

Rhodesia Railway Parcel Stamps - The Bechuanaland Connection

A Review by Otto Peetoom and Bruce Warrender

Preamble

Bruce sent in a short article plus illustrations on the above subject and in his opening lines wrote...*It is thought that 13 different station codes are believed to have been applied to the Rhodesian Railway stamps for use in the territory...*

To fully appreciate the subject, as suggested by the title, it is obvious that it is predominately a 'Rhodesian' topic. My own interest in it started during the 1980's when I acquired a stock book crammed with thousands of used copies of these parcel stamps which included multiples on parts of waybills. It was in the main stations in Northern Rhodesia circa mid to late 1950's with no Bechuanaland parcel stamps present.

Past Articles

The earliest on the subject was by Harvey Pirie and appeared in the April 1959 edition of *The South African Philatelist*.

Railway Philately - A journal published by the *Railway Philatelic Group* includes several articles - In September 1971 by Alan Johnson. H.C. Russell was another enthusiast of railway stamps and his efforts appeared in September and October 1973. Finally in March 1976 and June 1976 both by W.F. Simms.

Other Articles - The above was combined into another article by Simms in *The Philatelist* (December 1979) and Peter Collins produced a summary of events in one of the UK Stamp magazines in January 1982.

H.C. Russell then presented a comprehensive two part article in *The Journal of the Rhodesian Study Circle* No's 140 & 141. December 1987 and March 1988.

Finally Geoff Brakspear produced a further review in the *Rhodesian Study Circle* No 249 (December 2013)¹ and wrote... *Although most of the works have gone into some detail of what the stamps were about, how they were used and so on, I have been unable to find any articles that deal with the classification of the stamps themselves. There are articles that show there are different types but nothing comprehensive, this I hope to rectify.*

In a recent communication Brakspear commented...*My article is partly an update on Russell's work, but also a correction on some of the assumptions he made...He had not previously looked at the dates that the different types were used and I found that some of them were earlier than Russell indicated which meant that 'Rhodesian Printers' (later Mardon) were involved much earlier. I did not list all the stations or the use of the stamps. I concentrated on the stamps themselves and when they came into use, for this I have an extensive data base of all the stations and their use of the stamps.*

The Railway Parcel stamps

There were thirteen sterling values from 1d to £1, at first (believed) printed by Waterlow and Sons, Type I² and put into circulation from 1 August 1951. It is suggested that at first the values were added to the stamps, followed by station codes and finally the perforations. Russell stated that local printers³ took over the production of the stamps circa 1959 using Type II² and Brakspear's research suggests about 1955.

Bechuanaland comes into View

On 30 November 1959 *Rhodesian Railways* took over the operation of the lines through Bechuanaland from South African Railways, initially from Bulawayo to Mahalapye.

This extended throughout the route south and thirteen Stations were allotted codes. Parcel stamps were prepared for use in the Territory effectively after decimalisation on 14 February 1961. Ten values from 1c to R2 were overprinted on the various colours and ought to be Type II² only.

The Purpose of Railway Parcel Stamps

Formerly handwritten receipts and the parcel stamp system paid the charge for railage and were applied to the Waybills. Larger stations used the National Cash Register System, but this did not apply to Bechuanaland. Russell wrote ⁴...*Every conceivable type of article could be conveyed by train, from day-old chicks to bicycles, from cut-flowers to a coffin complete with corpse...*

Station Codes on Parcel Stamps

The larger stations have their code overprinted on the stamps, others may be handstamped or even applied in manuscript. In the case of Bechuanaland, only six out of 13 stations had their codes printed on the stamps Francistown (FT), Mahalapye (MAG), Palapye (PY), Seruli (SR) Shashi (SHH) and Tsessebe (TES). It is suggested that decimal overprints, without a station code, were used at 'other' stations in the Protectorate.

Yet Francistown has been observed either using a handstamp or denoted with a manuscript notation.



No Station Code - Used at small Stations

R.R.	Colour	Bech.	Stations N to S	Code
1d	Red/orange red	1c	Tsessebe ⁵	TES
2d	Blue	2c	Francistown ⁵	FT
3d	Purple/violet	-	Shashi ⁵	SHH
4d	Pale emerald	3c	Seruli ⁵	SR
5d	Pale blue-green	4c	Palapye ⁵	PY
6d	Light blue	5c	Mahalapye ⁵	MAG
9d	Magenta	-	Debeeti	DEB
1/-	Deep blue	10c	Aretsia	ART
2/-	Emerald	20c	Pilane	PIN
2/6	Orange	-	Gaberones	GS
5/-	Yellow brown	50c	Ramoutsa	RSA
10/-	Lemon	R1.00	Lobatsi	LI
£1	Grey	R2.00	Ramathlabama	RAB

⁵ Station code overprinted on Parcel Stamps



Francistown Error of Colour

10c on 5c colour⁶

20c on 9d colour⁷



⁶ Seen used on Waybills from December 1967 - October 1968 Alan MacGregor offers part of a Waybill serviced on 10.10.68 which includes the 10c Error of colour

⁷ Seen used on Waybill circa February 1966 - Russell RSCJ 141

Station codes on Bechuanaland - Despite the 13 allocated codes only nine have been recorded on parcel stamps.

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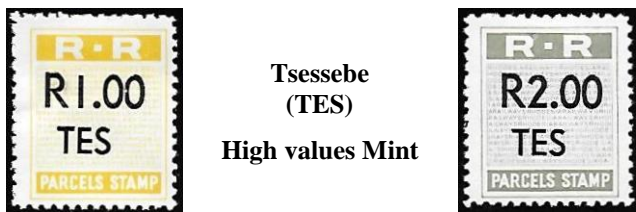
Printed Station codes on Bechuanaland Parcel Stamps
Brakspear⁸ made the following comments...*Used examples have been found for all these stations, except Shashi, whilst mint examples have only come to light for Mahalapye, Shashi and the higher values for Tsessebe. The usage of the stamps appears to be shortly after decimalisation to the end of 1969, at much the same time as Rhodesia ceased using the stamps.*



Mahalapye (MAG) Mint examples



Shashi (SHH) Mint Examples

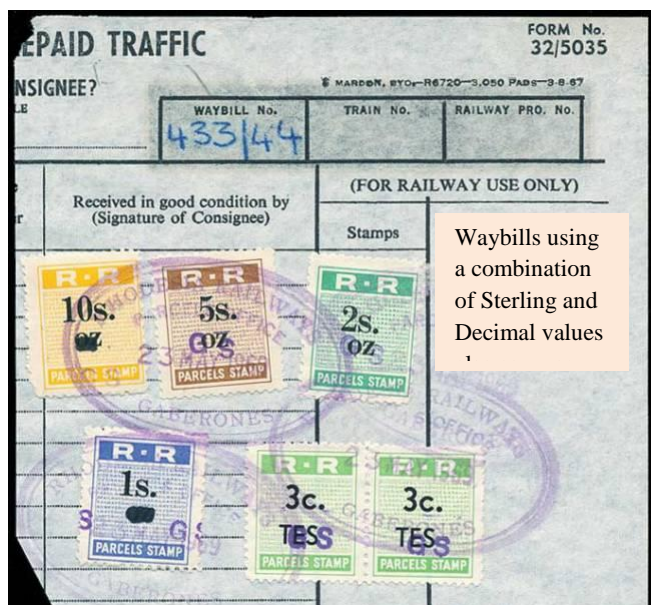


Tsessebe (TES)
High values Mint

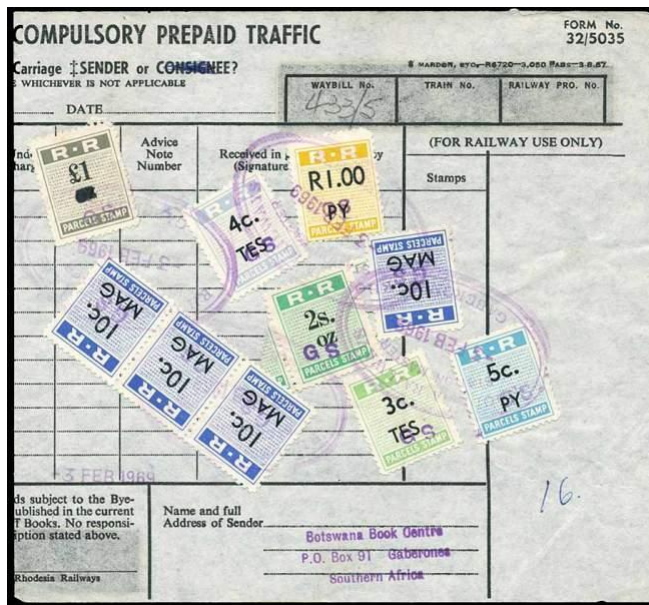
Previous researchers agree that the use of Railway Parcel Stamps ended on 31 August 1969 when the system was computerized. Both Russell and Brakspear suggest that the foregoing date also applies to, what was by then, Botswana. Parcel stamps continued in use in Zambia until circa 1979/80.

Obsolete Sterling/Decimal Values used in Botswana

Towards the end of the period of use, it appears that 'anything' will do. For example a 2s overprinted OZ (Odzi) handstamped 'FT' Francistown on a 21 MAR 1969 waybill and 2s, 5s and £1 'OZ' handstamped 'GS' (Gaberones) on 5 FEB 1969.



Illustrated at foot in the previous column - Sterling values 1s, 2s, 5s & 10s ex Odzi plus 3c pair ex Tsessebe 'TES' all handstamped 'GS' used at Gaberones 23 MAY 1969.⁹



Gaberones 3 FEB 1969 - Above, another 'cocktail' of various parcel stamps, all handstamped 'GS' 2s & £1 sterling values ex Odzi, a 10c strip of three and single ex Mahalapye (MAG), 3c and 4c ex Tsessebe (TES) and 5c plus R1.00 ex Palapye (PY)⁹

Palapye used at Shashi - Brakspear illustrates a 20c value overprinted 'PY' crossed out and 'SHI' inserted by hand, instead of the usual 'SHH' used in 1969.⁸

The above is merely a small sample of observed combinations and I suspect that other possible permutations are endless.

Bruce Warrender concluded his write up...*I would be interested to see if members have stamps from any of the other offices not shown here.* The foregoing inspired this review which includes invaluable input by Cecil Russell and Geof Brakspear and much of the information is attributed to these individuals.

Postscript - The Reminders

Imperfate and perforated Parcel stamps, without value or station code are in circulation and noted by Russell. Brakspear wrote...*Given that the stamps when attached to waybills should have been destroyed after auditing, a remarkable number have survived. Mint stamps on the other hand are largely remainder stock that the railways offloaded.*

During the 1990 London International at Alexander Palace, a dealer offered me a parcel of mint remainder, mostly in full sheets...the quantity was enormous, sufficient to fill a suitcase ...I decline interest and said...*what in heaven's name does anyone do with this mountain of obsolete Parcel Stamps?*

Notes

- ¹ Brakspear's article is available in PDF on the Rhodesian Study Circle's website
- ² Type I - Last line of script reads 'AR/' Type II - Last line of script reads 'ARAI'
- ³ Rhodesian Printers, circa 1962, known as Mardon Printers
- ⁴ Rhodesia Study Circle Journal No 141, page 34
- ^{5, 6 & 7} See relevant text on page
- ⁸ Rhodesia Study Circle Journal No 249, page 190
- ⁹ Courtesy MacGregor Website