acquaintances



Fig 10. Shows one stamp from the first reprint sent on December 20<sup>th</sup> 1861 from PSNC: 1 real Red on stout bluish wove paper (30 specimens produced)



Fig 11. The two stamps from the second reprint sent on April 25<sup>th</sup> 1862 and July 21<sup>st</sup> 1862: 1 real blue and 2 reales Brown on white wove paper (160 and 320 specimens produced)



Fig 12. The two stamps from the third reprint sent on October 23<sup>rd</sup> 1862: 1 real Red and 2 reales Blue on white vertically laid paper (160 specimens of each produced)



Fig 13. All stamps from the fourth and final reprint sent on June 6<sup>th</sup> 1863: 1 real Red, Blue, Green, and Yellow; 2 reales Brown, Green, Yellow, Green, Red and Blue on thin white wove paper (800 specimens of each produced)

Color comparison on century old stamps subject to very different preservation conditions, moreover when printed on very different paper matrices, is a daunting task. In truth what ought to be compared is ink chemistry, preferably with non-invasive methods. This defines the next chapter of my research.

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