

The Crown Agents

The Crown Agents handled the George VI issues, a task, with a diminished numbers of countries they still do today. Records were kept for each printing which now exist in the British Library.

The Crown Agents Requisition Books, Plate Issue Registers and Paper Issue Books covering this period have now been microfilmed to reduce wear and tear on the original volumes.

These records can be examined by contacting the Curators at:-
e-mail philatelic@bl.uk

Below are two articles that will go some way towards explaining the Crown Agents Records.

The First is by Major Criddle and first appeared in the King George VI Society's Magazine in 1967.

The second is from a letter sent by Mr Marcus Faux, the former Chief Inspector for the Crown Agents to the Curator of the Philatelic Collections in 1989.

- ◇ [Index](#)
- ◇ [Requisition Number](#)
- ◇ [Duty](#)
- ◇ [Number Ordered](#)
- ◇ [Date Due](#)
- ◇ [Date of Dispatch](#)
- ◇ [Quantity dispatched](#)
- ◇ [Specimens & CA](#)
- ◇ [Remarks](#)
- ◇ [For Dealers](#)
- ◇ [A2 Stock](#)
- ◇ [The Bureau](#)
- ◇ [Numbered 1 Up](#)
- ◇ [The Exchange](#)

The Crown Agents Records

Article Number 1

This article, written by **Major H.M. Criddle** in November 1967, is reproduced by kind permission of the **King George VI Society**.

The recording of philatelic facts has always been handicapped by official reluctance, both on the part of the authorities and of the printers, to reveal any of their secrets, even in respect of issues long since obsolete. permission to examine and make copies

of some of the records of the Crown Agents, granted to me some two years ago, can be considered as a personal 'scoop' (I was told I was the first 'outsider' to be given the facility) and as a more liberal and enlightened attitude towards the stamp collector and his interests. the reluctance to admit 'outsiders' can be understood in the light of the shortage of staff and even greater shortage of space, but I usually found a corner in which to work and eventually was able to complete extracts relating to the three African Protectorates of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.

The chief records upon which I worked were the Colonial Agents' Requisition Books, which run from 1921 to date. it is sad to have to state that the earlier books have been destroyed and that a similar fate was obviously in mind for a further 'run'. Officials working at the Crown Agents' Office seemed quite unaware of the fact that anything in their records could be of interest to philatelists, but once this had been pointed out and repeatedly emphasised, they proved only too ready to rescue the remaining records from destruction and even willing to place some of the sheets from the guard-books on exhibition for the benefit of customers.

Before entering into a more detailed description of the Requisition Books I must draw attention to the other records, etc. which could be of great interest and importance to philatelists. one series of records covers the ordering of paper from the various manufacturers, specifications, samples of each batch received and details of all assignments to the printers. Unfortunately the destruction of this series has been even more ruthless than that of the Requisition Books, though the remaining files could be most helpful in the matter of paper variations from one printing to another. Since the samples are security paper one could understand their reluctance to permit unsupervised work on these files. In addition there is a most amazing store of artists designs, both accepted and rejected 'essays', plates, proofs etc. and it seems probable that permission would be granted to photograph items of particular interest.

Each requisition Book is divided in sections for each printer concerned during the period in question. they are small folio in format, some 4 inches thick and about 16 in number. The entries are contained in seven columns ruled over two pages, and the entries are fully indexed. The columns and explanation of their contents are as follows:-

Requisition Number

This is the number allocated by CA to every order placed with the printers. It may cover a complete range of values in the case of a new issue or just a single value in the case of subsequent printings.

Duty

The face value of the stamps and postal stationery in question.

Number Ordered

This represents the number of stamps ordered of each duty or the number of items in the case of postal stationery.

Date Due

The target date given to the printers for completion of the order and delivery to CA.

Date of Dispatch

This is the date when each consignment was sent by CA to the territory concerned. Large orders are sometimes sent on more than one date; similarly, if the requirement is very urgent it may be sent off at various dates. In such cases the initial batch is sometimes replenished and possibly increased when the main supply is received from the printers.

Quantity dispatched

The number of sheets or items of postal stationery sent to the territory. in some cases the consignments contained half-sheets, etc. these are noted.

Specimens & CA

This information is contained in the final column. It gives the number of stamps retained in the Bureau for distribution as 'specimens' etc. and the quantity retained in the Bureau stocks for sale to dealers.

Remarks

This column contains various instructions, etc. for the guidance both of the printers and the CA staff. There are also notes as to how 'specimens' were to be distributed, although in the main these were inserted only in later issues.

The distribution of 'specimens' deserves a little expansion. It is not always standard, except perhaps in later years. the following is an example of one such entry:-

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| GPO | Obviously for transmission to UPU |
| PP | Publicity Purposes |
| CRO | Commonwealth Relations Office |
| CA | A branch of Crown Agents |
| CB | as above |
| Comm Ins | Commonwealth Institute |
| BM | British Museum |
| HM | The Royal Collection- a block of four is always sent |
| DLR | The printers are sent a copy. |

In the earlier books there is unfortunately, only a note that they have been sent to the GPO and no quantity is given. It would have been useful to know how many of the overprinted/perforated 'specimens' were produced.

In the later books appear occasional notes of the number of stamps exchanged from

the new printing for those still held in the Bureau from the previous printing. Even where no such note appears, my information is that it always been the practice to exchange old stock for new. It follows therefore that, if the Bureau stock were adequate to meet the demand from the territory, there might be a London release of a printing that might not reach the territory. It is evident that the converse of this cannot occur, and that, in consequence, there can be no such thing as a Colonial Release, which in the past has been confidently asserted to explain away rogue issues.

Another note is 'For Dealers'. This would seem to indicate that the whole consignment went into the Bureau for that purpose were it not for the fact that the CA have no authority to have stamps printed printed for such consumption. To get round this, a token allocation must be sent to the territory, even though there is no immediate need for such an allocation. This allocation must be at least 10% of the total order.

Article Number 2

What Were They?

Before going into the printing information from the Crown Agents Records I would like to define the terms used.

1: A2 Stock

This was the part of the printing from each requisition which was held by the Crown Agents in London. This was for sale to Dealers in the UK and to provide replacement supplies, if required, for the Colonial Governments.

2: The Bureau

This is the Crown Agents Bureau in London. They were responsible for the supply of stamps to U.K. dealers and to Colonial Governments. When a new supply of a stamp issue was received by the Bureau the existing stock was forwarded to the colony concerned.

3: Numbered 1 Up

Most colonies, but not all, requested that their supplies were numbered 1 up on the sheets for accounting purposes. The printers made a small charge for the service.

4: The Exchange

" (d) (i) 'The Bureau' refers to the Crown Agents Stamp Bureau.

(ii) The reason for distinguishing Bureau supplies from the rest is that stamp dealers have always received stamps which have been specially selected as being as near perfect specimens as possible. At the inspection stage the sheets are classified as (a) for dealers, (b) for postal use, and (c) waste for destruction. The Bureau supplies are not numbered. If subsequently they are sent out to the territory, where numbering is normally required, then this operation takes place before onward delivery.

(iii) Agreed policy required this exchange to take place on each reprint. Thus before inspection of the printed sheets, the Bureau advised the number of stamps they held. Accordingly (as (ii) (a) above) this amount in sheets was specially selected and conveyed to the Stamp Bureau, who would exchange them for the equivalent quantity from the earlier printing. Usually a small quantity was retained from the earlier printing to serve as stock until the main supply reached the Territory. In this way it was hoped to release for sale at Post Offices overseas, and in London by the Stamp Bureau, this new supply on the same day."