

Displays given on September 30th 1972 to the British West Africa Study Circle.

SPECIMEN STAMPS

Mr. Marcus Samuel showed his collections of the "Specimen" stamps of Gambia, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone.

Colonial stamps overprinted "Specimen" before 1884 are mostly very rare. Some may have been sent out by postal authorities but it is suspected that most of them were used as samples of the printer's work. While stamps overprinted "Specimen" were mostly distributed, those overprinted "Cancelled" were mostly preserved in record books. They were also used for special purposes, an example being the presence of the "Cancelled" Gambia 1869 imperf. 6d. on the appendix to an 1877 De La Rue Report, where it was used as an example of an embossed stamp, together with stamps printed by other processes by De La Rue & Co.

In 1879 distribution of "Specimen" stamps by the International Bureau of the U.P.U. to the postal administrations of its member nations was first put into effect, but it was not until 1884 that British Colonial stamps used for this purpose were first overprinted "Specimen", no doubt to prevent defrauding of the revenue by their postal use.

Among the first Colonial "Specimens" first to be distributed were the Sierra Leone 1884 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., 2d and 4d., which accompanied the U.P.U. circular dated 6th November 1884. An abnormal feature is that these four "Specimen" stamps are found both with the normal perf. 14 and also line-perforated 12, the latter very rare. The number of "Specimens" required for distribution at this time was only 100 (one set to most members of the U.P.U.) and it is probable that the British Colonial stamps were overprinted from a "Specimen" setting of sixty, to fit the panes then used. Regarding the Sierra Leone stamps abnormally perf. 12, it is possible that De La Rue & Co. miscalculated the number of "Specimens" required and were obliged to make it up by drawing stamps from imperforate proof sheets and then overprinting them after perforating them on a 12 gauge machine.

In 1885 the number of "Specimens" distributed to each member nation was increased to three and the total to 345; in 1892 five "Specimens" of each stamp were distributed and the total increased to 730, and in 1907 the numbers were reduced to three for each member and a total of 451. By 1940 the total had been reduced to 351 and it has fluctuated between 350 and 400 for many years, in accordance with the political consequences of wars and the emergence of new nations.

It should be appreciated that only stamps which were new in value, colour or design were distributed as "Specimens". Thus there was no normal distribution of King Edward VII stamps with the MCA watermarks until the "universal colour" scheme was put into operation. However, most of the King George V stamps with Script CA watermark were distributed because, in most cases, there was also a change from Die I to Die II. About the same time a smaller "Specimen" overprint was put into use by De La Rue & Co., and from 1929 British Colonial stamps sent to the U.P.U. were perforated, instead of overprinted "Specimen". Just before the issue of the Silver Wedding stamps in 1948, it was decided that in future all British Colonial "Specimen" stamps should be sent to the U.P.U. in normal mint condition, as was the practice for most of the other member nations.

A short reference must be made to two other classes of "Specimens". While the British Colonial stamps for U.P.U. distribution were taken from the first printings and overprinted or perforated "Specimen" in types used only by those printers, others may be found with quite different overprints, mostly handstamped. It is believed that these were produced to enable postal administrations to supply unexpected demands for "Specimens", probably from neighbouring territories, or for supplying to V.I.P.s., and where such overprints are not found on the stamps of any other territories, it is probable that they were applied locally. Great care should be taken with any freak overprints which may well be forged.

As previously mentioned, very early stamps with "Specimen" overprints may well have been used as samples of the printer's work. This is certainly true of later stamp proofs, generally printed in colours not used for the issued stamps on unwatermarked paper and frequently overprinted or perforated "Specimen". These are frequently, quite incorrectly, described as "colour trials", whereas they are reprints, but many are very attractive.

The following were noted among the items showed by Mr. Samuel,

- Gambia: 1869 4d. and 6d. "Specimen" and "Cancelled"
1880 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. and 1/- "Specimen"
1886-87 various with "Specimen" handstamps including an item of postal stationery.
1922-27 MCA 5/- handstamped "Specimen" in purple (only known thus) and 4/- De La Rue sample stamp.
- Gold Coast: 1876-79 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. (imperf.), 1d., 2d., 4d., 6d. "Specimen"
1907-13 unissued 10/- universal colours "Specimen"
1913 1d., De La Rue sample stamps
1921 15/- and £2 with abnormal De La Rue "Specimen" overprints, distributed thus to the U.P.U.
1928 6d., sample stamp overprinted "HARRISON'S/SPECIMEN"
- Sierra Leone: 1860 1d., pane of twenty with thick "Specimen" overprint.
1872-77 1d., 2d., 3d., 4d. and 1/- imperf. "Specimen"
1884 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., 1d., 2. and 4d perf. 12 "Specimen" (Difficult to get all four).
1893 to 1933, various handstamped including 1921-28 $\frac{1}{2}$ d. to £5 and the 1933 Wilberforce set.
- Southern Nigeria: 1908 $\frac{1}{2}$ d., to £1 with large "Specimen" handstamp in violet.
K.E. VII postcard with " $\frac{1}{2}$ d" on 1d. surcharge and "SPECIMEN" between two bars.