

The DISTRIBUTION of "SPECIMEN" STAMPS by the UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION

By Marcus Samuel

(Continued from page 651, January 1st)

1884. "SPECIMEN" overprints on stamps of the British Crown Colonies supplied to the U.P.U. for distribution.

As will have been seen from what has already been written, up to this time the stamps of all British-controlled territories (with the exception of Great Britain itself and British Guiana) had been supplied to the International Bureau for distribution in normal mint condition. In the case of the Crown Colonies, the initial collections were probably supplied from stocks of stamps held in the Colonies; specimens of new stamps could have been supplied from the Colonies or by the Crown Agents. Earlier British Colonial stamps are known with "Specimen" or "Cancelled" overprints, but with the exception of stamps of some of the Australian States, and a few others, they are very rare when so overprinted and can have been created only in extremely small numbers.

According to the De La Rue History*, excerpts from which, headed "D.L.R.", will be given by kind permission of Mr. John Easton, Messrs. De La Rue & Co., who then held a virtual monopoly in the production of British Colonial postage stamps, received the following instructions from the Crown Agents on June 9th, 1884.

D.L.R., page 393. "With reference to our letter of the 17th January last, I have to inform you that we have been authorised by the Governments of: BRITISH GUIANA, CEYLON, JAMAICA, MALTA, SIERRA LEONE, STRAITS SETTLEMENTS, TOBAGO and TRINIDAD to furnish the General Post Office with one hundred specimens of any new duty of Postage Stamps, Post Cards, etc., and of any existing duties printed in new colours, for distribution among the countries of the Postal Union, and I have to request that you will make a note that in future one hundred such specimens will have to be prepared for that purpose, in addition to the quantities mentioned in the respective requisitions.

We shall doubtless receive a similar authority in due course from all the other Colonies for which we act."

Although no instruction is given that such stamps were to be overprinted with the word SPECIMEN, it is significant that any new stamps of the above-mentioned Colonies, specimens of which were distributed with U.P.U. circulars dated later than the above, are represented in the collection of the International Bureau by examples with SPECIMEN overprints, and that from 1885 to 1948, practically all British Colonial new issues sent to Berne as specimens, with the exception of some locally-produced provisionals, were thus overprinted or perforated. The following British Colonial specimens were distributed during the period June to December 1884.

Circular No. 1933/63: June 19th, 1884

SIERRA LEONE: specimens of ½d., 1d., 2d. and 4d. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The ½d. dull green, 1d. carmine, 2d. grey and 1s. brown with SPECIMEN overprints, the ½d. and 1d. values being perforated 12, the others perforated 14. In the collection of the *Berne Postal Museum*, the similarly-overprinted ½d. and 1d. are perforated 14, the others perforated 12. The stamps perforated 12 are very rare and are seldom found in sets of four. Bearing in mind that these four stamps appear to have been the first British Colonial issues to have been overprinted SPECIMEN by De La Rue before being sent to the U.P.U. for distribution, it is suggested that the printers found that they had insufficient normally-perforated stamps available for this purpose and were obliged to complete the number with others which had been line-perforated 12 at Somerset House.

* "The De La Rue History of British and Foreign Postage Stamps", by John Easton (London, 1958).



D.L.R., page 389. The four stamps were invoiced on May 15th, 1884. There is no record of any specimens being supplied.

VIRGIN ISLANDS: specimens of ½d., 1d. and 2½d. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The ½d. green, 1d. rose and 2½d. ultramarine without "Specimen" overprints. De La Rue had not yet been instructed to overprint the stamps of this Colony.

D.L.R., page 370. The three stamps were invoiced on February 29th, 1884.

Circular No. 2411/85: July 26th, 1884

CEYLON: specimens of 7c., 4c. and 24c. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The 2c. dull green, 4c. rose and 24c. brown-purple with SPECIMEN overprints.* The 24c. brown-purple was never issued unissued and it is the first example of an unissued stamp which was distributed to members of the U.P.U. There are also examples of the 2c. and 4c. without overprints, but no circular concerning their distribution has been found.

D.L.R., page 390. The 2c. and 4c. were invoiced on December 27th 1883 and there is no mention of specimens. The 24c. was invoiced on July 15th, 1884 and 100 specimens were invoiced. It is suggested that further supplies of the 2c. and 4c. were forwarded at the same time as the 24c., and that 100 of each were overprinted SPECIMEN in accordance with the instructions from the Crown Agents.

STRAITS SETTLEMENTS: specimens of 2c., 4c., 5c., 10c. and 12c. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The 2c. rose, 4c. brown, 5c. purple-brown (Crown CC watermark), 5c. blue, 10c. slate (Crown CC watermark), and 12c. dull purple, without "Specimen" overprints and believed to have been distributed with the Circular dated August 30th, 1883. There are also examples of all but the 5c. purple-brown, overprinted SPECIMEN* and believed to have been distributed with the Circular dated July 26th, 1884. The presence of the 10c. slate stamp with Crown CC watermark appears to indicate that this stamp, rather than that with Crown CA watermark, was still in stock in July 1884.

D.L.R., pages 349 and 371. The 10c. slate was first invoiced on September 21st, 1881; the 4c., 5c. blue and 12c. were invoiced on May 21st, 1883; and the 2c. was invoiced on September 4th, 1883. There is no mention of specimens. It is suggested that 100 of each were overprinted at the time a new supply was forwarded in July 1884, in accordance with the instructions

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* Previously illustrated—see pages 547 and 549 (December 11th).

Distribution of "Specimen" Stamps by U.P.U. (cont. from p. 681) from the Crown Agents. De La Rue would have no means of knowing that specimens of these stamps had previously been distributed to members of the U.P.U.

Circular No. 2839/100: August 30th, 1884

TRINIDAD: specimens of $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 4d., 6d. and 1s. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The $\frac{1}{2}$ d. green, 1d. carmine, $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. blue and 4d. grey, without "Specimen" overprints and believed to have been distributed with the Circular dated February 17th, 1883. There are also examples of these four stamps, together with the 6d. olive-black and 1s. orange-brown, overprinted SPECIMEN* and believed to have been distributed with the Circular dated August 30th, 1884.

D.L.R., pages 356 and 369. The $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 4d. were first invoiced on December 8th, 1882. The 6d. and 1s. were first supplied on June 21st, 1883. There is no mention of any specimens. It is suggested that 100 of each of the six values were overprinted at the time a new supply was forwarded in August 1884.

Circular No. 3261/117: October 2nd, 1884

BRITISH HONDURAS: specimen of 1d. postage stamp.

Bureau Collection. The 1d. rose overprinted SPECIMEN. *D.L.R.*, page 395. The 1d. rose was first invoiced on September 11th, 1884. There is no mention of specimens. It is suggested that 100 examples were overprinted SPECIMEN. It is extraordinary that there appears to have been no distribution of the 1884 6d. yellow, with or without "Specimen" overprint.

Circular No. 3507/130: November 1st, 1884

BARBADOS: specimens of 3d. and 4d. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The 3d. purple and 4d. brown with SPECIMEN overprints; the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. dull green, 1d. rose, $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. ultramarine and 4d. grey, which had been distributed, without overprints, with the Circulars dated October 1st, 1882, and January 6th, 1883 (4d. grey).

D.L.R., page 396. The 3d. purple and 4d. brown were first invoiced on October 24th, 1884. There is no mention of specimens. It is suggested that 100 of each were overprinted SPECIMEN.

Circular No. 3939/148: December 23rd, 1884

BERMUDA: specimen of a $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. postage stamp.

Bureau Collection. A copy of the $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. ultramarine without "Specimen" overprint.

D.L.R., page 383. The first supply of $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. blue stamps was despatched on September 22nd, 1884. There is no mention of specimens. It is suggested that De La Rue had not, at this time, received instructions to overprint the stamps of Bermuda.

MALTA: specimens of $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., 2d., $2\frac{1}{2}$ d., 4d. and 1s. postage stamps.



Bureau Collection. There is an example of the $\frac{1}{2}$ d. yellow without "Specimen" overprint and the 1885 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. green, 1d. rose, 2d. grey, $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. blue, 4d. brown and 1s. violet are overprinted SPECIMEN. The 1886 5s. rose was distributed with the

Circular dated October 22nd, 1885, and is overprinted SPECIMEN. Among the later "Specimen" stamps is the unissued 1914 3d. purple on yellow paper with white back.

D.L.R., page 388. The $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d. and $2\frac{1}{2}$ d. were invoiced on June 23rd, 1884, the 2d., 4d. and 1s. on July 5th, 1884, with 100 specimens of each value.

No circular concerning distribution to be found

BAHAMAS: 1884 1d., 4d., 5s. and £1.

Bureau Collection. Examples of the 1d. rose, 4d. yellow, 5s. sage green and £1 Venetian red, all without "Specimen" overprints. In the collection of the *Paris Postal Museum* these stamps are not represented at all.



D.L.R., page 386. The 5s. and £1 were invoiced on May 12th, 1884, without any specimens. Examples overprinted SPECIMEN are known: they are extremely rare, and were certainly not distributed through the U.P.U. The 1d. and 4d. were first invoiced on June 27th, 1884, and 100 specimens of each were supplied. The stamps overprinted SPECIMEN are rare and it is doubtful if they were distributed to members of the U.P.U. It is suggested that they were overprinted by De La Rue in accordance with the instructions from the Crown Agents dated June 9th, 1884, but never sent to the G.P.O. for transmission to the U.P.U. because the printers had not, at this time, received instructions to supply specimen stamps of the Bahamas.

Letter from the Crown Agents to De La Rue & Co., dated February 23rd, 1885

D.L.R., page 421. The number of specimens of new postage stamps required by the General Post Office for circulation to Postal Union countries was to be increased from 100 to 106 of each. It is later made clear (*D.L.R.*, page 516) that the six additional copies were required for record in the G.P.O.

Circular No. 1663/52: June 13th, 1885

MAURITIUS: specimens of 2c., 4c. and 16c. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The 2c. green and 4c. carmine* and the 16c. chestnut, all with SPECIMEN overprints.

D.L.R., pages 369 and 370. The 2c. and 4c. were first invoiced on June 3rd, 1884, and it is also stated that 106 specimens of each were invoiced. The 16c. was invoiced on June 3rd, 1885, and there is no mention of specimens. As regards the 2c. and 4c., it is felt that there must be some error—either 100 specimens of each were invoiced before February 23rd, 1885, or 106 of each after that date. Mauritius was not one of the colonies mentioned in the instructions from the Crown Agents dated June 9th, 1884, requiring the printers to supply 100 specimens of every new postage stamp. It is suspected that, as in the case of the Bahamas 1884 1d. and 4d. stamps, examples of the Mauritius 1884 2c. and 4c. stamps were overprinted SPECIMEN before instructions had been received from the colony, and that they were held until the 1885 16c. stamp was ready for distribution.

Circular No. 2949/110: September 28th, 1885

SIAM: specimens of 1 att, 2 att, 4 att and 12 att postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. Examples of the four 1883-85 engraved stamps. Only the 1907 10t., 20t. and 40t. and the 1908 10t., 20t. and 40t. have "Specimen" overprints. (Illustrated on page 685.)

Circular No. 3941/144: December 4th, 1885

CONGO FREE STATE: specimens of 5c., 10c., 25c. and 50c. postage stamps.

Bureau Collection. The only stamps with SPECIMEN overprints are the 1887 50c. chocolate and 5f. lilac, which were distributed with the Circular dated October 4th, 1887. (Illustrated on page 685.)

(Continued on page 685)

* Previously illustrated—see page 549, December 11th.

* Previously illustrated—see page 483, December 4th.

Distribution of "Specimen" Stamps by U.P.U. (cont. from p. 683)



(Text for these illustrations is on page 683, foot of column 2)

Circular No. 4347/168: December 28th, 1885
INCREASE IN NUMBER OF SPECIMENS REQUIRED FOR DISTRIBUTION

By the terms of Article XXIX, revised at the 1885 Lisbon U.P.U. Congress, administrations of the Union were to communicate to one another, by the intermediary of the International Bureau, the collection of their postage stamps in triplicate. This was to take effect from April 1st, 1886. Referring to this arrangement, it is stated that the exact number of collections of postage stamps, stamped postcard envelopes and wrappers which will then be required will be 291, made up as follows:—

92 administrations will require three collections each	276
Germany will receive nine collections (instead of three), six of which are destined for the Offices of Bavaria and Wurtemberg	6
Gibraltar will cease to be part of the British Post Office, with effect from January 1st, 1886	3
Congo will become part of the Union from January 1st, 1886	3
Bolivia will become part of the Union from April 1st, 1886	3
Total items required	291

The notice continues:—

"But as it will be useful, in view of future increases in membership of the Union (British Colonies in Australia and South Africa, St. Helena, etc.) to form at the International Bureau a stock of stamps in order to offer to new members of the Union as complete collections as possible in exchange for their own, it will be best to fix the number of collections to be sent to the International Bureau in execution of the above arrangement at 345."

Letter from the Crown Agents to De La Rue & Co., dated January 2nd, 1886

D.L.R., page 441. The firm was informed that as from April 1st, 1886, the number of specimens should be increased from 106 to 306. The G.P.O. appears to have omitted to read the last paragraph of the December 1885 U.P.U. circular. In reply, on January 4th, the firm stated:—

"If you require us to supply you with the specimens on the occasion of each order being completed, we fear that we shall have to make some small charge for overprinting them. Until recently, we have allowed the specimens to accumulate and overprinted the lot together, thus minimising the expense." (*D.L.R.*, page 442.)

On January 12th the Crown Agents wrote to say that the

number of specimens was to be increased to 351 (presumably 345 for the International Bureau and six for the G.P.O.). In reply, the firm quoted a letter of January 9th and stated that they undertook to overprint with the word SPECIMEN postage stamps or items of postal stationery, in batches of not more than 400, at a charge of 3s.6d. for each duty or description of article. On February 12th the Crown Agents accepted this estimate and informed the firm that the quantity of specimens in future was to be 400 of each new duty or colour. They were obviously determined to get the maximum number of specimens for their money! The first charges were made for overprinting the Ceylon 1886 25c. and 28c. (*D.L.R.*, page 418), which were distributed with the U.P.U. Circular dated May 24th, 1886.

On November 14th, 1895, in a letter to the Foreign Office concerning stamps for the new British Protectorate in East Africa, De La Rue & Co. quoted a price of 10½d. per 100 for overprinting stamps or items of postal stationery with the word "Specimen" for Postal Union purposes. (*D.L.R.*, page 565.)

Circular No. 159/4: January 11th, 1886

GIBRALTAR: specimens of provisional ½d., 1d., 2d., 2½d., 4d., 6d. and 1s. postage stamps.



Bureau Collection. These stamps have SPECIMEN overprints.

Circular No. 2278/167: April 7th, 1886

BOLIVIA: specimens of 10c., 20c. and 50c. postage stamps.



The 1924 Air 10c. to 5b. are known hand-stamped MUESTRA and the 1925 Centenary 1c. to 5b. hand-stamped "Specimen", the last set including the unissued 1c. and 2c. It is believed that both these sets were distributed to U.P.U. members.

(To be continued)



Rhymes With Reasons No. 8

Some former British Colonies are playing funny games, Disguising their new issues under unfamiliar names. It's really most confusing for old-fashioned chaps like me Who use out-dated catalogues (mine's 1933).

A. L. THOM.