

Revisiting the “Lewis Proofs”

Lewis proofs/essays are key items in the development of the New Zealand 1898 pictorials. The advantages of a pictorial stamp issue from a financial and a general point of view were placed before the postmaster general as early as 1894 and in August of that year Charles Lewis of Christchurch submitted proofs of a series of stamps of a large size and original design, printed by a process of his own (ref 1). Subsequently in 1895 the New Zealand G.P.O. called for a competition for stamps with characteristic New Zealand designs.

Mention is made in *Postage Stamps of New Zealand* volume I, on pages 139 and 140 with an illustration of an example entitled: *The “Lewis Proof”*. Several others refer to this as a *proof*, yet it was an *essay* for a proposed set of pictorial stamps for New Zealand.

Occasionally, single imperforate Lewis essays – usually incorrectly described as “Lewis Proofs” – have been offered for sale. From the evidence of these sales the colours of the few Lewis essays offered have been grey-green and ultramarine – these are two of the four colours mentioned (grey-green, ultramarine, red and violet) in ref 1.

In early 2011 this writer was made aware of the existence of the Lewis essays in complete imperforate sheets of ten – information not previously recorded. What is more remarkable is that there were four such sheets!

These were sighted; three of the colours mentioned in ref 1 were present – but the so called *red* was not. Enquiries were made to several dealers and specialist collectors’ of 1898 pictorials regarding the existence of a *red* Lewis essay. Its existence could not be confirmed. The colours of the four sheets seen are grey-green, ultramarine, mauve and a second mauve sheet with a shade variant perhaps closer to *reddish lilac*, see figures 1 to 4.





Fig 2 reddish-lilac Lewis essay sheet



Fig 3 mauve Lewis essay sheet



Fig 4 ultramarine Lewis essay sheet

Each sheet of thick, soft white wove paper measures 170 x 93.5 mm and includes ten impressions of the 25 x 34 mm Lewis essays. Given the relative occurrence of these (from the few sighted in recent years) it appears that grey-green is slightly more common than the ultramarine. That may not be correct.

One suggestion is that only two sheets of essays in each colour were produced. On this basis, one might suggest that the two violet shades (see figures 2 and 3) are an ill matching pair of sheets and that *red* essays do exist. However, a single Lewis essay in reddish lilac is also known from the upper right of a sheet, i.e. a second reddish lilac sheet must have existed.

It has oblique roulettes measuring 11½ – see figure 5. It is believed that this is the first recorded instance of a Lewis essay with experimental separations. If, as suggested, two sheets of the Lewis essays were printed in each colour the existence of this second reddish lilac sheet suggests that the existence of Lewis essays in *red* is doubtful, because four colours are then known.

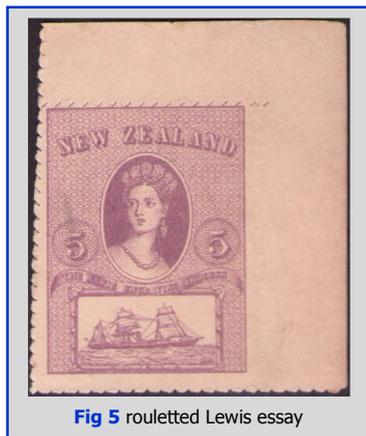


Fig 5 rouletted Lewis essay



Fig 6 cancelled Lewis essay

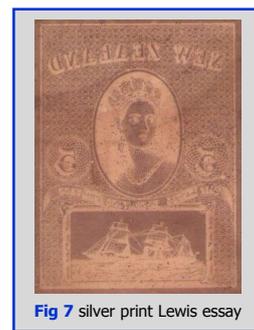


Fig 7 silver print Lewis essay

Whilst preparing this article an imperforate dull grey-green Lewis essay was shown to this writer – see figure 6. This essay (which bore *cancelled* stencilled in purple blue ink across the steam sailing ship) shows that shades do exist and that it is likely that there were at least three sheets (as evidenced by figures 2, 3 and 5) printed in the so called violet colour mentioned in ref 1.

Figures 5 and 6 indicate that Lewis was very serious about producing stamps and that he used the necessary tools to try to produce more than just a stamp like design.

A typed annotation on an envelope that contained miscellaneous Lewis essay material read: *Lewis Engraving Process/Ig. G. stamp engraving/proofs 1892*. The contents of this envelope included a spotted silver negative print of Lewis' design. On the reverse in blue manuscript is the explanation: *Silver print from diapositive of stamp "Lewis Engraving Process for copper or steel intaglio dry collodion"* and an abbreviated signature: I. Gottfried.

The annotation **Ig. G.** on the envelope is probably the initials of **Ig** (natus, or) **G** (ottfried) who developed the silver print – see figure 7.

The envelope additionally contained an irregular 71 x 59 mm piece of thin card numbered 113 on the reverse. On the front printed in blue were 9 partial Lewis essays forming a composite design. The significance of the *113* is not known but the appearance of the piece indicates that it was produced after the copper plate had been destroyed.

The typed 1892 date on the envelope is interesting. This may indicate that Gottfried produced the silver print some years before the announcement of the G.P.O. competition in 1895. The date on the envelope may have been when Lewis first developed *the Lewis engraving process*, or it may have been typed in error. There is no way now to verify that Lewis produced these stamp essays in 1892.

Summary

Lewis was possibly an engineer and as early as 1892 he may have produced these essays in imperforate sheets of ten. At least one sheet and probably no more than three sheets were printed in a range of colours. The known colours (of which shades exist) with regards to ref 1 are grey-green, ultramarine, and violet. The existence of red Lewis essays previously reported cannot be confirmed and these may not have existed.

At least part of one sheet of reddish lilac Lewis essays was rouletted in an experimental separation trial, and at least part of one sheet of grey-green Lewis essays was defaced with *cancelled*; perhaps when Lewis presented specimens of his craftsmanship to the G.P.O. in 1894.

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Acknowledgements

The writer thanks Neil Fenwick for help with this article and acknowledges that for the purpose of illustrating this article some minor cosmetic enhancements to the sheet selvages in figures 1,2 3 and 4 were made.

References

- 1 Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand, *Postage Stamps of New Zealand*, volume I, pp 139-140.



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