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Beware Old Certificates

By Ralph Riddell-Carre

I was recently browsing Stanley Gibbons (SG) Falkland Islands stock when I came across the first day cover which is illustrated below.



Stanley Gibbons description of the cover was as follows:

“1935 (7 MY) registered ‘Cameo’ cover from Port Stanley to London, with 1935 Silver Jubilee set of 4 to 1s, the 2½d and 1s exceptionally showing variety ‘Flagstaff on right-hand turret’ and ‘Short extra flagstaff’ (respectively from vignette plate ‘5’, R7/1, and vignette plate ‘2’, R2/1), all tied by individual strikes of Type PS.2C cds on first day of issue, with type 9 registration label at lower left. The 1s with one faintly toned perf, still a wonderful and almost certainly unique cover. Clear Brandon cert (1997).”

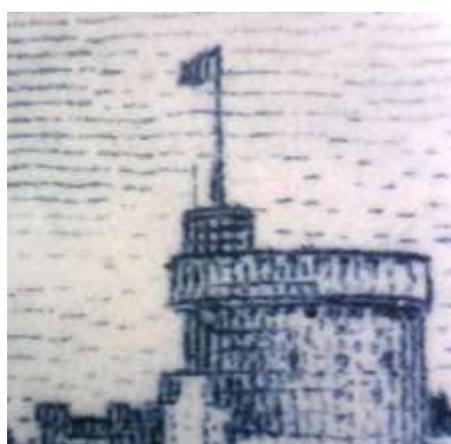
I was interested in this cover because Plate 2 was only known to have been used on the later printings of the Falkland Islands Silver Jubilee issue. A first printing completed using Plate 2 would be a significant new find.

Stanley Gibbons were extremely helpful allowing me to view the cover twice in their shop so that I could fully research it.

I started by looking at the Short extra flagstaff seeking to establish whether it was a genuine example. I took a picture and compared this short extra flagstaff with others in my collection. Below left is the SG example and below right an example from my collection known to be genuine. A comparison of the two confirms that the 1s stamp on the cover is a genuine example of the 'Short extra flagstaff' Plate 2, R7/1. Note that there are small breaks, as is often the case, in both the short extra flagstaffs which appear to be slightly more pronounced in SG example. I don't believe this to be significant, but it may suggest a later printing rather than the earlier one it would have to be part of the first printing.



From SG cover



From my collection

I next examined the cancellation and contacted Stefan Heijtz to confirm that it was a genuine example of PS.2C. His response reads - The postmark certainly looks genuine (and is indeed type PS.2C), but it is a much earlier date of PS.2C than previously recorded (February 1937). This leads to the question whether this is a backdated FDC, produced one or even two years later, or if it is in fact a much earlier and genuine use of PS.2C. The registration label is Type 9 which was in use from 1935, so that is no clue.

There were six different date stamps in use in Port Stanley in 1935 including PS.2A but not PS.2C which as Stefan noted in his response to me was first recorded being used in February 1937. PS.2B's first recorded use is in August 1936 so it too was not in use in 1935. The other date stamps in use in 1935 are F.4B, F.4C, F.6, PS.1A and PS.1B.

I had previously spoken to Malcolm Barton about the cover who supported the suggestion that this was probably a back dated example of PS.2C and drew my attention to the registration label

on a genuine first day cover which was Type 8A. I found a few more first day covers all with Type 8A registration labels and usually with arrival markings on the reverse of the cover. One must ask how likely it would be for two registration label Types to be used on the same day.

Everything I had examined to date casts doubt, but nothing is conclusive.

I returned to SG with some examples of first and later printings to compare with the stamps on the cover. Stanley Gibbons were again extremely helpful. On my first visit I had noted the colour of the 1s was rather redder than the usual first printing purple but given the date of the post mark and the Brandon certificate I believed it had to be a first print of the 1s. On re-examining the 1s, including comparing it with my examples, it was clearly not the purple of the first printing but one of the maroons of the third or fourth printings which were the printings completed using Plates 2 and 4.

There is no arrival or transit marking on the cover. This suggests that this cover was one of a batch of covers created by Cameo Stamps, serviced at Cameo Stamps request, by the Post Office in Port Stanley well after 7 May 1935 with first day of issue cancellations. Stefan Heijtz commented to me that stamp dealers were quite powerful towards colonial postal administrations in the 1930's, and it wouldn't be surprising if first day covers were produced on demand well after the issue date of the stamps. It generated important funds for the colonies, so it is quite likely that there was some relaxed attitude towards backdating.

Much research has been carried out since 1997 and we now have a better understanding of the different printings. Discussions continue as to how to best describe the colours and how many of the printings should be separately identified in the Heijtz specialised stamp catalogue of Falkland Islands stamps and postal history. In the last edition (2013) the four printings of the 1s were divided into two with the first and third printings being described as slate and purple and the second and fourth printings as slate and deep purple. The next edition of the catalogue is being prepared and the classification of the 1s printings is being reviewed. In my opinion the 2013 classification needs to be changed because the first and second printings are shades of purple while the third and fourth printings are redder being shades of maroon.

Both SG and I were initially misled by the Brandon certificate which is clearly incorrect. The cover is a fake with backdated PS.2C cancellations. Stanley Gibbons have withdrawn this item from stock, and it is now housed in their reference collection.

This was a most interesting cover to research, and I would like to thank Stanley Gibbons for the assistance they gave me throughout and thank Stefan Heijtz and Malcolm Barton for the advice they gave me.