

**J. Edward Nixon &
Charles J. G. Verge**



J. Edward (Ted) Nixon, FRPSC is Chairman of the Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation since 2006. Ted has been chairman of the Foundation's Expert Committee since 2002. He is an international gold medal exhibitor of the 1870-97 Small Queen Issue of Canada and co-author of a book on the same issue published by the Greene Foundation in 2009. He is a member of a number of national and international societies.



Charles J. G. Verge, FRPSC, FRPSL, is a member of the Vincent Graves Greene Philatelic Research Foundation's Expert Committee and is a former President of The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada (RPSC), the American Association of Philatelic Exhibitors and the Eire Philatelic Association. He is currently Historian of The RPSC. He has written extensively on British North America philately and other areas of the hobby for many newspapers and magazines. He is a member of dozens of regional, national and international stamp clubs and societies. He is an international exhibitor and a national, continental and international judge in four disciplines. He was awarded the Queen's Jubilee Medal for services to philately.

"MARTINSYDE" MANUSCRIPT OVERPRINT ON THE 3¢ NEWFOUNDLAND CARIBOU STAMP APRIL 12, 1919

Background

Several attempts to cross the Atlantic were made in the Spring of 1919 in response to a £10,000 prize offered in April 1913 by Lord Northcliffe, the owner of The Daily Mail, for the first non-stop flight over the Atlantic by a heavier-than-air machine. At the time, there was no aircraft suitable to make the attempt and the advent of World War I put a temporary end to the quest. The Daily Mail repeated its challenge in 1918. The rapid development and improvement of aircraft during the Great War ensured that, at its end, pilots and syndicates would take up the challenge with gusto.

Three main competitors showed up to take on the challenge early 1919.

1. The Sopwith Company whose plane was to be flown by Messrs. Hawker and Grieve.
2. The Martinsyde Company, piloted by Messrs. Raynham and Morgan.
3. The Vickers Company, the eventual winner with Messrs. Alcock and Brown at the helm.

The Newfoundland Post Office Department participated in these attempts by issuing or endorsing stamps for these flights and making arrangements for mail to be carried. The first of these was prepared for the Hawker or Martinsyde flights, depending on who would leave first. Two hundred 3¢ Caribou stamps were overprinted in black "FIRST/TRANS-/ATLANTIC/AIR/POST (Scott C1, SG 142). This stamp, issued on April 12, 1919, is well documented and, is without question, produced by the Newfoundland Post Office Department. Two hundred stamps were overprinted.

The manuscript overprint reading "Aerial/ Atlantic / Mail / JAR" written on the 3¢ Caribou and other values of the Caribou series was made up for the Martinsyde Raymor attempt (Scott C1i, SG 142a). It is far more controversial and is the subject of this article. According to W. D. Campbell, Secretary to the Post Office, "some 50 stamps were so inscribed".

An overprint reading "1st Atlantic / Air Post Martinsyde, / Raynham, / Morgan" found on several stamps of the Caribou series and the 3¢ brown Queen Victoria stationary envelope is considered bogus and was totally disavowed by the Postmaster General of Newfoundland, Dr. Robinson (John Alexander Robinson, 1862-1929, PMG 1916-1920), in a May 11, 1920 letter to *The Times of London*. Later it was discovered that Edwin Cleary, a British reporter assigned to cover the flights for the *London Daily Express*, prepared these overprints. The quantity of stamps bearing this overprint is unknown.

Newfoundland issued a subsequent stamp on June 9, 1919 to be used on the successful Alcock and Brown flight and on other projected flights attempting the crossing (Scott C2, SG 143). Ten thousand stamps were overprinted.

The Martinsyde Manuscript Overprint

The Martinsyde manuscript overprint were prepared in April 1919 to be used on mail posted in St. John's, NL on April 19, 1919 in anticipation of a transatlantic flight by the Raymor, a Martinsyde airplane, flown by Captain F. P. Raynham and Major Charles Morgan, Morgan was later replaced on the second attempt by Lt. E. H. Biddlescombe. The 3c. Caribou stamps issued in January 1919 (Scott 117, SG 132) and on continuous printing until 1923, were overprinted "Aerial Atlantic Mail" in manuscript by either a post office official or by an individual associated with the Martinsyde Company and countersigned by J.A. Robinson "JAR" in different ink.

The manuscript overprint was written in black ink with a nib pen. The pen and ink used to write the initials "JAR" is different from the pen and ink used to write the inscription "Aerial Atlantic Mail". The "JAR" initials have tended to fade badly over time on most copies- the degree of fading varies, whereas the inscription has not faded. The original 3¢ Caribou stamp issued in January 1919 comes in three shades of brown, - reddish brown, brown and deep brown and two perforations exist: 14.1x14.1 and 14x13.9.

There is no doubt that Dr. Robinson applied his initials to the manuscript overprinted stamps, probably once the stamps were on a cover but before there were cancelled. Who wrote the overprint is a matter of debate. For years many writers have claimed that Campbell, Secretary to the Post Office, was the originator. However, recent research seems to indicate that Cleary could have done so. This would explain why stamps from different sheets are recorded with the manuscript overprint. If Campbell had penned the overprint would he not have taken a new sheet of stamps? It would have been much easier.

In a letter to *The St. John's Daily Star*, Dr. Robinson freely admits that he is responsible for authorizing the Hawker stamps and goes into detail about their production. He is far less forthcoming about the manuscript overprint only saying that; "In conclusion, may I add that a small mail has been aboard the Martynside machine for some time. From the official standpoint, it was to some extent a duplication of letters sent by the Sopwith machine. The ordinary 3-cent stamp was used, with the words, 'Aerial Trans-Atlantic' mail written across the face." It was the extent of his comments on the manuscript-overprinted stamps. In 'Postage Stamps of Newfoundland' in *The Book of Newfoundland* (1937), Poole and Huber mention that the manuscript overprint "were, however, merely so inscribed by Dr. Robinson at the request of senders connected with the Martynside venture."

It is interesting to note that when the Martynside Raymor left Newfoundland on its second attempt on July 12, 1919, it carried mail bearing the Hawker stamp, the manuscript overprint stamp, the bogus stamps and the Alcock and Brown flight stamp-the only aircraft to do so.



Fig.1 The Martynside submitted for expertization in 2008.

Copy for Expertization

In late 2008, the Greene Foundation received a single copy of the Martynside manuscript overprint for expertization. The initials "JAR" were prominent and the stamp was off cover, with no gum and not cancelled. The submitted copy was said to be unused (Fig. 1).



Figs. 2 Fakes submitted to the Philatelic Foundation for expertization.
Courtesy, Philatelic Foundation, NY.

The Committee enquired from the leading certifying experts, (RPSL, APEX, Philatelic Foundation and the BPA). Only the RPSL reported having expertized manuscript Martynsides before. In fact, three of them. The Philatelic Foundation did report two copies in its files that were evident fakes as there were no "JAR" initials (Fig. 2). They had been replaced by a date "5/18/19". Following up on this information, the Committee did an extensive search of the literature and also contacted The Royal Philatelic Collection, The British Post Office Archives and the British Library. As well experts on Newfoundland and Newfoundland airmails including John Walsh, Editor of the *Newfoundland Specialized Catalogue*, were consulted. After this intensive research, the Committee found no previous record of the existence of the stamp submitted for expertization. Nor was there any indication of a previous certificate of authenticity. The overprint appears very similar to genuine copies on cover. The manuscript overprint and initials are written in two different inks, as they should be. The stamp colour is brown. The perforation is 14x13.9.

Because no authentic manuscript Martynside overprint had ever been expertized by the Greene Foundation, the Committee felt that an extensive analysis should be undertaken on this stamp and also thorough research undertaken on all of the other copies recorded. The Committee's analysis focused on the legitimacy of the manuscript overprint and also whether the characteristics of the stamp itself are consistent with other known used copies of the Martinsyde stamp. It is presumed that all legitimate copies were prepared by the same hand at about the same time in April 1919.

Manuscript Overprint

The following comments are relevant:

- The style of writing the words "Aerial Atlantic Mail" on genuine copies seems to be done in a normal pace of writing with a nib pen-thus there are pen strokes of varying thickness and intensity. On the submitted copy the shape of the pen strokes and intensity are perfectly uniform as though the writer wrote very slowly and deliberately, or the writing was not done with a nib pen. However on the submitted copy the shaping of the letters does seem very similar to genuine copies with a few exceptions (Fig. 3).
- The initials "JAR" on the submitted copy are fresh and shiny black-different in intensity from genuine copies. There is no evidence of fading. But the shape and style are similar to genuine copies.
- The first "t" in Atlantic on the submitted copy is shaped unlike any other genuine copy that we have seen.

Three Cents Caribou stamp

The following comments are relevant:

- The Caribou series of stamps was issued on January 2, 1919 and replaced in 1923.
- The 3¢ comes in three shades- reddish brown, brown and deep brown, which would normally suggest the shades can be chronologically assigned. In researching dated copies it looks like the brown comes earlier, the reddish brown later and the deep brown comes last but the differences can be subtle. In researching colour photos there are certainly some inaccuracies in colour reproduction.

- The series comes in two perforation varieties: 14.1x14.1 (perf. A) and 14x13.9 (perf. B). To date it appears that both of the perforations were used for many, if not all, values in the Caribou series. We have not been able yet to assign perforations chronologically. Since the perforation varieties are very close in measurement it is sufficient to simply decide if the horizontal and vertical perforations are equal or unequal.
- It seems reasonable to assume that all Martynside stamps came from the same sheet of stamps and thus had the same shade and perforation. To date this has not been proven - in fact to the contrary is evidenced.
- Clearly we were interested in the shade and perforation used in the first few months of the issue in 1919.



Fig.3 A genuine Martynside.
Courtesy, British Library.

Source of Known Copies

The Greene Foundation has located the following stamps and covers with 3¢ manuscript overprints. Many have appeared in more than one source.

Item	Source	Addressee	Perf.	Other Comment
1. single	Sotheby, '06; lot 610	n/a	A	unique unused single
2a. single	Harmer airmails 1953	n/a	-	unsigned trial copies
2b. single	Harmer airmails 1953	n/a	-	script "A", unsigned
3a. single	Harmer airmails 1953	n/a	-	on piece with "Hawker"
3b. single	Harmer Oct. '79, lot 6	n/a	A	same as 3a, without "H"
4. cover	Harmer airmails 1953	J. S. Ayre	-	-
5. cover	Harmer airmails 1953	Daily Express	-	with "Hawker" stamp
6. cover	Harmer May '69, lot 119	Hilton	B	thicker lettering
7. cover	Harmer Mar. '80, lot3	Bowring	B	thicker lettering
8. cover	Harmer airmails 1984	Harvey	-	-
9. cover	R Lowe pg 492	Mrs. Martin	-	thicker lettering
10. single	Harmer Feb.2002, lot 2011	n/a	-	on 12c 1911 Coronation
11. cover	Harmer Feb.2002, lot 2012	J. S. Ayre	B	small cover; see also #21
12. cover	Harmer Feb.2002, lot 2014	Powys-Keck	-	on 5c Caribou
13. cover	Harmer Feb.2003, lot3008	Bell	A	different "A" for Aerial
14. cover	Harmer Feb.2003, lot 3011	Read	-	on 2c Caribou, script "A"
15. cover	Harmer Ju.2005, lot 1627	Linnewell	A	stamp positioned horiz.
16. cover	Harmer Ju.2005, lot 1628	Burt	B	thicker letters;GB stamp
17.cover	Spink/Shreves No 2009	Linnewell	A	W. Gross collection
18. cover	British Library, Fitzg. Coll.	Crowe	-	JAR ties to cover
19. cover	R.Lowe,1968; RPSL	Stone	-	-
20. cover	R. Lowe Ja 1964	Lemessurier	-	incl. two GB 1/2p.
21. cover	Harmer '53; Gibbons'68	Ayre	-	distinct from #11
22. cover	Harmer, Jy '99	Campbell	-	-
23. cover	Siegel, Sp '02; RPSL	Illingworth	-	-
24. cover	RPSL	possibly Harvey	-	address is same as #8

Almost all copies identified by the Greene Foundation so far were sold or recorded by Harmer (C. H. C. Harmer and R. E. R. Dalwick, *Newfoundland Air Mails*, 1953). Some copies could not be satisfactorily perforated from the photos in auction catalogues

The style of lettering on the 24 listed items was compared with the submitted copy, specifically with the respect to the consistent thickness of letters in the overprint formed by the nib pen. While some covers showed slightly heavier inked lettering than others, none showed the perfect consistency evidenced on the submitted copy.

We decided not to attempt to describe the colour shades from photographs in auction catalogues. However the unused single (item #1), the Raynham copy, in the Sotheby "Sir Gawaine Baillie" sale certainly seems atypical from the photograph since it seems to be a lighter, almost reddish brown shade, whereas the copies from early 1919 are typically basic brown. However copies from 1920-22 are still more reddish brown. The submitted copy is brown with very little hint of red (Fig. 4).



Fig.4 The "Sir Gawaine Baillie" Martynside.
Reported to be the only unused copy.

Shades and Perforations

We examined an assortment of copies of the 3¢ Caribou stamp on and off cover accumulated by the Greene Foundation and John Walsh - in total about 71 copies. The two perforation varieties seemed to exist throughout on various shades. Next we selected about 25 dated copies and covers, and recorded shades and perforations chronologically.

Thus it appears the shade is brown for 1919, red brown for 1920, 1921 and 1922, and then dark brown for 1923. The brown of 1919 has a hint of red whereas the brown of 1923 does not. However we noted subtle variations within these three shades. The submitted copy is brown, not quite dark brown, but with no hint of red. At this point the submitted copy seems closer to the 1923 shades we have, but this is from a very small sample.

We concluded it was not possible to say whether the submitted stamp had the same or different printing characteristics of an early 1919 printing of the 3¢ Caribou. This forced us to consider more analysis.

Signed Copies are on Cover

With the exception of the so-called unused Raynham or "Sir Gawaine Baillie" copy (item #1), we are unaware of any other copies signed by "JAR" that are not on cover. All used copies on cover were cancelled with the same St. John's wavy bar machine cancel. There are no known used copies signed "JAR" that have been soaked off cover. The Raynham copy is recorded originally on a cover, which was taken back by the sender just prior to the mailing, and it never got sent-in one sense it was intended to be used. In fact it remained on a scrap of the cover for many years. We do not believe the submitted copy was ever on a Martynside cover, missed getting cancelled and has now been soaked off.



Fig.5 The "Crowe" cover showing the strong possibility that the initials "JAR" were applied after the stamps was affixed to the cover.

Courtesy, British Library.

Initials "JAR" added after Stamps on Cover

It is possible the initials "JAR" were added after the stamps were placed on covers to be mailed, as a security measure. On the "Crowe" cover (item # 20) the initials JAR go over the edge of the stamp and a small portion is evident on the cover between the perforations (Fig. 5). At least, in this case, Robinson signed the stamp after the stamp was on the cover. We have found other copies where the initials reached the edge of the stamp, but the photo does not allow us to prove the initials tie the stamp to the cover. Nevertheless, we consider this finding to be significant. It may explain why there are no truly unused copies known - simply they were not signed until placed on the cover. If the stamps were signed before being placed on covers it is hard to understand why at least a few copies did not get used and would have survived to today. If they existed in quantity, and some were left over, their sale would have been consistent with Robinson's approach of selling the remainder of the Hawker stamps for the benefit of the Newfoundland Seaman's Benevolent Fund.

Examination at the Smithsonian

The submitted copy was examined at the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum (NPM) using their video spectral comparator (VSC4+) in October 2009. Linda Edquist (Chief Conservator-NPM), Helen Young (Paper Conservator-NPM), Charles J. G. Verge (Greene Foundation) and Elizabeth Hisey (Independent Observer) conducted the examination together.

The stamp was examined using all the technology available with the VSC+4 comparator including de-layering; side, top and back lighting; and comparison of each layer. To the naked eye it was evident that the three-line overprint and the "JAR" initials were written with different inks and different penmanship. The comparator proved beyond a doubt that the inks were vastly different as was to be expected. On delayering of the three-line overprint there was no sign that it had been tampered with.



Fig.6 The delayed "JAR" initials showing a ghost set of initials. Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum.

However, it was evident upon delayering the "JAR" initials that there were two separate layers of initials—one on top of the other. Neither quite matched the other. The lower set, a ghostly shadow, gave a glow similar to fluorescence (Fig 6). The layer of initials on top was opaque. The superimposition of the two sets of initials showed some differences between the two particularly in the thickness of some of the loops on the letters.

A further review of the overprints was made to see what method was used to apply the overprint and the initials. Both were compared to the following writing instruments: nib pen, felt pen, ballpoint pen and paintbrush. The group of examiners was unanimous in agreeing that the overprint was produced by a nib pen while the top layer initials "JAR" had been painted in with a paintbrush (Fig. 7).



Fig.7 The "JAR" was applied with a paintbrush. There is a feathered look to the lettering particularly where the stroke ends reminiscent of paintbrush strokes.

Courtesy, Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum.

Lack of Provenance

The submitted stamp appears to have a complete lack of provenance. We have shown the item to a range of specialists and no one has seen the item before. It does not appear to have been in any sale. If the item was genuine it is very difficult to believe it would be completely unknown after 90 years following its creation. This is considered by us to be a serious, but not conclusive, impediment to its genuineness.



Fig.8 The "Linnewell" cover from the William H. Gross Collection. Courtesy, Spink Shreves Galleries.

Comparison to Genuine Cover

In November 2009 we were finally able to compare the submitted item directly to the "Linnewell" cover offered by Spink Shreves Galleries in the William H. Gross sale (Fig. 8). The comparison was conclusive in our decision that the submitted item is not genuine. The consistency in the thickness of ink in the manuscript "Aerial Atlantic Mail" is entirely different between the two items. The initials "JAR" are thick shiny black in the submitted item, whereas they are lighter, of varied thickness, and clearly not the same ink as on the submitted item-this was proven by the analysis done at the Conservation laboratories of the NPM. Several experts compared the two items-there was no doubt that the manuscript overprint and initials written on the submitted item were a forgery.

Sources and Contributions

The Greene Foundation received many contributions of written documents, scans of items and input on the likely validity of the submitted item. We appreciate the assistance from David Beech and Paul Skinner at the British Library, Ellen Peachey at the American Philatelic Society Research Library, Patrick Pearson at the RPSL Experts Committee, the Philatelic Foundation, the Conservation staff at the NPM, Michael Sefi, Keeper of The Royal Philatelic Collection and John Walsh, Peter Motson, Elizabeth Hisey and Bob Dyer.