



British Empire West Africa Specimen Stamps

Article for CAMEO, the West Africa Study
Circle Journal

Bob Myers – May 17, 2025

Quick 1 Page Specimen Refresher

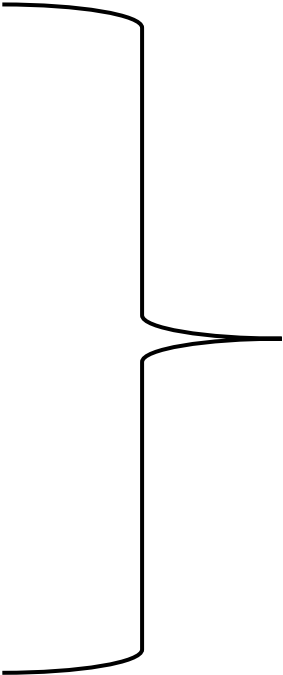
- **May 18, 1878:** Universal Postal Union (UPU) met in Paris, adopted regulation that UPU members transmit “a collection of their postage stamps” to one another. UPU specimen stamps w/ “protective markings” came into existence
- **1884** - British General Post Office, controlled specimen issuance, decided specimens would be distributed w/protective marking (overprint or handstamp).
- **June 1884 - March 1886 100 specimens were produced** for each new issue, w/single specimen copy of each newly issued stamp sent to each UPU member
- **April 1886 - June 1892: 345 specimens** were produced for each new issue, w/strip of 3 specimen sent to UPU member
- **July 1892 - September 1907: Between 716 and 756** were produced, w/strip of 5 of each sent to UPU member
- **October 1907 - July 1948: Between 339 and 451** were produced, decreasing to 3 of each sent to UPU member
- **1884 - 1928** - Stamps were overprinted or hand stamped “SPECIMEN” in various shapes and sizes from type set forms.
- **1928 - 1948** - Overprinting was replaced w/punched holes (perforations) forming “SPECIMEN” for security reasons
- **July 15, 1948** - Decision to cease SPECIMEN distribution due to cost was communicated to all UPU British Empire members in circular letter from the Colonial Office.
- **1884 - 1948** – Specimens distributed to 109 different British Empire UPU members, from Aden to Zululand.
- **6,317** specimen stamps were distributed.

A bit about the West Africa Study Circle (WASC)

- **210 members from 30 countries**
- **Based in UK**
- **Meets twice a year at Royal Philatelic Society in London**
- **Existed for 75 years, since 1950**
- **WASC Journal (CAMEO) published since 1975, 3 times a year**
- **Rob May & Barry Burns are co-editors**
- **Rob reached out asking if I would write an article for the June 2025 issue of CAMEO on Specimens of West Africa**
- **Specimens were last featured in CAMEO September 1972, authored by Marcus Samuel, who developed British Empire specimen classification system & in 1976 published “Specimen Stamps of the Crown Colonies 1857-1948.”**

WASC focus on stamps & postal history from 10 countries:

- **Ascension**
- **The Gambia**
- **Gold Coast**
- **Nigeria & its Territories**
- **St. Helena**
- **Sierra Leone**
- **Togo**
- **Cape Verde Islands – Portuguese Colony**
- **Fernando Poo – Spanish Colony**
- **Kamerun – German Colony**






Today's focus are these 7 UPU members. (Specimen types, summary table, illustrations)


Small summary of the other 3

7 UPU members used 15 Specimen types from 5 printers

De La Rue & Co.

1	SPECIMEN	D11	H/S	14.5 × 2.5	1884
2	SPECIMEN	D12	Optd	14.5 × 2.5	1884 - 1922
3		D12x	Optd	14.5(±0.5) × 2.5	1889 - 1922
4	SPECIMEN	D12a	Optd	13.5 × 2.5	1897 - 1922
5	SPECIMEN	D16	Optd	15.5 × 1.75	1922 - 1928
6	SPECIMEN	D18	RH/S	16.5 × 2.75	1922
7		D19	Perf	65 Holes	1928 - 1936
8		D20	Perf	65 Holes	1936 - 1940
9		D21	Perf	65 Holes	1941 - 1948

Bradbury, Wilkinson, and Co.

10		B9	Perf	67 Holes	1928 - 1948
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Waterlow & Sons

11	SPECIMEN	W1	Optd	19.5 × 1.75	1898
12	SPECIMEN	W8	Perf	70 Holes	1928 - 1944
13	SPECIMEN	W8a	Perf	69 Holes	1938 & 1942

Harrison & Sons

14	SPECIMEN,	H2	H/S	14 × 1.5	1928
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Inland Revenue

15	SPECIMEN	GB9	H/S	14.75×1.75	1892
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Specimen type breakdown by UPU member

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Developed 7 summary tables (1 per UPU member) that contain:

- Stanley Gibbons (SG) Number
- Samuel Specimen Classification
- Number of stamps distributed by UPU
- Number of stamps in each set
- Year in which they were distributed
- **BLUE** denotes 2024 SG Catalogue value of £450 (Approx \$600) or greater
- **RED** denotes 100 or fewer than 100 distributed

Ascension (1)

53 specimens distributed between 1922 -1946. 4 definitive sets, Silver Jubilee, Coronation & Victory Omnibus sets. 1st set 1922 St. Helena stamps of King George V overprinted "ASCENSION". All specimens were De La Rue type except for Silver Jubilee Waterlow & Sons perforation Type W8. All specimens except for the Silver Jubilee are catalogued over £450 (\$600)

SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
1-9s	D16	413	9	1922
10-20s	D16	412	12	1924 - 1927
21-30s	D19	413	10	1934
31-34s	W8	409	4	1935
35-7s	D20	406	3	1937
38-47s	D20	399	13	1938 - 1940
48-49s	D21	360	2	1946



The Gambia (2)

112 specimens distributed between 1886 -1946. 4 definitive sets, Silver Jubilee, Coronation & Victory sets. 1st set was the 6d in June 1886 & 1/2d, 1d & 2d in April 1887. All specimens are De La Rue type except for Silver Jubilee, Coronation & 1938 Definitive set, which have Bradbury, Wilkinson, & Co. type B9.

SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
21s, 23s, 24s, 32s	D12	345	4	1886 - 1887
37s - 44s	D12	730	8	1898
45s - 56s	D12	716	12	1902
63s, 65s, 66s	D12	726	3	1904
73s - 85s	D12	409	14	1909
86s - 102s	D12	400	17	1912-22
108s - 117s	D12	396	10	1921-22
118s - 142s	D12, D12a, D16, D18	410	23	1922-29
143s - 146s	B9	409	4	1935
147s - 149s	B9	406	3	1937
150s - 161s	B9	351	12	1938
162s - 163s	D21	360	2	1946



Gold Coast (3)

117 specimens distributed between 1888 & 1948. Oct 1888 1 & 2 shilling were the first to be distributed. All specimens are De La Rue type until 1921. 1928 Christianborg Castle set are the only specimens with the Harrison H2 Handstamp. The final UPU distributed protected specimens are from Gold Coast

SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
14s - 15s, 18s - 19s	D12	345	4	1888-91
22s - 25s	D12	730	4	1889
26s - 34s	D12	716	10	1889
38s - 48s	D12	716	11	1902
57s	D12	731	1	1904
59s - 68s	D12	389	10	1907-1913
69s	D12	389	1	1911
70s	D12	389	1	1908
71s - 84s	D12	369	12	1913-21
85s	D12	375	1	1918
86s - 102s	D12, D16	396	14	1921-24
103s - 112s	H2	419	10	1928
113s - 116s	B9	409	4	1935
117s - 119s	B9	406	3	1937
120s - 132s	B9	351	13	1938-1941
133s - 134s	D21	360	2	1946
135s - 146s	B9	379	12	1948
D1s - D4s	D16	262	4	1922



Gold Coast

Throughout the course of UPU distributing specimens, 15 specimens were either returned, never issued, or destroyed. Two came from the West Africa.

Gold Coast 1913 10 shillings, type D12 overprint distributed June 10, 1911 (SG69s), but never issued. 389 specimens required for distribution. Only one example exists without the SPECIMEN overprint.

SG69 was part of a color change that was never finalized or that the plan to issue the stamp was canceled.



Distributed by the UPU
but never issued

Nigeria & its Territories (4)

193 specimens distributed between 1886 & 1946. 1st stamps distributed with were Lagos 2s, 5s & 10s in October 1886. Specimen types for Nigeria & associated protectorates & territories:

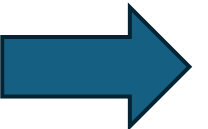
- **Lagos (De La Rue) – 1886 - 1906**
- **Niger Coast Protectorate (Oil Rivers) (De La Rue) – 1892 - 1893**
- **Niger Coast Protectorate (Inland Revenue) – 1893 – 1897**
- **Southern Nigeria (De La Rue) – 1900 - 1914**
- **Northern Nigeria (De La Rue) – 1900 - 1914**
- **Nigeria (De La Rue, Bradbury Wilkinson, Waterlow & Sons) – 1915 to 1946**

Nigeria & its Territories (4) 1 of 2 pages

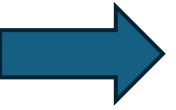
	SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
Nigeria	1s - 12s	D12	369	12	1914
Nigeria	15s - 29s	D12, D16, D19	396	14	1921
Nigeria	30s - 33s	W8	409	4	1935
Nigeria	34s - 45s	D20	400	12	1936
Nigeria	46s - 48s	B9, D20	406	3	1937
Nigeria	49s - 59s	B9, D20	400	15	1938
Nigeria	60 - 61s	D21	360	2	1946
Northern Nigeria	1s - 9s	D12	726	9	1900
Northern Nigeria	10s -18s	D12	716	9	1902
Northern Nigeria	28s - 39s	D12	409	11	1910
Northern Nigeria	28s - 39s	D12	409	11	1910
Northern Nigeria	40s - 52s	D12	400	13	1912

Nigeria & its Territories (4) 2 of 2 pages

	SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
Southern Nigeria	1s - 9s	D12	716	9	1901
Southern Nigeria	10s - 20s	D12	721	11	1903
Southern Nigeria	33s - 44s, plus 25s	D12	409	12	1907
Southern Nigeria	45s - 56s	D12	400	12	1912
Lagos	27s - 29s	D12	345	3	1886
Lagos	30s - 41s	D12	345	12	1887
Lagos	44s - 53s	D12	721	10	1904
Niger Coast Protectorate Oil Rivers	1s - 6s	GB9	400	6	1892
Niger Coast Protectorate	71s, 73s, 74s	W1	730	3	1898



St. Helena (5)



97 specimens distributed between 1887 & 1946. 1st stamps distributed were 1887 3d & 6d in May 1887. All specimens were De La Rue type except 1934 Centenary set (B9) & the 1938 - 44 Definitive set (W8, W8a).

SG Number	Specimen Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
40s, 41s, 43bs, 44s	D12x	345	4	1887-1894
46s - 52s	D12	345	7	1890-1897
53s - 54s	D12	716	2	1902
55s - 60s	D12a	721	6	1903
64s - 70s	D12	451	4	1908
71s	D12a	400	1	1911
72s - 81s	D12a	400	10	1912-16
83s - 84s	D12	400	2	1912
85s - 86s	D12	400	2	1913
87s - 88s	D12a	375	2	1916
89s - 91s	D12a	398	3	1922
92s - 96s	D12a, D16	404	5	1922
97s - 113s	D12a, D16	404	16	1922-37
114s - 123s	B9	416	10	1934
124s - 127s	D19	409	4	1935
128s - 130s	D20	406	3	1937
131s - 140s	W8, W8a	362	14	1938

St. Helena

The other specimen from the West African area that was distributed by the UPU but never issued was the St. Helena 1911 One pence red, 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 St. Helena postmaster and De La Rue in London**. When the postmaster requested a further supply of the 1-pence 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

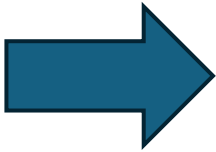


Distributed by the UPU
but never issued



What it should have
looked like

Sierra Leone (6)



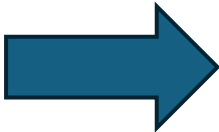
136 specimens, distributed between 1884 & 1946. 1st UPU British Empire set distributed was 1884 Perf 14 ½d. 1d, 2d and 4d June 1884 with 60 stamps distributed. An additional 40 were perforated on single-line Perf 12 perforating machine. Samuel states De La Rue had sent supply of stamps in May 1884, but did not have sufficient stock to meet the requirements. All specimens until 1932 were De La Rue. Others include 1932 Definitives (W8 low values, B9 high values), 1933 Wilberforce (B9), Silver Jubilee and Coronation (B9), 1938 - 1944 Definitives (W8, W8a, W9) and Victory (D21).

SG Number	Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
27s - 34s	D11	60	4	1884
27sa, 28sa, 30sa, 33as	D11	40	4	1884
36s	D12x	100	1	1885
41s - 53s	D12	730	13	1896
73s - 85s	D12	721	13	1903
99s - 111s	D12	409	13	1907
112s - 130s	D12	400	19	1912-21
131s - 146s	D12/D12a/D16	400	16	1921
147s	D16	400	1	1923
148s	D16	400	1	1923
155s - 167s	W8/B9	422	13	1932
168s - 180s	B9	414	13	1933
181s - 184s	B9	409	4	1935
185-187s	B9	406	3	1937
188s - 200s	W8/W8a	351	16	1938

Togo (7)

Togo only had 1 set of specimens - The 12 stamps of the KGV Gold Coast definitive set, distributed August 11, 1917. This was during World War 1, when the British and French had occupied Togo. The specimens were the Gold Cost series (SG70s - 84s), overprinted TOGO ANGLO-FRENCH OCCUPATION

SG Number	Classification	Total Number of Each Stamp Distributed	Number of Different Stamps per Set	Year Distributed
H47s - H58s	D12	375	12	1917



Additional Information for the other 3 countries, for the article

Cape Verde Islands – Portuguese Colony – 2 sets

- 5 reis, 10 reis yellow, 20 reis yellow-bistre, 25 reis rosy-mauve, 40 reis blue, 50 reis yellow-green, 100 reis, 200 reis, 300 reis distributed 1887
- 10 reis emerald-green, 20 reis carmine, 25 reis lilac, 40 reis yellow, 50 reis blue distributed 1881-1885

Kamerun Specimens – German Colony – 2 sets

- Berner Ausgabe: 3pf, 5pf, 10pf, 20pf, 25pf, 50pf distributed April 6, 1897
- Yacht: 3pf, 5pf, 10pf, 20pf, 25pf, 30pf, 40pf, 50pf, 80pf, 1m, 2m, 3m, 5m distributed February 5, 1901

Fernando Poo – Spanish Colony – 5 sets

- King Alfonso XIII dated 1902: 5c, 10c, 25c, 50c, 75c, 1p, 2p, 5p distributed October 14, 1902
- King Alfonso XIII dated 1903: ¼ c, ½ c, 1c, 2c, 3c, 4c, 5c, 10c, 15c, 25c, 50c, 75c, 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p distributed June 17, 1903
- King Alfonso XIII dated 1905: 1c, 2c, 3c, 4c, 5c, 10c, 15c, 25c, 50c, 75c, 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 10p distributed April 8, 1905
- King Alfonso XIII dated 1907: 1c, 2c, 3c, 4c, 5c, 10c, 15c, 25c, 50c, 75c, 1p, 2p, 3p, 4p, 5p, 10p distributed February 25, 1907
- Seville and Barcelona Exhibition issue of Spain: 5c, 10c, 15c, 20c 25c, 30c, 40c, 50c, 1p, 4p, 10p distributed February 26, 1929

In Closing

- **Article comes out in June**
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