



thin paper. Cancelled proofs are known, but these represent connivance by local clerks, not actual postal use.

As is usually the case with a stamp that attracts so much attention and study, numerous varieties and errors have been reported. Only one has been confirmed. Apparently two sheets were printed in raven blue-black instead of jet black and specimens of these command premiums on the market. American collectors may not be aware of this because Scott does not recognise the colour difference, but Arthur Pierce, the dean of American philatelists, believes that this represents a collectible variety and it is so listed by Stanley Gibbons and in the specialised catalogue. An expert should be consulted before this item is purchased as colour changes are said to have been produced chemically by unscrupulous vendors.

It is amusing to recall that one young lady reported a specimen on cover with the profile of Holmes inverted - a real rarity in the case of one-colour printing. Subsequent careful examination revealed that the letter had been posted with the

stamp upside down.

Although enough (13,500,000 according to official sources) were printed to supply collectors' needs, the stamp has always been a desirable one because of the great demand by admirers of the famous detective. Due to insufficient advance notice, first day covers are really rare. The great bulk of these are due to Deak Simpson, that grand Sherlockian scholar, who sent the 36th volume of Simpson's Sherlockian Studies from Eglonitz on the day of issue and franked the covers with well centered pairs.

It is believed that the foregoing is an accurate summary of the available data on the Bohemian Sherlock Holmes commemorative stamp of 1988. Certainly further study and investigation are desirable and it would be of great advantage to correspond about any varieties and other desirable items as yet unreported.



that the philatelic world is prepared for a disclosure of the facts. First of all, the reason for the issue has always been a subject for speculation and up to the present time the situation has been analogous to the one Mark Twain was describing when he was quoted as having said: "The researches of many antiquarians have already thrown much darkness on the subject, and it is probable, if they continue, that we shall soon know nothing at all." However, those with access to the nation's secret history, which is much more interesting than its public history, know that 1988 was the centennial year of an important service rendered by Sherlock Holmes to the great house of Ormstein, formerly hereditary kings of Bohemia.

The stamp itself is rather crude in design and has little artistic merit. It is black and was printed by photogravure on thick glossy paper. Panes of 100 were supplied, but no plate numbers are found because marginal markings were removed before distribution to local offices. The face value indicates that it was intended for use on foreign mail.

A detailed description is not necessary since the cut is a satisfactory illustration. Yet it may be useful to point out that the indistinct drawing next to the numerals of value is a bee, the symbol of Holmes's retirement. It is also of interest to note the uncrowned republican form of the old royal fork-tailed lion.

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All the sheets printed were perforated 12. There are no legitimate perforation varieties. Although some are offered, it has been determined that these are proofs removed from the printing office by the postmaster-general and privately perforated. All imperforate specimens are also proofs, including the unique block of six in the unrivalled complete Bohemian collection of Edgar Smith. These may easily be distinguished, having been printed on

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PHILATELIC CHRONICLE

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y. FRIDAY, 1 APRIL 1997

### A RAMBLE IN BOHEMIA

"The humblest of creatures has its uses. ... Why, I have got substantial help from a stamp-collector!" (Dr. Thorndyke)



**A****F****T****E****R** the series of successful revolutions that freed the iron curtain satellites, the new governments issued numerous commemorative stamps; too many, according to conservative philatelists. None of these aroused as much interest as the Sherlock Holmes stamp issued by the Republic of Bohemia in 1988. Planned for March 22nd of that year, actually it was not put on sale until December 7th because of some mysterious delay at the Mori-Arty Statni Tiskarna in Eglow.

Considerable misinformation has been circulated about this stamp and, now that sufficient data are available, it seems