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The Overprinted 1/2 d British Newspaper Wrapper

by

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Newspaper wrappers were introduced in British Bechuanaland during January 1887 to pay the 1/2 d local and the 1 d United Kingdom rates. Both Cape of Good Hope and Great Britain wrappers were overprinted (Figure 1). The last of these was issued in 1889-90 and their usage appears to have been discontinued as the stock was exhausted.

One of the most common British Bechuanaland postal stationery items is the overprinted 1/2 d Great Britain newspaper wrapper. The wrapper was both printed and overprinted by De La Rue and Co. Two different types of wrappers were overprinted.⁽¹⁾ The first wrapper from 1883 has five lines of instructions and was released in Bechuanaland during October 1888; the second wrapper from 1889 has four lines of instructions and was according to Holmes released in Bechuanaland later the same year.⁽¹⁾ The De La Rue Day Books, now at the National Postal Museum of London, show that three printings were made of the 1/2 d wrappers totalling 143,040 copies, but do not specify which overprinting was made on which type of wrapper.⁽²⁾

De La Rue did the first overprinting during September 1887 (32,640 copies), the second overprinting in May 1890 (14,400 copies), and the final and third overprinting (96,000 copies) in November 1891. Since the four-line wrapper was introduced in Great Britain on September 1, 1889,⁽³⁾ only the second and third overprinting can possibly have been made on this design.

There are some additional and interesting details in the Day Books. The two first overprintings were packed, insured, and shipped by De La Rue apparently direct to Bechuanaland. This contrasts to the normal procedure that required the printer to deliver the finished product to the Inland Revenue Stamping Department.⁽⁴⁾ Another interesting detail is that for the second (May 1890) overprinting, the Stamping Department was invoiced for both printing and overprinting. The latter was not the case for the first overprinting and for another shipment not involving newspaper wrappers for which the Day Book also details the content of the invoice. This suggests that the Stamping Department in May 1890 did not have a stock of wrappers to forward with the warrant to the printer for the overprinting. The May 1890 overprinting, therefore, may have been made on a special printing or as part of a larger Great Britain printing.

In October 1890, the current British Bechuanaland postal stationery and stamps were distributed by U.P.U.'s International Bureau in Berne to member countries.^(5,6) This was the result of a July 1889 agreement to exchange specimen copies between members and some British controlled protec-

torates not yet U.P.U. members. The 1/2 d wrapper distributed, together with the 1 d wrapper, was the one with the four lines of instructions. The shipment of the 345 U.P.U. wrappers must have occurred in early 1890 and, therefore, suggests that the second overprinting must have been made on the four-line wrapper. The specimen canceller applied to the wrappers was of a type believed to have been used locally in Bechuanaland.⁽⁶⁾ Consequently, the wrappers must have been shipped to southern Africa and then back to Europe again, a journey that took the most of two months.

It can with confidence be assumed that the first overprinting was made on the wrapper with the five lines of instructions because this was the first type issued. Thus, it would now make sense to suggest that both the second and third overprintings were done on the four-line wrapper since this design replaced the British wrappers in 1889.

In order to evaluate this possibility, we have examined our admittedly limited holding of the 1888 1/2 d wrapper (the one with the five explanatory text lines). Clearly, there exists two overprint types identified by the cancelling bars (Figure 2). One type has the bars terminated parallel to the text lines. The other has the bars terminated perpendicular to the length of the bars (squared). In addition, a 180° rotation will produce a close (but not perfect) overlap of the two asymmetrical and marginal bars. This may imply two different overprintings on the five-line wrapper.

Could it be that the third overprinting was also done on the five-line wrapper since two subtypes (printings?) exist of this type? The relative scarcity of the two types of overprinted wrappers prove that this is not so. We have pooled our, again very limited, holdings of these wrappers and the result is 12 copies of the wrapper with five text lines and 12 copies of the wrapper with four text lines. Although hardly a statistically sound sample, still sufficient to conclude that there must have existed more than the 14,400 copies of four-line wrapper produced by the second overprinting (minus 340 copies U.P.U. specimen cancelled). On this background, it is plausible that both the second and third overprintings were made on the four-lined wrapper.

Finally, how do the two types of overprint on the five-line wrapper fit into the printing information? If we accept the above argumentation, we know that there were only one printing of this type of wrapper and both bar types must have been produced as part of the same overprinting. Our combined holdings suggests that the subtype with the squared terminated bars is the most common (9 copies), while the subtype with the parallel terminated bars are less common (3 copies). The subtype with the squared bars is known cancelled AU 30 1890.

From the above arguments, we can conclude that only one printing of a total of 32,640 copies was made of the five-lined wrapper, while two printings were made on the four-lined wrapper totalling 110,400. The first of the latter two overprintings were specimen overprinted and distributed by U.P.U. in 1890, and cannot have been issued in the British Bechuanaland prior to that date as suggested by Holmes.⁽¹⁾

Notes.

1. Holmes, H.R., 1971. The Postage Stamps, Postal Stationery, and Postmarks of the Bechuanalands. Royal Philatelic Society, London.
2. Young, J.D., 1976. The Victorian overprinted issues for P.O.'s abroad. The Overprinter, Jan. 1976. Also J. Inglefield-Watson, unpublished research in De La Rue Archives, Bay Books (Inland Revenue Series), National Postal Museum, London.
3. Huggins, A.K. 1970. British Postal Stationery. Great Britain Philatelic Society, London.
4. Inglefield-Watson, J., 1996. The British Library Philatelic Collections - The Board of Inland Revenue Stamping Department Archive. Runner Post 43, 1004-1005.
5. Samuel, M., 1976. Specimen Stamps of the Crown Colonies, 1857-1948. Royal Philatelic Society, London.
6. Bendon, J., 1988. U.P.U. Specimen Stamps. J. Bendon, Limassol, Cyprus.

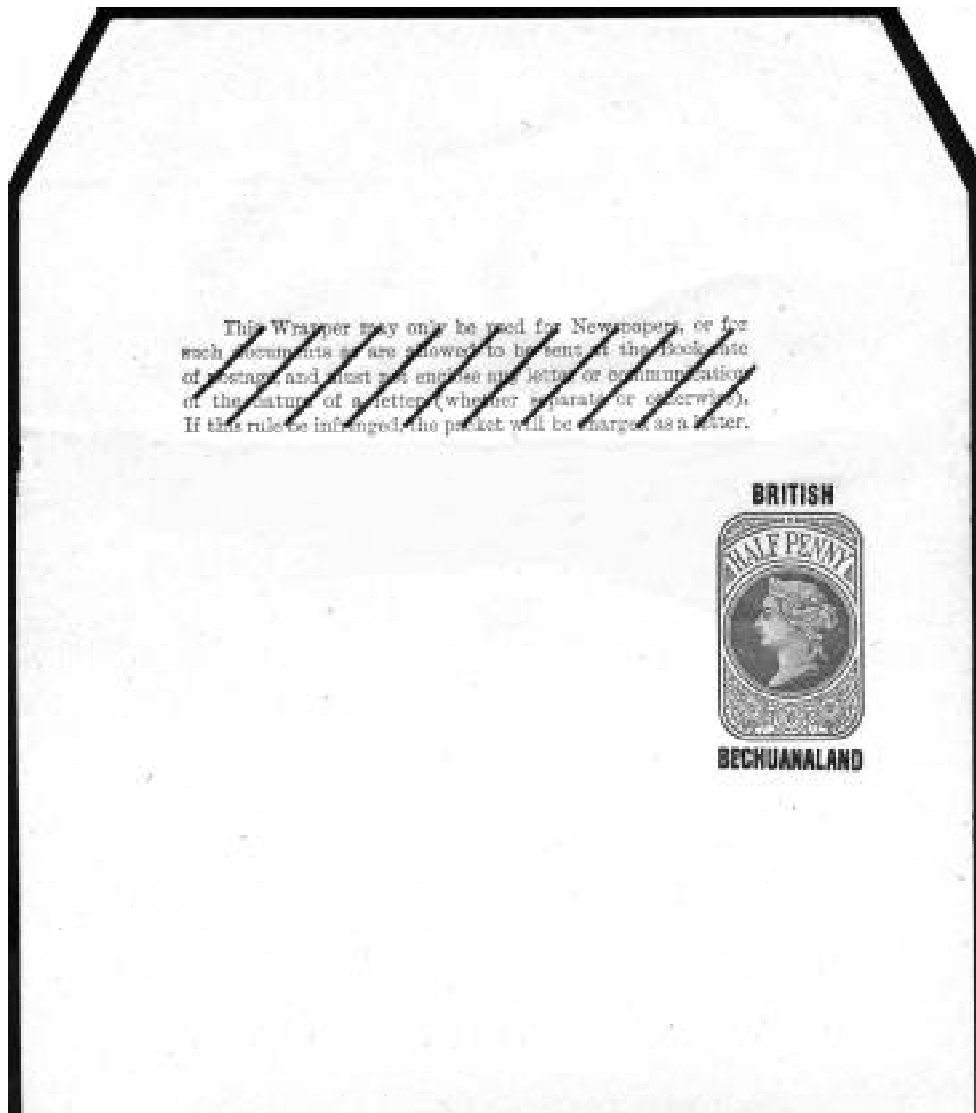


Figure 1. 1/2 d British wrapper overprinted in October 1888 for use in British Bechuanaland.

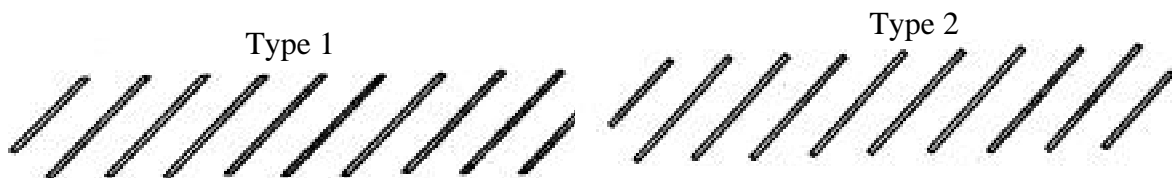


Figure 2. The two different overprint types on the 1888 British Bechuanaland newspaper wrapper. Type 1 has the cancelling bars terminated parallel to the text lines. Type 2 has the bars terminated perpendicular to the length of the bars.

