

BRITISH CENTRAL AFRICA.

By P. L. PEMBERTON.

The first issue of stamps for these territories took place in April, 1891. They were made by overprinting the stamps of the British South Africa Company, then current, with the initials B.C.A. in block capitals 3½ mm. high.



All values were so treated except the 3d; the 3sh was not issued until Oct., 1895, and the 4sh till March, 1893. The stamps of the values from 1d to 10sh were of the usual size and the higher values, from £1 to £10, almost twice the size. The former were in sheets of sixty stamps arranged in six horizontal rows of ten, and the paper used was of a very thin transparent texture similar to that used for early issues of other colonies by the printers, Messrs. Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co. The collector of entire sheets may look out for two varieties, as follows.

1. With watermark "W. C. S. & Co." in monogram, of which the letter "C" forms an almost complete transverse oval measuring 6 centimetres across, with the words "Pure Linen," arched above, and "Wove Bank" below. When well-centred, portions of this watermark appear on about one-third of the stamps on the sheet.

2. Similar watermark with the addition of the number "139" below, and the words "Extra—Strong" to left and right of the monogram, respectively. This variety is scarce.

The unsurcharged stamps of British South Africa are known on paper without watermark and of slightly thicker texture, and though I have not heard of any of this variety being used for B.C.A., they might be found.

There are slight variations in the letters B.C.A. of the overprint. Each sheet of 60 was apparently overprinted from a stereo of which the lower three horizontal lines were an exact replica of the top three, for all the peculiarities in the overprints on the upper half of a sheet are reproduced in the same positions on the lower half. The principal variations in the type are the following:—

Stop after A larger, and further away from the letter; first stamp in first and fourth rows.

Stop after A touches the foot of the letter; seventh stamp in first and fourth rows.

Top of C thick and misshapen; eighth stamp in first and fourth rows.

Extreme tops of B and C cut off straight; first stamp in second and fifth rows.

B with thicker down-stroke; ninth stamp in second and fifth rows.

All the other stamps in each half sheet differ in some slight degree, either in the thickness of the letters and stops or in the positions of the latter.

Some of the stamps of this issue are known bisected and used as stamps of half their value. The 2d, 8d and 1sh have been recorded as so used.

All the stamps of this issue up to 10sh are common unused, and can still be procured at a small advance on face value; a single exception is that of the 6d ultramarine, which is quoted at ten times its face value.

Of the high values the £1 and £2 are the best. Great care should be exercised in buying any of the high values either used or unused, as fiscally used specimens cleverly cleaned are frequently offered, by unscrupulous persons, either unused or with forged postmarks.

1892-93 Provisionals.—The need for stamps of the value of four shillings arose before the B.S.A. stamps of that value were issued; provisionals were accordingly made by surcharging the five shillings stamp with the words FOUR SHILLINGS in two lines of block capitals. This was issued in August, 1892, and only lasted till February, 1893, when the ordinary 4sh stamps arrived.

In the same way a 3sh provisional was issued in October, 1893, and for this value the new 4sh slate and vermilion was made use of. The printing was a very small one, only 1,380 stamps (twenty-three sheets) were issued. Taking this into consideration, the present market value of the stamp is very low.

One Penny Prov. 1895.—There is something to be cleared up in connection with this stamp as there appear to have been three settings of the surcharge. The first reference to this that I can find is a note in the *Monthly Journal*, for Oct., 1896, as follows:—

"There is a history going the round of the magazines, in reference to certain copies of the 'One Penny' on the 2d of the British South Africa Company with double surcharge. The story is that 100 sheets were sent to the Government printing office, at Blantyre, to be surcharged; that the first sheet was put through the press twice over, presumably to show the Postmaster how nicely they could do it. The P. M., however, was not satisfied, and sent the other 99 sheets to Cape Town to be adorned; and thus is accounted for a double overprint which differs in type from the single one."

The *Monthly Journal* went on to say:—

"This history comes from an unimpeachable source, and we have no doubt that it is perfectly true; but we think that waste products of this kind should be destroyed, instead of being preserved for sale to collectors."

The stamps printed at Blantyre differ from those of the Cape Town setting, in that the letters of the words ONE PENNY are slightly thinner and that the bar below them is thinner and shorter, measuring 16½ mm. instead of 18 mm. This surcharge is only known double and it is almost certain that the stamps were never issued to the public.

Of the Cape Town type there is pretty good evidence of two distinct settings of the surcharge. I have an entire sheet before me on which the sixth stamps of the second and fifth rows have the two last letters of PENNY set rather below the level of the rest of the word. It is quite certain, judging by this and other evidence, that this sheet was printed from a stereo made up of three horizontal rows of ten surcharges which was impressed twice on the sheet. With the

exception of the slightly depressed NY there is no semblance of a variety on this sheet. Yet there is a well-known and marked variety in which the "y" of PENNY is dropped considerably below the level of the rest of the word. Several years ago I had an entire sheet in which this variety occurred but unfortunately it was broken up before I took a note of how many there were on the sheet and what positions they occupied. It certainly occurred more than once. However that may be, it is certain that the setting was different from that in which the slightly depressed "NY" occurs. This sheet was memorable for having the fourth horizontal row doubly surcharged; it is puzzling to know how this could have occurred unless each row was surcharged separately, and I am inclined to think that this is the solution. Collectors should take particular note of the fact that, of the two types of double surcharge, the Blantyre variety was never issued to the public, whereas the Cape Town type is a genuine error. Both command good prices, but the latter is not only more desirable as an issued stamp but is also scarcer.

THE 1885 ISSUE. NO WMK.

A new set of stamps, in a design typical of the Colony, having been requisitioned from Messrs. De La Rue & Co., stamps with a representation of two negroes, one with a spade and the other with a pick-axe, supporting a shield surmounted by the Arms of the Colony (a tree), were issued in 1895. The design was intended to represent the dignity of labour. The inscription "Light in Darkness" appears in coloured letters on a scroll at the foot of the stamp.

The set consists of five values from 1d to 1sh, and six values, of a larger size, from 2sh 6d to £25. I have never found out what the £25 stamp was wanted for, but the £10 was largely used for fiscal purposes and also occasionally for prepayment of postage and insurance of valuable parcels of gold dust, etc. All the values from 2sh 6d upwards are good, but I do not advise the purchase of the £10 and £25 for investment purposes. These can be got sometimes with the surcharge "specimen" and even in this condition are fairly valuable.



Feb., 1896. Watermarked.—This set is similar to the last except that the small sized stamps are watermarked Crown CA, and the larger ones Crown CC and that the shades of all the values are somewhat different while the £1 is changed in colour from orange to blue. The £10 and £25 of this issue are even scarcer than those without watermark. There is a marked shade of the 6d in a pale washy blue.



Issue of 1897.—For this issue the design was slightly modified. The negro group now appears on a white, instead of a lined, background; the name of the Colony is in an arched label above, and the value is in a tablet at foot, instead of being in each of the lower corners as before. The colours, too, are different for every value. As before, the values from 1d to 1sh are watermarked *Crown CA* and the higher values *Crown CC*. The most sought after stamp in this set is the 3sh sea-green; these were not required very much in the ordinary way, and were nearly all used up for the provisional "one penny" stamps, early in the following year.

1d on 3sh of 1898.—The exact date upon which this stamp was issued is not known, but it is generally believed to have been early in January, 1898. The surcharge, which was printed in red, on the 3sh sea-green of the 1897 issue, consisted of the words "ONE-PENNY" in two lines in Roman capitals. An error occurred on the second stamp from the end in the last row but one, in which the word PENNY was spelled PNNEY. This mistake must have been seen very soon, and corrected immediately, as the stamp is exceedingly rare. It was not until 1901 that the error was discovered by philatelists.

This provisional was made necessary by the loss in transit of a case containing a supply of stamps from Messrs. De La Rue & Co. Nobody ever knew what became of the case but its loss made the issue of this, and, afterwards, the curious provisionals I am about to describe, an absolute necessity.

Check-Stamp Prov.—Presumably there was not a sufficient supply of any other value, after the 3sh had been used, for surcharging purposes, and the authorities at Blantyre hit upon the happy expedient of manufacturing stamps themselves and using the embossing stamp ordinarily used for impressing upon checks as a groundwork. These were printed in red in two rows of 15 on sheets already



prepared with thirty upright rectangular frames, made with printers' rule, and containing the words *INTERNAL*, above, and *POSTAGE*, below, all printed in blue.

In order to guard against forgery the Postmaster initialled some of the stamps first issued, on the back, by hand, with

his own initials, J. T. G. but as this was an exacting and wearisome work another form of control was used, after a short time, consisting of uncoloured letters and figures faintly embossed on the backs of the stamps, presumably by means of ordinary type.

Mr. B. W. H. Poole, in a most interesting article in *The West-End Philatelist*, for June, 1907, says that only sixteen sheets (480 stamps) were initialled by the Postmaster, and that the remainder of the issue, both perf. and imperf., numbering in all about 24,000 stamps, were marked with the uncoloured type. The meaning, if there is any, of these figures and letters, has always been, and probably will always remain a mystery. Mr. Poole, in the article referred to, gives some particulars about this matter which I cannot do better than reproduce verbatim.

"The uninked type consisted of figures and letters—a different combination for each stamp on the sheet, so that the stamps of this issue can be "plated." So far as the figures are concerned, the arrangement is quite systematic, the stamps in the top row being numbered 1 to 15, from right to left, while those in the lower row are numbered 16 to 30, also from right to left. The letters that accompany the numbers appear to be quite unintelligible, though they might have had some significance to the officials at the time the stamps were issued. In some cases the figures are above the letters, in others the letters are over the numbers; and in four stamps on the sheet they are side by side. I have reconstructed the plate, and find the combinations of letters and figures on the thirty stamps are as follows:—

15	14I	13	12	XA	10	9	F	7	6	F	4	3	2G	1
K		D	WX	11	Z	C	8	H	P	5	M	X		F
30	XQ	28	27	Z	25	24A	23	S	21	T	Z19	Q	E	16
S	29	FA	B	26	J		N	22	WP	20		18	17	FY

"The letters and figures are not, as a rule, in line above each other, as shown in the diagram. Usually, one is to the left of the stamp, and the other to the right. For instance, on the thirteenth stamp the figure "3" is in the centre and the "X" is close to the left-hand side; on the seventh stamp the "9" is on the left, and the "C" in the centre; on the thirtieth stamp the "16" is in the centre, the "F" is on the left, and the "Y" on the right and so on; the positions varying on almost every stamp.

"The following diagram of the six stamps, from the right-hand side of the sheet gives an idea of the appearance of the uninked type":—

13		15
D	14 I	K
28	XQ	30
F A	29	S

The stamps as first issued, in March, 1898, were not perforated, but they were afterwards perforated 12. Marked shades of colour, both of the central oval and of the frame can be found, and the oval stamp is very rarely found evenly centred in its rectangular frame. Specimens exist with the centre inverted, and it is said that only the stamps in the upper row of fifteen on one sheet were so printed.

Issue of 1900.—Relief did not come to the provisional-ridden country until 1900 when a new supply of 1d, 4d and 6d stamps arrived. In these the niggers appeared in violet instead of the more correct black, and the frames were also changed in colour.

King's Head Issue.—During the years 1903-4, the values of a new set, bearing the portrait of the King, were issued. As with earlier issues, the number of denominations, especially of the lower values, was singularly limited, 1d, 2d, 4d, 6d and 1sh stamps being sufficient to supply all needs. The higher values were 2sh 6d, 4sh, 10sh, £1 and £10. The design was identical with that used in East Africa and Uganda, the five high values being in the usual size employed by Messrs. De La Rue for stamps of 5sh, and watermarked *Crown CC*. In 1907, the 1d, and later, the 6d, were issued on paper watermarked with the multiple *Crown CA*, chalk-surfaced, but the watermark of the other three values was not altered.

Nyasaland Protectorate.—The name of the Colony was altered to "Nyasaland Protectorate" by an order in council dated 6th July, 1907. This necessitated

a change in the stamps and a new series as follows:

Wmk. Crown CA, single, chalk-surfaced paper.

1sh black green.

Wmk. Crown CA, multiple, ord. paper.

½d green.

1d carmine.

Wmk. Crown CA, multiple, chalk-surfaced

3d deep lilac on yellow.

4d red on yellow.

6d red-lilac on white.

2sh 6d carmine and black on blue.

4sh black and red on white.

10sh red and green on light green.

£1 black and lilac on red.

£10 ultramarine and lilac on white.

It will be noticed that the 2d value is not included but that two values, not hitherto used in British Central Africa, have been added, namely:—½d and 3d. The stamps are printed from the two new universal key-plates and are the first stamps to be so printed. The issue of the 1sh on single watermark paper might have led to a good deal of speculative buying if it had not been already officially announced that 60,000 were to be issued.—*Philatelic Journal of Great Britain.*