

BRITISH WEST AFRICA STUDY CIRCLE

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THE RARE GOLD COAST 20/- STAMP

By G. A. Higlett

The first 20/- stamps of the Gold Coast Colony, of nearly 40 years ago, are described in the Stanley Gibbons Catalogue as:-

	<u>Unused</u>	<u>Used</u>
No. 24. Green and Red	£ 35	-
No. 25 Dull Mauve and Black on Red (1894)	52/6	20/-

The following history of the first issued Green and Red Stamp, and the reason for changing its colour, was related to me by a member of the Legislative Council of the Colony, to which body official reports of all the circumstances were made. While there was no request for secrecy, obvious possibilities have caused me to defer publishing the story for so many years.

In order to understand the matter, it is necessary to consider the actual fiscal use of this stamp for stamp duty on deeds, for which purpose it was primarily created, and its improbable use on telegrams.

The Colony was divided into two provinces, the Eastern and the Western. There were two registry offices for stamping deeds, one at Accra for the Eastern Province, and the other at Cape Coast Castle for the Western Province. At one of these two offices every deed executed in the Colony and liable to stamp duty had to be stamped and in these early nineties the registries had no machines for impressing duty stamps, and the adhesive postage stamps had to be used.

These Green and Red stamps were supplied to the post offices at Accra and Cape Coast Castle only, and the reserve stock was kept at Accra, the seat of government. It is important to bear in mind that no other place was officially supplied with these stamps for any purpose.

In 1893 the entire reserve stock at Accra was stolen by a native. The Legislative Council promptly ordered the withdrawal of all the stamps from both Accra and Cape Coast Castle, and a fresh supply in changed colours was ordered from England. Until the arrival of these new stamps, the Colony had to make shift without stamps of this value!

It was ascertained and officially reported that besides the supplies made to the registry offices for stamping deeds, the total number sold at both the post offices was 39 only. It will be seen from this that there was no real need for the stamp for postal purposes. I had experience of handling large numbers of letters from the Gold Coast,

including many bulky letters, from the time before the first issue of 1875 until after the period we are now considering, and I have no hesitation in saying that after the reduction of postal rates (before this time) there was no need for a stamp of this value for postal purposes. The highest charge on letters handled by me was about 15/-, and even if so much as 20/- was occasionally required by anyone, two stamps of 10/- would have served the purpose. It is possible that one or two stamps may have been properly postally used, but I do not think so. Most of the 39 stamps sold must have been supplied to dealers or collectors. A few may have been postmarked to obtain used specimens.

The thief was caught, and the whole of the stolen stamps recovered, just about the time that the new issue in changed colours arrived from England. The whole of the Green and Red stamps were ordered to be burnt, and in due course a certificate was produced to the Legislative Council that this had been done.

Some time after this alleged total destruction, some members of the council, including my informant, had unused pairs presented to them. Later on a larger number suddenly came on the market at Liverpool, which was then the port at which passengers from the Gold Coast arrived home. Verb. sap.

The question arises, "Were not some of these stamps used on post office telegrams, or cables, receiving the same obliterations as those applied to stamps on letters?" My answer to this is, "No!" The cable company at this time had offices at Accra and Cape Coast Castle, at which two ports the cable touched shore. Senders of cables to Europe took their messages to these offices and paid for them in cash. The rate was some shillings per word. There would be cables from other coast towns, costing more than 20/- each, and these had to be handed in at the local post offices, where the charge of a few pence per word extra was made for transmitting the messages over the post office land lines and delivering to the cable company's office, either at Accra or Cape Coast Castle. But none of these other offices had stamps of higher value than 10/-.

Now it is manifest that the collections of the world contain many more than 39 specimens, and a certain small number allegedly postmarked copies. As I have already indicated, there may have been a very few copies postmarked for collectors, but the few copies that I have seen of these used stamps have been taken from deeds, the fiscal cancellation removed, and a false postmark applied. I think it probable that not a single copy was ever used for the franking of a postal packet at the proper rate of postage.

These remarks do not apply to any later period nor to any later issue of stamps of this value. Of later issues there may have been many used on telegrams to Europe cancelled with postal date stamps.

This history presents one of many instances of destroyed issues, some copies of which always seem to escape destruction.