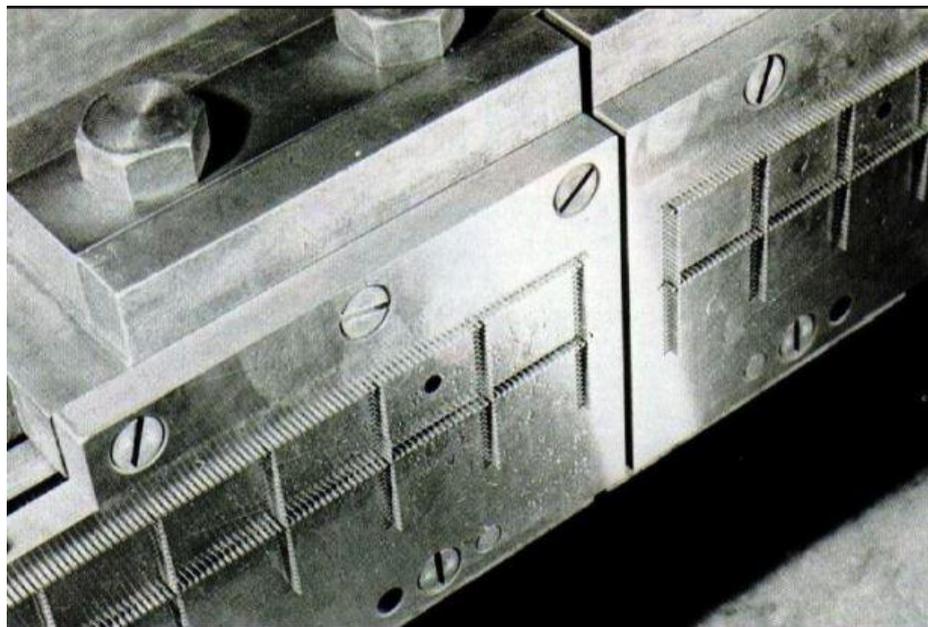


Under the Magnifying Glass: No.24 Distinguishing Perforations by Malcolm Barton and Kim Stuckey

In the last issue of Upland Goose, under the APS StampShow report, Carl Faulkner mentioned he had received an enquiry as to the possibility of including a short informative piece on Line Perf versus Comb Perf. Well, here is an attempt at meeting that brief!

The first thing to state is that it is not always easy to distinguish whether a single stamp is line perforated or comb perforated. This we will explain later. It is also worth mentioning a good reference on perforation types is page 12 of the latest volume of the Heijtz catalogue, but we understand that members may not have this reference; therefore this article sits alongside the catalogue.



Definitions:

Comb perforation: The comb perforator perforates three sides of a stamp at once for an entire row or column. Therefore you can imagine it looks like a comb (with widely spaced teeth) as it automatically travels down or across a sheet. This produces a very regular perforation pattern and equal and regular corner perforations. A comb perforation head from a perforating machine is illustrated to the left. This head has a double row of perforation teeth and also can perforate two panes with a gutter in between.

Line perforation: Line perforators simply have a single line of perforating pins, arranged in a straight line. The process begins by perforating the top row of the sheet and the sheet of stamps is shifted down by a height of a row of stamps to perforate the next row at the top edge. This continues until the lower sheet margin is perforated. The sheet is now rotated 90 degrees so the vertical columns are now perforated.

As you can imagine, the multiple steps in line perforation lead to minute differences in stamp heights and widths plus most importantly haphazard corner perforations.



Questions to Ask:

Have I got a block of stamps? This makes identifying your perforation type fairly easy. We illustrate this with two blocks with a magnification of the centre perforation holes; The KGV block above left is line perforated with misaligned vertical and horizontal perforating holes. The block above right is comb perforated with neatly intersecting horizontal and vertical perforating holes.



What Stamp is it? First of all many Falkland stamp issues used only one type of perforation and this is indicated in the Heijtz catalogue. Two of the most iconic Falkland issues, the 1933 Centenary and 1938 KGVI sets were only line perforated. Trickier issues, that used both line and comb perforation, include the KGV 1912 Multiple Crown (plus War Stamps) and the Whale & Penguin sets.

When was it postmarked? This only works for used stamps in a particular period. If you have a KGV ½d or 1d postmarked in 1912 -1914, you should have a comb perforated example, as line perforated issues did not appear before late December 1914. We show here an example from April 1914. Likewise Whale & Penguin ½d or 1d postmarked in the period of 1929 until the middle of 1936 should be comb perforated.

As usual be aware that postmarks may not be correctly dated, for example January 1921 postmarks still have the year date set as 1920. But generally postmarks are a good indicator of the stamp being used.



What do the corners look like?

Line perforated stamps have corner that are random in alignment, leading to what might look “short perf” corners (see top left corner of this stamp) or pointed or “hammer” corner perfs (see bottom right corner of the same stamp for a pointed perf).



Of course, chance dictates that occasionally line perforated corners can appear perfectly aligned to look like comb perforations!

If you look at the centre of this block of ½d War Stamps, you would at first glance determine that is was comb perforated. However, if you look at the top right corner and the right hand of the centre perforations you can see the double perforation hole characteristic of a line perforated block.

It so happens that we have shown here a block from a line perforated sheet (SH35a) where the centre line perforations happen to line up. It is only our knowledge of the irregular corners of line perforated stamps that would help identify this block in isolation, so you need to check all stamp corners in blocks. You may find this alignment happening once or twice in a sheet of line perforated stamps when you look at individual blocks of four across the sheet.



Do the opposite perforations line up?

This is worth trying if you are struggling to definitely assign a stamp to line or comb perforation. On a comb perforated stamp any perforations horizontally or vertically opposite to each other should be in alignment. You can use the frame line on a stamp to help you; place a ruler along the frame line and see where the ruler intersects the perforations either side of the stamp.

On line perforated stamps, perforations horizontally or vertically opposite to each other will not normally be in alignment, though it is of course possible. On this Centenary 4d we have extended on the image here the lines from the frame into the perforations. On the bottom frame line horizontally it passes through a perforation hole at the left and a perforation tip at the right. Likewise the vertical frame lines on the left pass through a perforation tip at the top and a perforation hole at the bottom.

We have deliberately in this simple guide to line and comb perforations left out discussing the Whale & Penguin issue which was perforated by various old Perkins Bacon perforating machines with different perforation spacings. This is probably the most challenging Falklands issue to separate the printings and perforations and still needs considerable study.

Summary: Hopefully this guide and checklist of questions will assist you as you look at your Falkland Islands stamps to determine perforation types. As with the challenge of distinguishing shades, if you practice over time looking at perforations across a large number of stamps, with reference to already categorised examples you will build your skill in this area. Finally, an essential item for the philatelist is the "Instanta" perforation gauge.

References: Specialised Stamp Catalogue of the Falkland Islands and Dependencies 1800-2013 by S.F. Heijtz
The De La Rue Stamps of the Falkland Islands by John Bunt
Ideas and assistance from discussions on www.stampboards.com