

PHILATELY

A REAL WORLD RARITY HAS BEEN FOUND

Paolo Vaccari from Vignola (MO), since many years expert in philately of 1800, has been recently invited to make an evaluation of postage stamps, coming from an inheritance, kept in a safe in a bank abroad. On that occasion, he has found one of the best world rarities: the first postage stamp in the world. The Penny Black, issued by Great Britain on 6 May 1840, in a corner block of 42 copies is the third multiple in the world after the two belonging to the Royal Collection.

It has been found among documents and not in the three stamp albums containing one collection of the first Swiss postage stamps (1843/1852) and one of Italian States (1850/1860). After a check by the heirs, they seem to have been deposited into that safe between 1925/1930; perhaps also the large block of the Penny Black.

A really new exemplar never recorded before. Nobody knew about its existence, even though in the years when it was probably kept in the bank it already represented a great world rarity. The exceptional finding, valued more than Euro 1,500,000.-, has been sold in a very brief time.

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GREAT BRITAIN - 1840

In philately, for those who professionally make appraisals, very often connected to distributions of estates, exceptional findings, even though rarely, can always happen. This is the case of this corner block of 42 exemplars of the first postage stamp in the world: the Penny Black.

Some months ago, I was called by a Lawyer, who lives in a European country, whom I had had the opportunity to meet during a journey. After the usual mutual professional presentation, he told me that he was dealing with a really important distribution of an estate and that there were also postage stamps, considered of a "non common interest" by one of the heirs.

Afterwards, we agreed for a meeting to verify what was kept in a safe in a bank. After a first rapid check, I realised that that material, well arranged in three big stamp albums of old making, was worth a deep analysis. Even though some of the most valuable copies were not of a perfect quality, there were some very interesting multiples and, except for some Swiss Cantonal exemplars, the others were all Italian Ancient States. According to what the Lawyer told me, they seemed to have been deposited in the bank between 1925 and 1930.

After my close examination and my sale evaluation report for what I had been shown, I was informed that there was another "piece" (sic!) found in the pages of one of the many letters kept together with the three stamp albums. I was given the "piece" to check and in that moment, with a block of 42 exemplars of the Penny Black in my hands, I had the clear perception that my regular quantity of adrenalin had not remained still due to strong emotion! I asked whether, about the block, they had found some notes, because if they dated back to the years 1925/30, it was a great rarity even on those days. They had found no notes or indications neither for the three albums nor for the block.

I am not able to state from when that block was, lying horizontally, among those papers; however, everything has contributed in preserving its perfection and freshness in time: its gum is still perfect and presents the peculiar partial brightness without any cracks, when we exclude an unimportant yellow dot in the 18th copy.

Block of 42 exemplars belonging to the third plate as indicated in the corner margin with the figure "3".

The third plate of the Penny Black, or printing plate, was delivered and recorded on 9 May 1840. It started to be used on 12 May, and the first date of use known is the 16 of the same month; because of the wearing of steel due to its use, the plate was made unusable in October of the same year (ref. Queen Victoria - ed.; Stanley Gibbons).

The still existing large blocks of this postage stamp known are the following:

- large block of 216 exemplars (the sheet was of 240), Royal Collection; block of 43, private or public collection (?) - (ref. catalogue Victor - Victoria - ed. Bolaffi); the one here reproduced of 42 of the third plate (unique), now in a private collection; one of 33 of the second plate (unique) - (ref. The British Postage Stamp - ed.; The National Postal Museum - London); one of 24, private collection; one of 18, private collection; another one of 18, ?; one of 12 + some of 6 + some of 4, ex Saida collection; some smaller ones (ref. The British Postage Stamp - ed.; The National Postal Museum - London).

Perhaps a few more exist, but I really doubt that they can appear with the same impressiveness as this block of 42!

The present finding is certainly one of the most important, in the world, in the last decades.