

The 1890 3d N.Z. Railways Newspaper stamp perf 12½

Adam Miller FRPSNZ

All values from this set are found in several shades - ½d in black and grey-black, 1d in violet and purple, 2d in deep blue, blue and ultramarine, 4d in red and rose-red, and 6d in yellow green and green. The 3d stamp was the only one to undergo notable colour changes in its early life.

The 3d is found in brown, bright pale lemon and shades of yellow through to near orange. It paid the rate for six newspapers.

Jim Brodie, in *The Postage Stamps of New Zealand Volume VI* (1977), noted that RJG Collins had reported proofs in issued colours, including brown for the 3d. (Figures 1 & 2)



Figure 1. 3d brown 1890 proof



Figure 2. 3d brown 1890

The first printings of the stamps were perforated 12½, on soft wove paper. The perforations are frequently “fluffy” although clean-cut examples are also found. Mint gummed copies are known (actually they appear proportionally more frequent than later printings – perhaps collectors at the time put aside sets of the “new” stamps?)

The 3d brown remains an elusive stamp, but copies have appeared at reasonably regular intervals in local auctions. Perhaps the colour was soon found to be too close to that of the brown paper used on parcels at the time, or the wooden cases of shipping boxes? Whatever the reason, the colour was altered, possibly even in the first year, to a bright pale lemon (Figure 3).

This seems at least as scarce as the 3d brown, understandable as it also had a short life. Possibly it was too pale for the value to be clearly read. Brodie noted it as “lemon-yellow” in Volume VI, but until the recent 5th edition of *The Kiwi Catalogue of New Zealand Revenue and Railway Stamps* (Smitham, 2013), the few printed catalogues covering the N.Z. Railways Newspapers stamps did not list the lemon shade (Dave Elsmore’s ozrevenues.com site does, however). No dated copies of the 3d brown or lemon are recorded. The 3d lemon is found on both thick (c4.5/1000”) and thin (c3/1000”) wove paper, easily distinguishable.



Figure 3. 3d bright pale lemon, M & U. Note fluffy perforations.

Government Printing Office records show that just 50 sheets of the 3d (6,000 stamps) were issued in 1892, and the colour was altered again during that time. There are no records of any 3d printings in 1891. A handwritten note to the 1892 3d printing records states “Colour altered from Cr. Citron to a deep yellow with approval of Controller” (Figure 4). It is not recorded at what point the colour was first altered from brown to lemon so the number of brown sheets and lemon sheets are unknown. Records show that in 1893 another 100 sheets of the 3d, in deep yellow, were printed.



Figure 4. 3d perf 12½, deep yellow. Note clean-cut perforations.

Curiously, the 3d brown was explicitly referenced in the November 1893 issue of *The Australian Stamp Collector* (vol 1 no 2). At that time, it was the official journal of the Philatelic Society of New Zealand, and regular meeting reports were published therein. Within the report of the fifth Annual General Meeting is the following:

“A letter was received from Mrs Thomas of Christchurch, covering a specimen of the N.Z. Railway 3d newspaper stamp, printed in dark brown. Enquiries show that this was *an error in printing* a small quantity of the earlier supplies, as no colours but yellow or orange had been officially sanctioned.” (*my italics*)

This (very) contemporary report may have some credibility as an alternative explanation of the 3d brown stamp’s scarcity. If the proof was in brown, but the decision had been subsequently made to produce it in lemon, the printer may have created the first print run in the proof colour by mistake, or released some brown proof sheets.

As they had been produced, it is quite possible that the Railways Department then decided to use them up rather than destroy them.

As a rare catalogued shade variety, the 3d pale lemon can be expertised by the RPSNZ Expert Committee. The shade is quite distinctive, even beside the nearest yellow shade; even more so when it is remembered that they only occur perf 12½.

The Kiwi catalogue also records the 3d yellow perf 12½ as existing on vertically laid paper. This follows directly on from Brodie's recording the same in Volume VI. The author has not sighted a copy, nor have two other senior collectors with significant interest in these stamps. Any perf 12½ on laid paper are much scarcer than their catalogue values would suggest, and the author would be interested in sighting any 3d examples, care of the Editor.

All subsequent printings of the 3d, across various papers and perforations, were all in shades of deep yellow through to almost orange. None come close to the lemon shade.

The author would like to thank Stephen Jones for his comments, and the illustration of the 3d proof.