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# Denmark's 2 RBS Stamp

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## Part I

### Genesis of stamps

The name Sir Rowland Hill is famous among stamp collectors. Hill's brilliant idea to reform the English postal system began when he privately produced a little booklet in 1837. His proposal was simply to institute a uniform postage in England "according to weight and without any regard to distance." At the same time, Hill suggested a *stamp* as "a bit of paper," large enough for a design, along with some gum on the backside so that it could be affixed to a letter when moistened. However, there were three main production problems: security, cost, and speed of printing. Sir Rowland Hill came up with tasteful, ingenious solutions to these complex problems, and so he has been given the honorary title, "Father of Stamps."

The One Penny Black went on sale May 1, 1840, and could be used on letters from May 6. It paid the postage for a letter weighing up to one-half ounce between any two points in England. Rowland Hill's innovative postal reform spread to the rest of the civilized world over the next decades. It was adopted in Brazil in 1843, Norway and Sweden in 1855, and Finland in 1856. Japan did not use stamps until 1871.



The late Peer Lorentzen and his son, Mark.

### The first Danish stamps

By October, 1842, a group of Danish postal authorities was chosen to come up with suggestions for improving the postal system. After much deliberation, a proposal was presented to Parliament in 1850 for a uniform postage rate and the creation of a stamp (although only a 4-RBS stamp was mentioned). By decree of King Frederik VII, these proposed changes became law on March 11, 1851, effective April 1, 1851. The uniform postage rate in the Kingdom of Denmark became 6 Rigsbank Skilling (RBS) in cash; however, to encourage the use of stamps, a single 4-RBS stamp could be used instead.

The Danish postal administration had started preparations for the production of stamps as far back as 1849. Semi-official work had been done to create a footpost stamp, with a value of 2 RBS, to be used in Copenhagen on letters sent within the city walls. At this time, the city of Copenhagen was divided into eight sections, one for each postman to walk on foot. Mail was delivered and picked up twice a day. The 2-RBS postage rate was the same whether or not a stamp was used.

A decision was made to transfer the production of both the 2-RBS and 4-RBS, as well as the stamp cancelers, to the engraver M. W. Ferslew. He had worked at the Treasury and was given permission to use the existing facilities. The firm of Drewsen and Sons had started the preparations for the paper to be used for the stamps. As late as December, 1850, Drewsen was still waiting for the forms that were to produce the watermarks, which were also to be produced by Ferslew.

On February 22, 1851, Ferslew announced that the printing plates would soon be ready. The paper preparation was still in progress, however, and the first shipment was not delivered until March 8, when the actual printing of stamps could begin. Initially, 400 sheets of stamps could be printed daily. Ferslew and



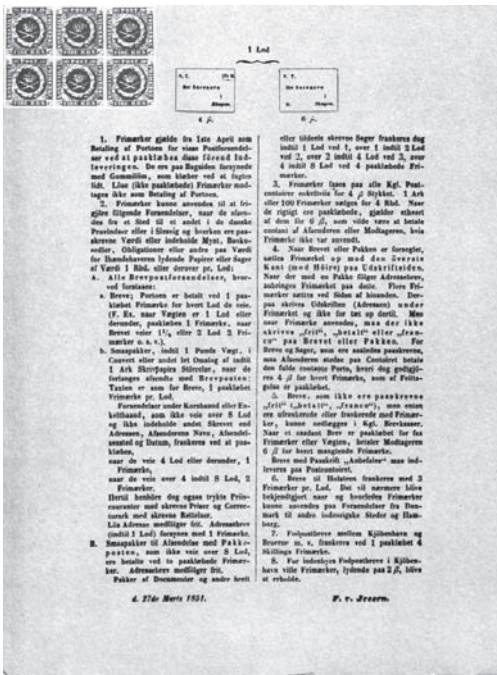


Figure 1. The Danish Birth Certificate.

the printed stamps.

The watermarked paper for the 2-RBS stamp had already been prepared by Ferslew in connection with the production of the 4-RBS stamp. The printing process would require two plates of 100 stamps and a plate for the burelage (a foundation printing of wavy lines to prevent forgery). Since time was of the essence, Ferslew employed an unusual and primitive method to produce the plates.

From the mother die, 10 impressions were made in plaster. These matrices were placed together to form a block of 10, consisting of two vertical rows with five clichés. This basic block of 10 was stereotyped in metal. From this original block of 10, some 20 secondary blocks of 10 were produced by stereotyping. At least a few extra clichés were produced as reserves. These 20-cliché plates were welded together and mounted with nails on two mahogany plates (Fig. 3). The nails were placed in the empty space within the center circle under the word “SKILLING.” Six nails were used in every block of 10 – in rows 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, and 10. Plate II had 60 nails, whereas Plate I had 63 nails because of the clichés that were substituted later. Traces of these nails can sometimes be seen on the stamps as spots of blue, occasionally distorting the “SKILLING” text.

A proof sheet was printed on plain paper with no watermark in order to obtain approval for the blue color used for the stamp. The clichés from Plate I were used, although the burelage was the type that was later used for the printing of Plate II. The lower half of this proof sheet was sold to collectors at an auction; the top half can be seen in the Danish Postal History Museum.

his staff worked hard so that the 4-RBS stamps could be printed daily. Ferslew and his staff worked hard so that the 4-RBS stamps could be ready on their first day of issue on April 1, as stipulated in the postal law of March 11, 1851.

The April 1 date came too soon for the 2-RBS stamp, which was not publicized until March 27. This 2-RBS stamp was only referred to briefly by Copenhagen’s postmaster, F. V. Jessen, in the famous “Birth Certificate” (Fig. 1). This announcement was adorned with a block of six 4-RBS stamps and was probably a poster on the bulletin board outside the main post office on Copenhagen’s Købmagergade. The Birth Certificate explained in detail how the 4-RBS stamp was supposed to be used. The last paragraph stated, “It will be possible to get stamps with a value of 2 skilling for footpost letters sent within the city of Copenhagen.”

## Design and production of the 2-RBS

Ferslew designed and engraved the “mother” die, or cliché, for the 2-RBS stamp. This original cliché, with fine and beautiful details, is on display at the Danish Postal History Museum (Fig. 2). The frame around the design was perhaps intended as a cutting line, but it disappears on



Figure 2. Original cliché of 2-RBS stamp.



Figure 3. Mounted clichés.

## Identifying the 10 main types of flaws

In the process of producing the original 10 plaster impressions, characteristic or primary flaws occurred. Because these imperfections were repeated in each of the 20 blocks of 10 that made up the two plates, it was possible to identify 10 main types that help to position the stamps. The 10 main types can easily be identified in the half-sheet of proofs in the Danish Postal History Museum. This provides evidence that these primary flaws were present from the start.

The characteristics used to identify each of the 10 types have been described in several books and catalogs. Type 2, with the pointed foot on the large numeral “2,” is the most well-known of the 10 types. Type 7 has been described as not having any of the flaws of the nine other types. However, in the November 1978 issue of *Nordisk Filatelistisk Tidsskrift*, Lasse Nielsen identified Type 7 as having small indentations in the color band’s outer edge over the “ST” in “POST.”

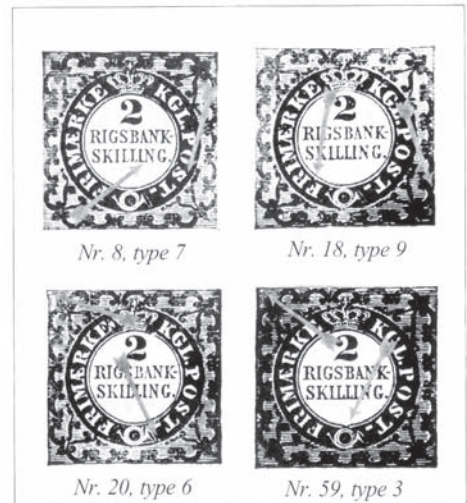
Beyond the imperfections associated with the 10 main types, each of the 200 individual clichés has specific flaws that occurred because of the inexact nature of the stereotyping process. Therefore, it is possible to identify the position of every stamp. This is most easily done by sorting according to the 10 main types, then using the secondary flaws to further identify to which of the 20 or so positions the cliché belongs. Svend Grønlund’s and Sten Christensen’s books give thorough descriptions of each individual cliché. A seasoned collector who has a magnifying glass and a certain amount of patience should be able to accomplish the task of identification.

## Substituted clichés

Before the printing process started, four clichés in Plate I were substituted. We know this because the types do not fit the repeating pattern that would be expected from the blocks of 10 types (Fig. 4).

- Position 8 should be type 2, but is type 7
- Position 18 should be type 4, but is type 9
- Position 20 should be type 4, but is type 6
- Position 59 should be type 1, but is type 3

The result is that in plate I, type 4 occurs eight times; type 1 and 2 occur nine times; and types 3, 6, 7, and 9 occur 11 times each. This theory is confirmed by the half-sheet of proofs in the Danish Postal History Museum. It includes positions 8, 18, and 20.



These substituted clichés are sometimes referred to as reserve clichés. Perhaps some other clichés were also replaced at a later stage in the printing process.

It appears that most, if not all, of the clichés were retouched. Four of these retouches were prominent enough to be termed “large” retouches.

These stamps have positions 80, 93, and 100 in plate I and position 98 in Plate II (Fig. 5). A study of the actual plates in the Danish Postal History Museum shows that the clichés are generally well-worn (Fig.



Figure 5. “Large” retouched clichés.

Figure 4. Plate I pattern.



Figure 6. Well worn clichés.

burelage on the right of Fig. 7 is type 1b, which had the sharper part of the waves pointing downward.

In the “Ferslew” printing, type 1a was used for Plate I and type 1b was used for Plate II. This was

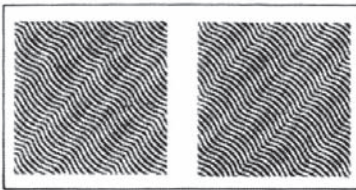


Figure 7. Types 1a and 1b burelage.

reversed for the “Thiele” printing. The burelage for the first printing was done at Ferslew’s print shop and was engraved. The printing of the burelage for the second printing was done at Thiele’s print shop and was typographed.

This difference is easiest to recognize on canceled

stamps. Cancellations on the Thiele printing leave an even or smudged impression, whereas cancellations on the Ferslew printing leave a corrugated impression in the margin from the relief of the burelage.

The color on the Ferslew printing varies from greenish-blue to blue; whereas the Thiele printing has a more consistent, clear deep-blue color. The Ferslew printing consisted of 1,018 sheets of 100 stamps; the Thiele printing was 3,775 sheets.

The printing of the stamp image for both printings was done at Thiele’s print shop. So it is not truly correct to call the first printing “Ferslew” because his operation only printed the burelage. But the shorthand label has stuck and that is what the printings are called. ■

(To be continued.)

References:

Christensen, Sten, *Denmark 2 RIGSBANK-SKILLING 1851-1852*, Trelleborg Philatelic Society, Sweden, 1980.  
 Grønlund, Svend, *Danmark 2 Rigsbankskilling 1851 og 1852, beskrivelse af de 200 klicheer*, Copenhagen, 1956.  
 Nielsen, Lasse, “Typebestemmelse af 2 Rigsbankskilling,” *Nordisk Filatelistisk Tidsskrift*, No. 5/1978.

6). However, it is strange that several of the clichés appear to be almost new, including position 100 in Plate I, which is one of the large retouches. This is a good area for further study.

**Differences between printings**

As described earlier in this article, in addition to the watermark, the paper was preprinted with a burelage. The burelage on the left of Fig. 7 is type 1a, which had wavy lines going from NW to SE, with the sharper waves pointing upward. The

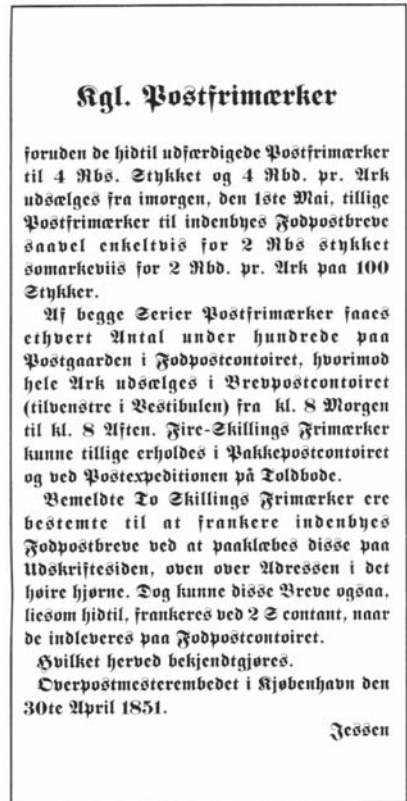


Figure 8. The announcement in the newspaper, *Berlingske Tidende*, that the 2 RBS stamp could be purchased beginning May 1, 1851.