

# The Penny Black

1840

The **Penny Black** [Sc. Great Britain 1] was the world's first adhesive postage stamp used in a public postal system. It was first issued in the United Kingdom on 1840 May 1. The stamp features a profile of Queen Victoria at age 15.



In the 1830s, British postal rates were high and the charges were complex to understand. Usually, the recipient paid for postage upon delivery, with the charge determined by weight and distance travelled. To make matters easier for the Post Office and for the general public, Sir Rowland Hill proposed using an adhesive stamp to indicate postage had been prepaid. Although he put forward his idea in 1837, it was not until three years later that the Penny Black was first issued in Great Britain. This historic stamp allowed people to send letters weighing up to half an ounce (14g) to be delivered for the flat rate of one penny, regardless of the distance travelled domestically.

It may have been small, but this rectangular piece of gummed paper left a lasting legacy for six main reasons. It:

- was the world's first adhesive stamp,
- made sending letters affordable,
- changed the way the world communicated,
- developed new ways to process and deliver mail,
- unified the price of sending letters, and
- encouraged people to read and to write.

Despite its fame, the 1d black postage stamp was considered a relative failure because the thrifty and ingenious Victorians quickly came up with ways to reuse the stamps by washing off the cancellation. Even though it was superseded by the Penny Red in 1841, the British public refuse to let their love affair with the Penny Black diminish. To this day it remains one of the most popular stamps in the world.