

'First Sidefaces' is the name given to the set of stamps which in 1874 superseded the earliest issue of New Zealand, the Chalon Heads. 'Sidefaces', because they depict Queen Victoria in side face profile as opposed to the Chalon portrait which had shown her full-face. Inscribed NEW ZEALAND POSTAGE, they are 'First' Sidefaces to distinguish them from the similar set inscribed NEW ZEALAND POSTAGE & REVENUE – the 'Second Sidefaces' – which replaced them in 1882.



The New Zealand 'First Sidefaces'

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It is easy enough to put together a simplified set of eight stamps, but to go further and put together an exhibition display of the issue is quite a challenge. Perhaps that is why the First Sidefaces have suffered unjustified neglect. It is much harder to develop three, five or eight frames of First Sidefaces than the equivalent for Chalon Heads, Second Sidefaces, or any other New Zealand definitive issue.

In part, that is simply a matter of longevity. The Chalon Heads were in use for 19 years, from 1855 to the end of 1873. The Second Sidefaces lasted from 1882 to 1900: again, 19 years. But the First Sidefaces survived for only nine years, being effectively exhausted by the end of 1882. No other New Zealand definitive set before the reign of the present Queen had such a short life.

Other reasons for the difficulty in putting together a substantial display of First Sidefaces have to do with their historical niche. New Zealand was still lightly peopled, although its population was growing. Excluding Maori, who had little impact on the postal services, there were just over quarter of a million people in the country in 1871. Australia, by comparison, had over two million non-aboriginal inhabitants by the mid-late 1870s.

Few local collectors

More important from a philatelic point of view, there were no stamp clubs and hardly any collectors in the country. (The earliest known recognizably philatelic cover posted in New Zealand was sold at auction last year; formerly in the Bruce Alexandre collection, it is dated 1884.) So no-one was consciously saving the First Sidefaces during their period of issue. As a result, blocks, especially of the earlier perforations, are rarely seen. A further hindrance to philatelic research is that most records of the central archives have been destroyed.

At least in New Zealand, the 1870s also seem to have been a watershed in the way firms and individuals treated envelopes. Before the advent of postage stamps, and for some years thereafter, messages were normally on letter sheets. These were kept because they were an integral part of the message. Old habits die hard, and as the use of envelopes spread they, too, were often preserved with their contents. But by the 1870s it would seem that most New Zealanders were simply extracting the contents and throwing the envelopes away. In any event, covers bearing First Sidefaces are just as hard to find as

those with Chalon Heads—probably harder. Only one substantial archive, the McLean correspondence, has bequeathed a significant number to later collectors.

No doubt it would be tempting for a United Kingdom or French judge, faced by an exhibit of New Zealand First Sidefaces, mentally to compare them with their own national equivalents, the British Queen Victoria stamps with large coloured letters in the corners (1873–80) or the Peace & Commerce set of France (first issued 1876). Any such comparison, though, would be grossly misleading, given the largely undeveloped nature of New Zealand which was still very much a new country and lacked not only the volume of mail but the filing traditions of long established businesses and the developing interest in collecting stamps in the Old World. Set in their New Zealand context, the First Sidefaces are a major philatelic challenge of a very different order and significance.

Background

The issue had a long gestation period. As early as 1867, De La Rue & Co had proposed surface-printed stamps to the London Agent for the New Zealand Government. By 1871 the plates used for producing the Chalon Heads were wearing badly. Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co produced line-engraved essays for replacements, based on the 1860–63 Nova Scotia issue printed by the American Bank Note Company, but this approach was rebuffed. Bolstered by the knowledge that Great Britain used the cheaper process of surface-printing, the authorities decided that it was now timely to take up De La Rue's suggestion.

The Agent General accepted De La Rue's cost estimate on 1 August 1872. That very same day De La Rue designed a 'NZ and Star' watermark (Fig 2), although it was later modified to have single-lined letters rather than double-lined ones. Stamp designs were also prepared by the firm with commendable



Fig 1 Bradbury, Wilkinson 'Nova Scotia' essay. Six such essays exist, printed in different colours with the head and frame printed separately and the head then glued in place

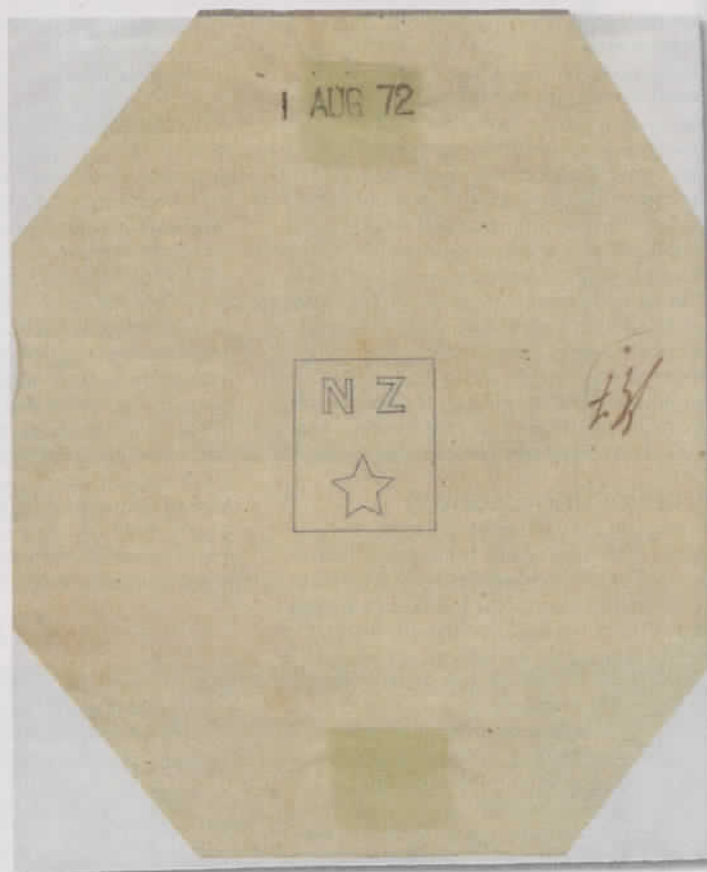


Fig 2 De La Rue essay for a new New Zealand watermark

speed, and the first die proof before hardening (of the 6d. value) was struck on 16 October.

The stamps themselves, however, were not issued in the Colony until the start of 1874. Originally there were six values. The 1d. paid for unsealed commercial matter. 2d. was the standard local rate. There proved to be little use for the 3d. stamp, much less than in the Chalon Head period, because the postage rate to Australia had been reduced from 3d. to 2d. at the same time as the stamps appeared. 6d. paid postage on the cheapest overseas rate to the United Kingdom. The 4d. and 1s. stamps covered double-rate letters inland and overseas respectively.

De La Rue did their work to a high professional standard, and the plates had not noticeably worn by the time they were retired from service. The sheets were of 240, in four panes of 60, and the margins included the earliest plate numbers used in the Colony as well as De La Rue's current numbers.

There is only one variety of note on any value of the issue. It occurred on R7/2 of the bottom left pane of the 1d. stamp, and takes the form of vertical streaks in front of the Queen's nose, mouth, chin and neck. This variety does not appear in the New Zealand specialized catalogues, but deserves to do so. It was present for most or all of the life of the stamp.

The issue appeared at the start of January 1874, and the Post Office made a determined attempt to ensure that it cleanly replaced the Chalon Heads. As a result, only three covers (or possibly four) have been recorded showing joint use of Chalon Head and First Sideface stamps.

Fig 7 Cover (ex Burrus) showing Chalon Head and First Sideface stamps used conjointly

Fig 3 Original De La Rue watercolour designs for the 2d. and 1s. values



Fig 5 plate number block



Fig 6 1d. pair showing the BL pane R7/2 scratched plate variety on the right-hand stamp



Teething problems

While both De La Rue and the New Zealand authorities were motivated to produce a good result, the change to the surface printing process brought teething problems in its train. De La Rue supplied not only dies and printing plates but also a dandy roll, paper, ink, the printing press, and roller stocks and frames. Like his New South Wales counterpart, the

New Zealand Government Printer found the paper hard to use. In mid-1874 it was described as 'very inferior throughout', but that might just be the printer defending his inability to follow all De La Rue's instructions for preparing it properly.

The first stamps came out perforated 12½ or compound 12½ and 10, on white or blued paper (SG numbers 152/177). It is not always easy to say where the boundary lies between white and blued, although the extremes are marked. It is uncommon to meet either perforation compounds involving perf 10, or blued paper, after 1875. In that year there also appeared 1d. and 2d. stamps on paper with watermark large star as remaining paper stocks from the Chalon Head period were used up.

In 1878 all the original values except the 3d., of which there remained a plentiful supply, appeared on paper with a new comb

Fig 4 first 'before hardening' die proof



The First Sidefaces are a major philatelic challenge

perforation $12 \times 11\frac{1}{2}$. At this time two new values were added to the set, a 2s. and a 5s., in anticipation of a parcel post service which did not eventuate. Only 46,800 of the 2s. and 47,520 of the 5s. were printed, in sheets of 120 without plate numbers, and most of the printing was used fiscally.

These two high values have a special place in the country's philately. They were designed, engraved, and the plates prepared in Wellington by William Rose Bock, a recent arrival from Australia. As such they were the first postage stamps to be created with all stages of design and preparation being carried out in the colony. Moreover the 2s. stamp featured fern leaves in the lower corners, the earliest thematic touch in New Zealand stamp design.

One First Sideface has the dubious distinction of being the most frequently misidentified stamp in New Zealand philately. This is the 2d. value perforated nearly 12 (158). The problem for collectors is to distinguish this comparatively rare stamp, on issue for just a few weeks early in 1878, from the 2d. perf $12 \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ which came out a couple of months later that same year and remained on issue for the remaining life of the set (181). There is no significant difference in the shade of the stamp, or the paper on which it was printed, and the gauge of the perforations of the two is so close that measurement will not differentiate between them.

Fortunately there are other ways to distinguish between the two stamps. The $12 \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ was a comb perforation. This means stamps so perforated were of a uniform width. It follows that stamps perforated around $11\frac{1}{2}$ which are too narrow or too wide for the comb will be the scarcer line perforation described as 'nearly 12'. Moreover the comb perforation produced stamps with 13 holes in the vertical sides of the stamp, while the use of the line perforation often resulted in there being 14 holes.

The Second Sideface

Use of the First Sidefaces came to an end in 1882, not because the plates were wearing or in need of replacement but by government fiat. Before 1882, postage stamps in New Zealand were intended solely for postal use. Revenue charges were paid through a series



Fig 8 2s. First Sideface, 1878



Fig 9 2d. perf nearly 12 (single) and comb perf $12 \times 11\frac{1}{2}$ (pair). In this instance the single stamp is far too wide for comb and clearly shows 14 perforation holes on the vertical sides

of other stamps, some inscribed 'Stamp Duty', others 'Law Courts', 'Land & Deeds', or 'Beer Duty'. They could not be interchanged. However in 1881, legislation was introduced to simplify the situation. A new set of stamps up to 1s. came into being inscribed 'Postage & Revenue', while higher values from 2s. upwards continued to be inscribed 'Stamp Duty'. Thereafter both sets were able to be used for either postal or revenue purposes. It was this legislative change that caused the replacement of the First by the Second Sidefaces.

While the use of the First Sidefaces may have ceased in 1882, the imprint of the stamps continued to be employed on postal stationery, which had no possible revenue usage and for which the inscription 'New Zealand Postage' remained as valid as ever. The first item of New Zealand postal stationery, a postcard, had appeared in 1876, bearing the 1d. First Sideface imprint.

Postcards with that imprint continued to be produced in a variety of designs into the twentieth century, likewise reply cards which were first introduced in 1886. Registered envelopes using the imprint of the 3d. First Sideface design also appeared, in 1898.

This postal stationery aspect poses a problem for would-be exhibitors: should they include it in their display? If they choose to do so, they would be well advised to watch the balance of the exhibit carefully. A display consisting, say, half of the issued stamps of 1874-82 and half of postcards issued around the time of the Boer War would look distinctly odd and would rapidly lose all coherence. If an exhibitor wanted to develop the First Sideface story laterally, it might be better to look towards postal history, for during the currency of the issue there were many important developments both internally, including the first Railway Travelling Post Offices, and overseas, with major developments in speed and reliability in the route to the United Kingdom via San Francisco that was so important to New Zealand.



Fig 10 First New Zealand postcard, 1876



Fig 11 Triple rate letter to the United Kingdom via San Francisco