

# UPU



# STAMPS

## from the British Empire

A history and collector perspective

BOB MYERS

**C**ollecting UPU specimen stamps is rewarding as well as challenging. As a stamp collector, I enjoy the chase of an elusive specimen stamp or set of stamps that can be found on occasion. There are specimens that rarely surface, and could take years to locate, with many remaining in museums or with postal authorities. This is the challenge, the reward and enjoyment of collecting British Empire UPU specimens.

### Brief UPU specimen history

On May 18, 1878, the Universal Postal Union (UPU) met in Paris and adopted the regulation that UPU members transmit “a collection of their postage stamps” to one another. The UPU specimen stamps with “protective security markings” came into existence to keep members informed of another’s officially issued postal paper and to discourage counterfeiting. These markings came in the form of overprints, handstamps, perforations, and postal markings.

From December 1878 to June 1884, between 70 and 80 specimens of the British Empire were distributed to UPU members as normal, unused stamps.

In 1884, the British General Post Office, which controlled the issuance of specimens, decided that all specimens would be distributed with a protective marking (overprint or handstamp). Specimens distributed from June 1884 to March 1886 are difficult to find. Only a single copy was sent to the UPU members (100 specimens in total).

In 1885, the 3rd UPU Congress in Lisbon decided to

increase the number of stamps distributed from one to three. The number required was 345 stamps, sent in strips of three, with very few strips remaining intact today. This continued from April 1886 until June 1892.

In 1891, the 4th UPU Congress in Vienna decided to increase the number of stamps sent from three to five. They were sent in strips of five, which are quite rare. The five stamps were sent from July 1892 to September 1907. During this time, between 716 and 756 specimens were distributed globally.

In 1906, the 6th UPU Congress in Rome decided to decrease the number of stamps sent from five to three. The effective date was October 1, 1907, and it remained at three stamps until specimens ceased to be printed in 1948. During this time, between 339 and 451 specimens were distributed globally.

From 1884 to 1928, stamps were overprinted or hand-stamped “SPECIMEN” in various shapes and sizes from type set forms. From 1928 to 1948, overprinting stamps were replaced, for security reasons, with punched holes (perforations) forming the word “specimen,” in capital letters.

### Specimen distribution

The specimen distribution process started with the British printer or Inland Revenue Service sending stamps to the Crown agents, who then sent to the London General Post Office (GPO). The GPO sent them to the UPU authorities in Bern, Switzerland, who in turn, distributed the specimens to their members. The UPU International Bureau divided

Time Period	Specimens distributed to each UPU member	Total Specimens required for distribution	Specimen Type
Dec, 1878 - June, 1884	1	70 - 80	Uncancelled
June, 1884 - March, 1886	1	100	Overprint/Hand Stamp
April, 1886 - June, 1892	3	345	Overprint/Hand Stamp
July, 1892 - Sept, 1907	5	716 - 756	Overprint/Hand Stamp
Oct, 1907 - Dec, 1928	3	369 - 451	Overprint/Hand Stamp
Dec, 1928 - Sept, 1938	3	395 - 423	Perforated
Sept, 1938 - July, 1948	3	351 - 395	Perforated
After July, 1948			Uncancelled

**Table 1 outlines the specimen distribution history.**

complete sheets or large blocks of stamps that they received into singles or strips, before distributing to the postal administrations of the UPU members. In addition to these, several locally produced specimens were overprinted, or handstamped in country and sent to Bern for distribution.

From 1884 to 1948, there were 109 different British Empire UPU members, from Aden to Zululand. They included colonies, protectorates, overseas territories, states, post offices, occupations, and mandates. During this time, 6,317 specimen stamps were distributed. The United Kingdom produced 5,662, with an additional 655 (about 10 percent) locally produced. In comparison, 91 other UPU members (Afghanistan to Yemen), had protected specimens during this time, including French, German, Portugal and Spain colonies and post offices abroad.

Stamps with protective markings are a subset of all the stamps submitted to the UPU during this period. Stamps without protective markings were distributed either in mint condition or canceled to order (CTO).

## Specimen classification

Specimen collectors have two people to thank. Marcus Samuel (1904-1997) was a distinguished British philatelist and an expert on specimen stamps. When his father, a stamp dealer, acquired a collection that contained many specimens, Marcus was allowed to keep them in return for removing the other stamps from the albums. He developed

the British Empire specimen classification system and in 1976 published *Specimen Stamps of the Crown Colonies 1857-1948*. The different specimen types are based on the printer's name followed by a number.

James Bendon (b. 1937) is a universally known specimen expert, publishing *UPU Specimen Stamps 1878-1961* in 1988, and updating it in 2015 and 2021. Not all types recorded by Samuel were used on UPU-distributed stamps, however, all types that were used are illustrated in this article. Specimen philatelists universally follow the Samuel numbering system.

## Printers: Table 2

During this period five British printers and the Inland Revenue were utilized. De La Rue & Co. was by far the largest specimen producer, with more than 75 percent of all UK printers and 67 percent of all specimens, including those locally produced.

## British printers' standard types

The following tables (3-11) outline all printers' standard types for each printer. The tables list the Samuel specimen type, overprinted (Optd), handstamped (H/S), or rubber hand stamped (RH/S), measurement (width by height) in millimeters, distribution years and number of specimens distributed.

Printer	Contract Duration	Specimens Distributed
De La Rue & Co	1884 - 1948	4258
Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co	1890 - 1948	586
Waterlow & Sons	1898 - 1948	645
Harrison & Sons	1927 - 1947	71
Perkins, Bacon & Co	1897 - 1934	48
Inland Revenue	1892 - 1937	54

See Bob Myers' exhibit on the UPU British Commonwealth Specimens at the Postal History Symposium this November!

## De La Rue & Co type summary (Eleven types distributed): Table 3 & 4

The D12 overprint was the most used type of any printer, with the longest duration, and was utilized on 2,255 stamps from June 1884 until it was replaced with a D16 smaller type in 1922 on 473 stamps.

From 1928 to 1948, De La Rue perforated specimen stamps. Table 4 lists the Samuel Specimen Perforation Type, number of perforated holes, distribution years and number of specimens distributed. The D20 was the most widely used De La Rue perforation.

\*D1 to D8 were from 1857 to 1882, before the UPU required protective markings

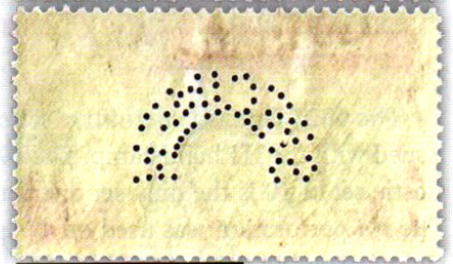
SPECIMEN	Type	Perforation	Dimensions	Years	Count
SPECIMEN	D9	Optd	15 × 2	1884 - 1920	2
SPECIMEN	D11	H/S	14.5 × 2.5	1884	8
SPECIMEN	D12	Optd	14.5 × 2.5	1884 - 1922	2255
	D12x	Optd	14.5(±0.5) × 2.5	1889 - 1922	465
SPECIMEN	D12a	Optd	13.5 × 2.5	1897 - 1922	79
SPECIMEN	D13	Optd	14 × 2.5	1885 - 1887	3
SPECIMEN	D14	Optd	15 × 2.5	1903 - 1927	14
SPECIMEN	D16	Optd	15.5 × 1.75	1922 - 1928	473
	D16x	Optd	15.5(±0.5) × 1.75	1922 - 1928	70
SPECIMEN	D17	Optd	13.75 × 3.25	1922	2
SPECIMEN	D18	RH/S	16.5 × 2.75	1922	1



D12



D16



D20 front and back

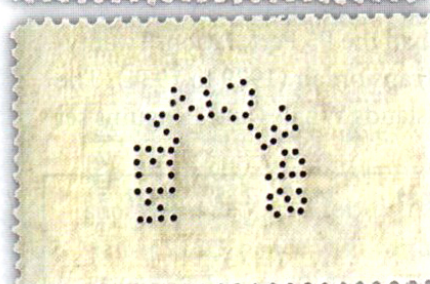
Type	Perforation	Holes	Years	Count
D19	Perf	65 Holes	1928 - 1936	268
D20	Perf	65 Holes	1936 - 1940	387
D21	Perf	65 Holes	1941 - 1948	231

## Bradbury, Wilkinson, and Co. type summary (Nine types distributed): Table 5

The B6 overprint is a variation of the B2 overprint. It was used on 17 specimens from 1923 to 1925, including the Jamaica 1923 Child Welfare League set, the Malta 1925 postage due set and the Tanganyika 1925 set of four Giraffes.

The B9 perforation was the most widely used of the Bradbury, Wilkinson specimens used on 521 specimens. It is the only Bradbury, Wilkinson perforation used on UPU specimens.

SPECIMEN	Type	Perforation	Dimensions	Years	Count
SPECIMEN	B1	Perf	80 Holes	1890 - 1920	13
SPECIMEN	B2	Optd	12 × 2.5	1891 - 1898	10
SPECIMEN	B3	Optd	12.5 × 1.25	1921 - 1927	7
SPECIMEN	B4	Optd	15.75 × 1.5	1922	1
SPECIMEN	B5	Optd	29 × 3.75	1922	6
SPECIMEN	B6	Optd	12.25 × 2.5	1923 - 1925	17
SPECIMEN	B7	Optd	16 × 1.5	1927	1
SPECIMEN	B8	Optd	16 × 1.75/1.5	1928	10
	B9	Perf	67 Holes	1928 - 1948	521



B9 front and back



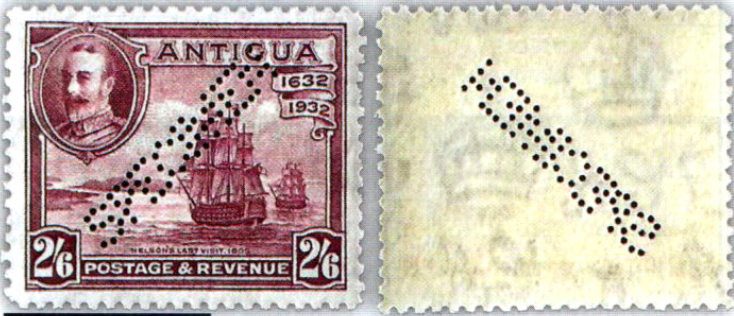
B6

## Waterlow & Sons type summary (Ten types distributed): Table 6

Seventy stamps have the W2 overprint. They were used on 18 of 19 of the Rhodesia 1913 Admirals, the Federated Malay States 1924 postage dues, 1925 Transjordan definitive and postage dues sets, the 1922 Palestine definitive set and the Malta 1926 low value definitives.

The W8 perforation specimen type was the first Waterlow perforation and was widely used for UPU specimens. It was usually applied diagonally sloping upward.

Specimen Type	Value	Perforation	Dimensions	Year(s)	Count
SPECIMEN W1	Optd		19.5 × 1.75	1898	3
SPECIMEN W2	Optd		12 × 1.25	1913 - 1926	70
SPECIMEN W3	Optd		17 × 2	1918	1
SPECIMEN W4	Optd		19.75 × 2.5	1922 - 1931	19
SPECIMEN W5	Optd		15 × 2	1925	16
SPECIMEN W6	Optd		15.25 × 1.75	1926	6
SPECIMEN W7	Optd		12.5 × 2	1928	16
W8	Perf	70 Holes		1928 - 1944	325
W8a	Perf	69 Holes		1938 & 1942	136
W9	Perf	70 Holes		1944 - 1948	53



W8 front and back



W2

## Harrison & Sons type summary (Three types distributed): Table 7

The 1927 Palestine definitive set of 14 is the only set of stamps issued with the H1 handstamp. The 1928 Gold Coast Christianborg Castle set of 10 is the only set distributed with the H2 handstamp. The H3 perforation was used on 47 specimens: the Palestine set of eight (1932-1942), the Seychelles set of 24 (1938-1941), the British Virgin Islands set of 12 (1938-1947), the 1928 Kelantan \$1, the 1940 Dominica ¼ d and the 1937 Grenada ¼ d.



H1

H2

Specimen Type	Value	Perforation	Dimensions	Year(s)	Count
SPECIMEN H1	H/S		15 × 1.75	1927	14
SPECIMEN H2	H/S		14 × 1.5	1928	10
W8	H3	Perf	58 Holes	1928 - 1947	47



H3 front and back

## Perkins, Bacon & Co. type summary (Two types distributed): Table 8

Only the 1927 Transjordan definitive set of 13 had the P4 overprint.

Thirty-five specimens had the P5 Perforation. Twenty-four specimens are from Transjordan (1929 to 1934). The other 11 are the Falkland Islands Whales and Penguins set of 1929-1932.

Specimen Type	Value	Perforation	Dimensions	Year(s)
P4	Optd		14.25 × 2.25	1927
P5	Perf	67 Holes		1929 - 1934



P4



P5 front and back

## Inland Revenue summary (Six types distributed): Table 9 & 10

Seven UPU members had protected specimens on stamps from Great Britain, overprinted by the Inland Revenue.

Table 9

SPECIMEN	GB9	H/S	14.75x1.75	1892
SPECIMEN	GB15	Optd	14.5x2.25	1901
<b>SPECIMEN</b>	GB17	Optd	16x2.75	1902 - 1909
SPECIMEN	GB23	Optd	10x1.5	1915 - 1943
SPECIMEN	GB26	Optd	12.5x2	1917 - 1947
SPECIMEN	GB32	Optd	10.5x2	1932 - 1937



GB9



GB15



GB17



GB23



GB26



GB32

Table 10

UPU Member	Distributed Dates	Specimen Type and number distributed					
		GB9	GB15	GB17	GB23	GB26	GB32
Niger Coast Protectorate	1892	6					
Bechuanaland Protectorate	1902 - 1915		1	1	4		
British Levant	1902 - 1921			2	1	4	
British Occupation of Italian Colonies	1943 - 1947				4	3	
British Post Offices in China	1919 - 1927				6	1	
Morocco Agencies (British, French and Spanish)	1907 - 1937			4	7	1	6
Nauru	1915 - 1916				3		
<b>Total</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>

## Local overprint and handstamp types: Table 11

Thirty-five UPU members produced protected specimen stamps locally, using local overprints, metal, and rubber handstamps, with 655 produced locally. The distribution years were between 1884 (Trinidad) to 1932 (Papua). The Australian states, Labuan, North Borneo, Rhodesia, South Africa, and South-West Africa made up 80 percent of the locally produced specimens. For the detailed types, I would encourage you to read James Bendon's book on UPU specimen stamps.

### Specimens distributed by the UPU but never issued

Throughout the course of the UPU distributing specimens, there were 15 specimens that were never issued. They are:

1. Ceylon 1884 24 cents, type D12 overprint distributed July 26, 1884. They were prepared for use and sent to Ceylon, but were not issued. 100 specimens required for distribution.
2. Gold Coast 1913 10 shillings, type D12 overprint distributed in 1913, but never issued. 389 specimens required for distribution.
- 3-4. Jamaica 1921 6 pence, type D12x overprint distributed April 20, 1921. The specimens were sent to Jamaica, but due to political reasons were not issued and all stocks

Enjoy the hunt of locating a stamp that only had 100 copies distributed, and that is more than 130 years old!

destroyed. The first two shipments were destroyed on July 2, 1921 and the third shipment in October 1921. As the stamp was so close to issuance, 398 specimens were sent to the UPU for distribution. Watermarks are Multiple Crown CA (left) and Multiple Script CA (right).

- 5-10. Labuan and North Borneo 1899 4-cent on 1-cent, 4-cent on 2-cent, 4-cent on 3-cent, type NB5 overprint distributed October 26, 1899. Referenced in *Stanley Gibbons* with the 1899 sets, respectively. 730 specimens required for distribution. The stamps were never issued.
11. Malaysia Straits Settlements 1921 8-pence carmine, type D12 overprint distributed August 1, 1922, but never issued. Specimen examples were distributed throughout the UPU, with few overprinted examples known. 410 specimens required for distribution.
12. Malta 1918 3-pence with white back, type D12 overprint distributed June 29, 1918. The stamp was never issued, presumably because a large stock of King Edward VII

# If you buy an incomplete set, it is almost impossible to find the missing single.

stamps of this denomination remained on hand, even though he passed away on May 6, 1910. 381 specimens required for distribution.

13. St. Helena 1911 1-penny red, type D12a overprint distributed September 22, 1911. Marcus Samuel called this stamp the “all red error,” printed by mistake, as a result of a misunderstanding between the local postmaster and de La Rue in London. When the postmaster requested a further supply of the 1-penny carmine and black, specimens were supplied to the UPU for distribution, and a shipment was sent to St. Helena. On arrival, the “all red error” was discovered, and the stock was destroyed. Specimens were distributed to UPU members. 400 specimens required for distribution.
14. Transvaal 1909 2-pence gray, Samuel Type D12 overprint distributed September 22, 1909, but the entire supply sent to Transvaal was destroyed. There is one 2-pence gray non-specimen stamp that exists in the Mosely Collection in the British Library. 409 specimens required for distribution.
15. Trinidad 1899 3-pence on 5-pence dull purple and mauve, type D12 overprint distributed December 9, 1899. This stamp was prepared for use, distributed, but was never issued. 726 specimens required for distribution.



Table 11

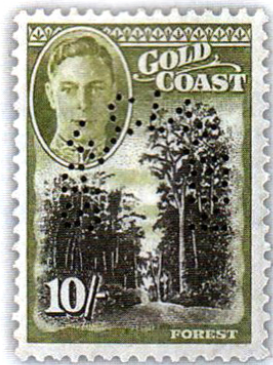
UPU Member	Local Specimens Distributed	Distributed Dates	Specimen Types
North Borneo	84	1894 - 1922	NB2, NB3, NB4, NB5, NB6, NB7, NB8, NB9, NB10
Labuan**	71	1894 - 1900	LA2, NB2, NB3, NB4, NB5
South Australia	67	1889 - 1895	[1], [2], [3], [4]
New South Wales	65	1889 - 1904	4,6,12,15,16,16a,18,19
Victoria	52	1891 - 1897	[1], [2], [3]
Rhodesia	52	1902 - 1910	R5, R6, R7
South West Africa ***	47	1923 - 1927	SWA1, SA5
Tasmania	33	1892 - 1904	[2], [3], [4]
Western Australia	30	1889 - 1891	WA1
Bechuanaland Protectorate*	22	1890 - 1891	BEC2
Union of South Africa	22	1910 - 1928	SA1, SA3, SA4, SA5
Queensland	15	1889	[1]
Ceylon*	11	1891 - 1927	CE4, CE6, CE7
Zululand*	11	1893	NA1
Seychelles*	10	1896 - 1902	SY2, SY3, SY4, SY5
Canada	8	1897, 1906	[1], [2]
Sudan	8	1906	SU1
Trinidad	6	1884	TRI1

UPU Member	Local Specimens Distributed	Distributed Dates	Specimen Types
Nyasa-Rhodesia Force - Tanganyika	5	1916	NY4
Orange River Colony*	5	1900	SAA
Natal*	4	1890 - 1895	NA1
Transvaal*	4	1900	SAA
Kenya, Uganda & Tanganyika*	3	1941	K4
Mauritius*	3	1925	MAU2
British East Africa*	2	1894	BEA1
Grenada	2	1892, 1916	GR3, GR5
Hong Kong*	2	1897 - 1898	HK4
India	2	1888 - 1890	[15]
Papua	2	1932	PAP1
St Vincent*	2	1892, 1897	SV5, SV10
Dominica*	1	1918	D01
Fiji*	1	1916	FJ1
East Africa and Uganda*	1	1919	K2
Malta*	1	1902	MAL1
Palestine	1	1918	PA1

## The last distributed UPU specimens

The final British Empire protected set distributed by the UPU was the Gold Coast definitive set of 12 issued July 1, 1948, type B9 perforation with 380 specimens required for distribution. All stamps distributed by the UPU after this were uncanceled.

The decision to cease using the specimen perforation was communicated to all UPU members in a circular letter from the Colonial Office dated July 15, 1948, mainly due to cost.



The final British Empire specimen, the Gold Coast definitive of 1948.

## Helpful hints when collecting specimens

- Purchase complete sets. If you buy an incomplete set, it is almost impossible to find the missing single.
- Purchase from reputable dealers that belong to well-known societies and associations.
- Work with reputable auction houses.
- Enjoy the hunt of locating a stamp that only had 100 copies distributed, and that's more than 130 years old!

## References

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- Stanley Gibbons. *Stamp Catalogue, Commonwealth and British Empire Stamps 1840-1970* (Part 1).

## The Author

**Bob Myers is a British Empire specimen specialist. His specimen exhibit has received several gold awards as well as the AAPE Gold Award of Honor.**

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