



Union of South Africa

**It's strained relationship with the British Stamp Printers
and the transition to domestic printing**

Eddie Bridges

Collectors Club of New York

November 2015

Background to the Formation of the Union of South Africa

The Union of South Africa came about as a result of the Peace of Vereeniging which ended the Second Boer war (1899-1902). Initially all four the colonies were under British Sovereignty with the promise of eventual self government.

After the 1906 British elections, the political outlook changed with more sympathy to the former Boer Republics and Jan Christian Smuts took advantage of this to propose a National Convention. The Convention assembled in Durban, in Natal, in October, 1908. Representatives of all four the colonies were present and after lengthy debates a motion to establish the Union of South Africa was adopted on October 13. The Convention moved to Cape Town and the following year in February, a draft constitution was accepted.

On May 31, 1910, the Union of South Africa became a legal entity with dominion status within the British Empire. Although John Merriman, Cape Colony prime minister, hoped to become the first South African prime minister, the British governor-general, Lord Gladstone, chose Louis Botha for that office. Ironically, eight years earlier Botha had been fighting the British army on the battlefield during the Boer War!

With the creation of a new country, new stamps would also be required. Here the British printers saw an opportunity!



Louis Botha, first prime minister of South Africa.

The early stamp printers for the Union of South Africa

- De La Rue printed the first commemorative stamp as well as the first definitive series for the Union of South Africa

De La Rue Security Print Ltd. Thomas De La Rue & Co. Ltd. was founded in 1813, with their first stamps appearing in 1853 (revenue) and 1855 (postal – the British 4d carmine). Group origins lie in the efforts of Thomas to build a business in printing and publishing on Guernsey. He later made his way to London to make his fortune where he dabbled, among other things, in straw hat making. De La Rue finally made good in printing and amassed a fortune from producing stamps (then in their infancy) and from his patented production of playing cards, much in demand in Victorian England. They held a monopoly on British stamp printing from 1880 to 1911, losing the low value production to Harrison's due to an excessive pricing structure.



The early stamp printers for the Union of South Africa

- Waterlow & Sons were given the contract for the low values of the second definitive series

Waterlow & Sons Ltd. Founded in 1810 as sellers of legal documents, Waterlow's first stamps appeared in the early 1850s with a lithographed issue for British Guiana and 1913 saw their first British contract. In 1952 they celebrated a century of stamp production, but within eight years had been absorbed into DLR.



Waterlow's workshop

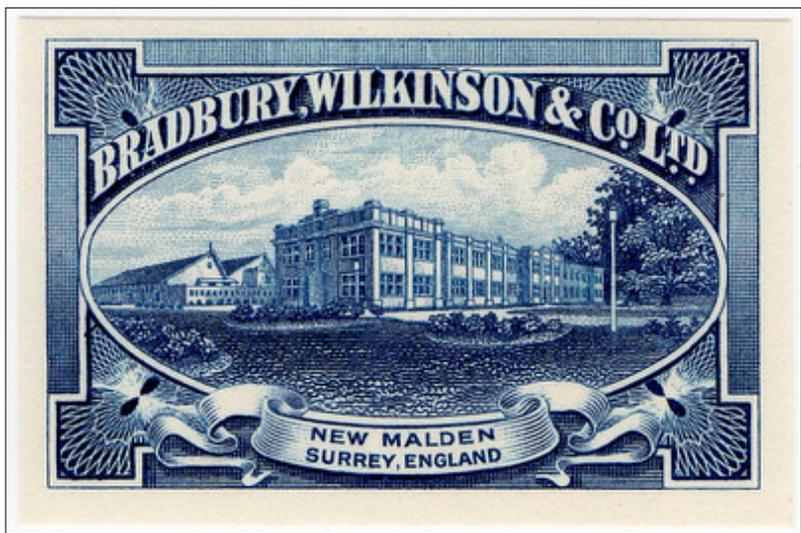


Waterlow's premises in
Finsbury, London

The early stamp printers for the Union of South Africa

- Bradbury Wilkinson were awarded the higher values

Bradbury, Wilkinson & Co. Ltd. In 1856 Henry Bradbury formed a company with his partner and engraver, Robert Wilkinson and executed a banknote order for Montevideo in 1858. In 1871, the firm made its first engraving for stamps preparing plates for the state of Hyderabad and in 1878 engraved and printed the first Falkland Islands stamps. 1918 saw production of the British 'Seahorses' high values and they intermittently printed recess high values until the 1970s. The company moved from London to a site in New Malden, later becoming a subsidiary of American Bank Note Company. In 1986 ABNC sold Bradbury to DLR, who absorbed them by 1990.



The Bradbury Wilkinson Printing works in
New Malden, Surrey

The early stamp printers for the Union of South Africa



Bradbury sales person taking a break at their offices. Would have loved to see what was in that suitcase!

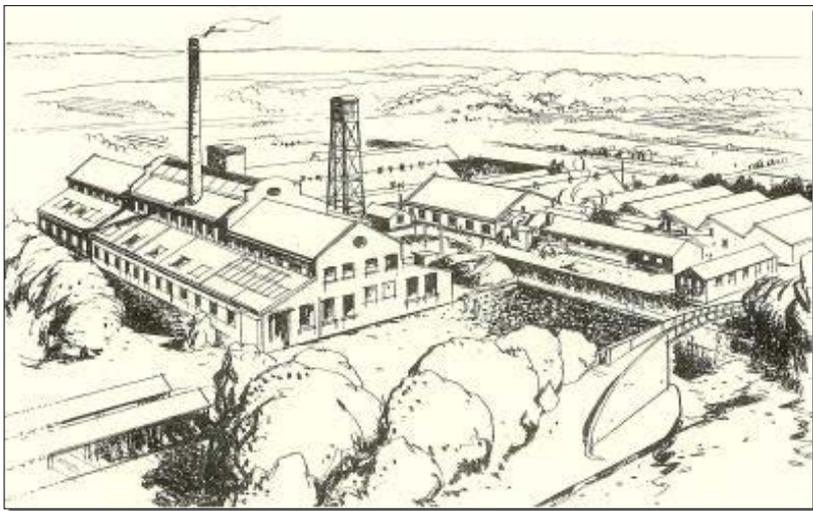


The early stamp printers for the Union of South Africa

- Harrison & Sons were unsuccessful but made the most effort to procure contracts

Harrison & Sons Ltd. Company origins can be traced back to Richard Harrison who, in the mid-1500s, was recorded as a Freeman of 'the mystery and art of printing'. The company was founded by James Harrison in London in 1750 and the company logo changed over the years, but invariably retained the hare, rye and sun rebus.

Harrison once produced stamps for over 100 countries and its first British contract was in 1881 producing one-shilling embossed stamps for telegram forms, followed by a major contract in 1911 for definitives and from 1934 until the 1980s virtually every British stamp came from Harrison's. In 1997, DLR purchased Harrison and almost overnight centuries of tradition were swept away when the company changed its name to De La Rue Security Print.



**The Hayes Factory in
Middlesex in 1910**

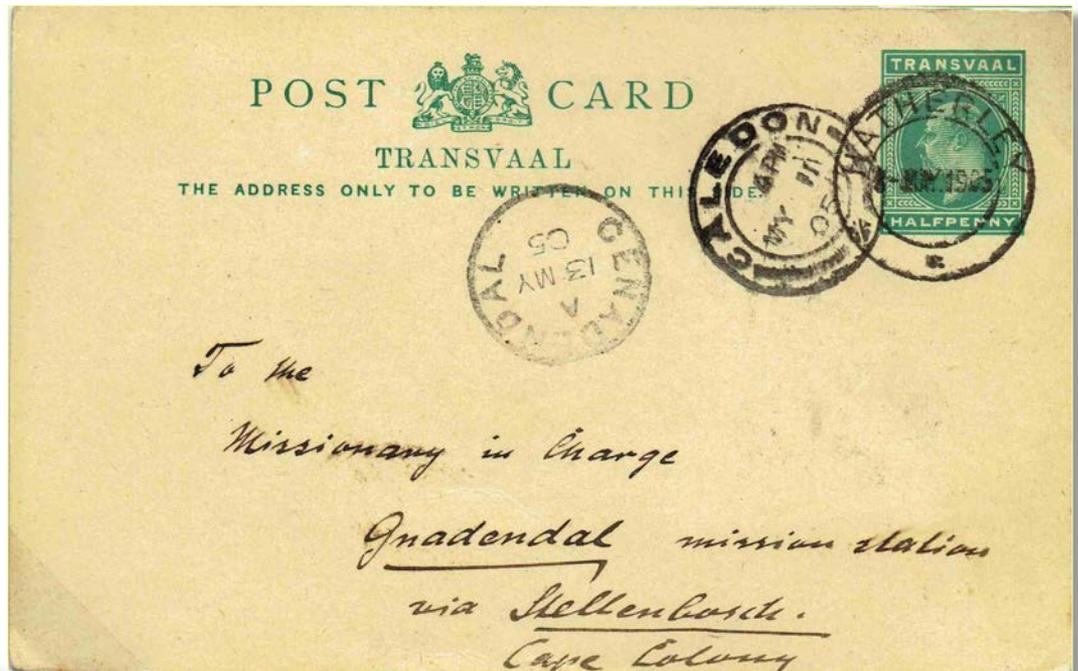
The Philately of the Union of South Africa

The philately of South Africa offers the collector a wide range of subjects and challenges to collect. The philately of the Union has kept collectors enthralled for a hundred years now and new discoveries are still being made! Much has been documented but much more needs to be done to bring the information up to date.

Collecting the Union of South Africa can be as challenging as you the collector will allow it to be. Many collectors shy away from the complexities of the definitive rotogravure printings from this period, others revel in the chase to find the missing material!

The first Union commemorative was issued in November 1910 and then no Union stamps were issued till 1 September, 1913. In the interim period stamps and postal stationery of the former colonies was used. This was known as the interprovincial period.

A Transvaal card reprinted in Pretoria and used in 1911.



Interim Post cards

Re-printing of the various cards from the former Colonies

- Cape of Good Hope:**

- Ordered early 1910 but delivered after the formation of the Union

- Transvaal:**

- Re-printed in 1911 in a sage green colour.

- Natal:**

- Re-printed in 1912

- Orange River Colony:**

- Re-printed in 1912

- The Transvaal Govt. Printer had reprinted large quantities of the Transvaal cards since 1908 when the plates were sent by De La Rue. The Cape of Good Hope cards were only ordered once shortly before Union and the plate not used again. After De La Rue sent the plates of the Orange River Colony and Natal in Jul. 1911 quantities of each were printed and sent to the distributor of stamps in Pretoria. Exact release dates to the Post Offices are not known but it appears from dated examples that the Orange River Cards were released to Post Offices before those of Natal.

The Union's First Stamp

The First stamp to appear for the Union was a commemorative for the opening of Parliament in November 1910.

Printed by De La Rue and the only stamp of the Union to be printed on multiple rosette watermarked paper. The blue ink penetrated the paper to various degrees and many shades of "blued" paper appeared as a result



H.C. 1

72, VICTORIA STREET,
WESTMINSTER, S.W.

*Forwarded with the compliments of
The High Commissioner for the Union of
South Africa.*



**The Union's first stamp to
commemorate the opening of
Parliament on 4 November 1910**

**These compliments slips were
handed out by The High
Commissioner of the Union of
South Africa to various
dignitaries.**

**Highly sought after by
specialist collectors!**

Design Competition for the first Definitives Jan. 1911

Many designs were submitted in a competition for the new definitives.

Small cash prizes were handed to some of the designs but none were finally used.

The most often seen are the Mackay Essays printed in strips of 5 in various colours.



The First Definitive Series printed by De La Rue

Initially a set of 11 stamps were issued on Sep.1,1913 more than three years after the formation of the Union! A £1 value was added in Jul.1916 and a 1½d on Aug.23,1920 and finally 1/3 value on Sep.1,1920. These were due to postage increases and changes. On Oct.4, 1922 a 3d blue was added to replace the black and orange-red 3d due to the harmonized colors for overseas postage by the UPU.



The initial 11 values from De La Rue

The First Definitive Series printed by De La Rue



£1 value
added in Jul.
1916



1½d value added
in Aug. 1920



1/3 value added
in Sep. 1920



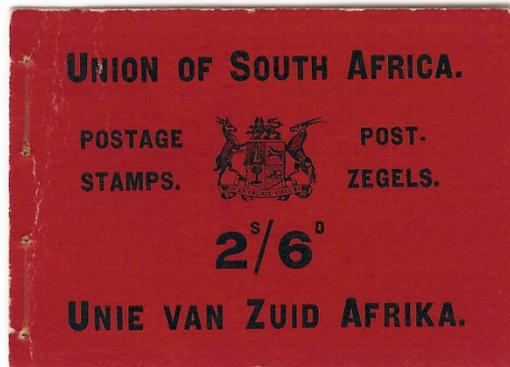
The final 3d value in blue to comply with
UPU guide colors for overseas mail

The First Definitive Series printed by De La Rue

Booklet stamps as well as roll stamps were added to the standard postage values.



The 4 Roll stamps issued at various times



Booklet 1 & 2 front



Booklet 1 back



Booklet 2 back

The first booklets printed by De La Rue for the Union.
The rarest of the Union Booklets

The First Definitive Series printed by De La Rue

Booklets.

After the first contracts were agreed, the Union Government made several changes to the booklet requirement which included postage information changes printed in the booklets, stamp values in the booklets as well as the addition of adverts on the interleaves. This must have driven De La Rue crazy!



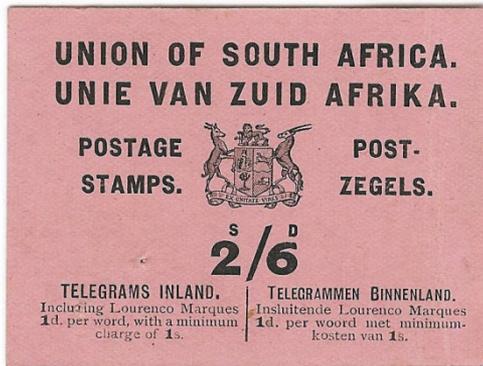
2 x 1/2d panes per booklet



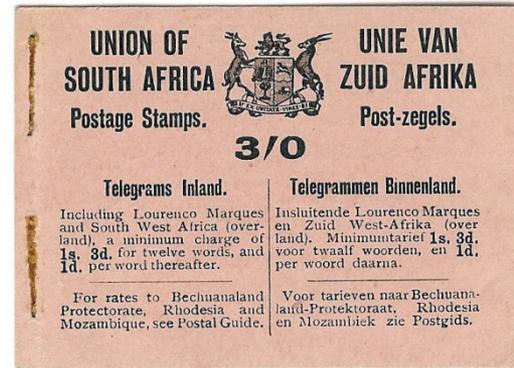
4 x 1d panes per booklet

The first booklets printed by De La Rue

The De La Rue Booklet Printings



Booklet 3



Booklet 4

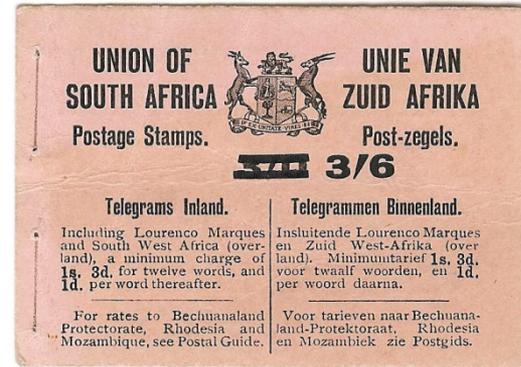


Booklet 4 with 2d overprint



Booklet 4 with 2 only overprint

The De La Rue Booklet Printings



Booklet 5 with two different overprint fonts



1½d pane as found in B 4
due to postage increase



2d pane replaced the 1½d
pane in B 5 due again to
postage increases

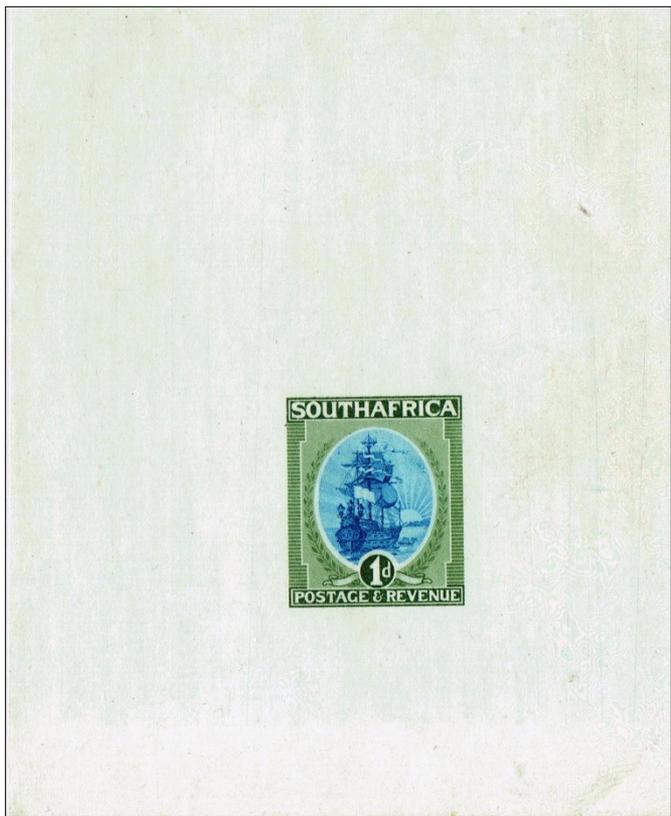
The De La Rue Booklet Printings



Surplus 1½d tete-beche sheets sold over the Post Office counters

Design Competition for the Second Definitive Series

A set of Pictorial definitive stamps to replace the Kings Head issue was contemplated as early as September 1922. In 1923 Harrison & Sons submitted essays of four different designs in various color combinations. Harrison & Sons invested in essays which were printed in Photogravure (a technology they did not yet have) by collaborating with a Dutch firm, Nederlandsche Rotogravure Maatschapy which were the pioneers in this form of printing.



**One of the four designs
submitted by Harrison & Sons**

Design Competition for the Second Definitive Series

Harrison's had printed sheets of sample stamps to demonstrate their printing capabilities to the Union Government. After they were advised that they did not get any of the contracts, Harrison's made up these sample cards to show other potential customers their print capabilities. The interesting issue was that Harrison's did not yet own the new printing press to do photogravure printing and were collaborating with NRM in Leyden, The Netherlands. This was most likely the reason they did not get the contract.



New Contracts Awarded

Despite many modifications by Harrison & Sons as well as two designs adopted from De La Rue, contracts were awarded to Waterlow & Sons for the ½d, 1d and 6d values and Bradbury Wilkinson for the 2d, 3d, 4d, 1/-, 2/6, 5/- and 10/- values, much to the disappointment and protests from Harrisons and De La Rue.



Specimens of the 3 values awarded to Waterlow & Sons in 1925

New Contracts Awarded



A triangular stamp was printed by Bradbury Wilkinson for release on Jan.1, 1926

New Contracts Awarded



The seven values awarded to Bradbury Wilkinson
Specimen Set

The First Waterlow Values To Appear

Roll stamps and Booklets were also printed by Waterlow & Sons of the ½d and 1d values.



**Stamps were produced in rolls of 500 and 1200 by
Waterlow & Sons**



The First Waterlow Values To Appear

Roll stamps and Booklets were also printed by Waterlow & Sons of the ½d and 1d values.



Each booklet contained
2 x ½d and 4 x 1d panes

The First Values To Appear

Waterlow & Sons managed to get the ½d and 1d shipped in time for their issue on Jan. 1st, 1926 and the 6d four months later on May 1st, 1926.



First day of issue, Jan.1 1926, despite Post Offices being closed for a holiday. Post Offices were opened in the main centers for an hour or two to service collectors.

The First Waterlow Values To Appear

The 6d value appeared on May 1, 1926, 4 months later than planned.



The First Bradbury Values To Appear

Bradbury Wilkinson produced a 4d imperforate value in triangular format on Jan. 1st, 1926 as well. It was initially the intention to issue the 2d value on this day as well but for various reasons this did not happen. More on this later.

The 4d triangular stamps were initially issued in packets of 60 pre-cut by the printers. This design was chosen by the Union Government but it was soon realized that these were unsuitable for modern requirements. Later uncut sheets were sold over the Post Office counters as well.

This was a failed experiment.



2d Value Printed By Bradbury Wilkinson

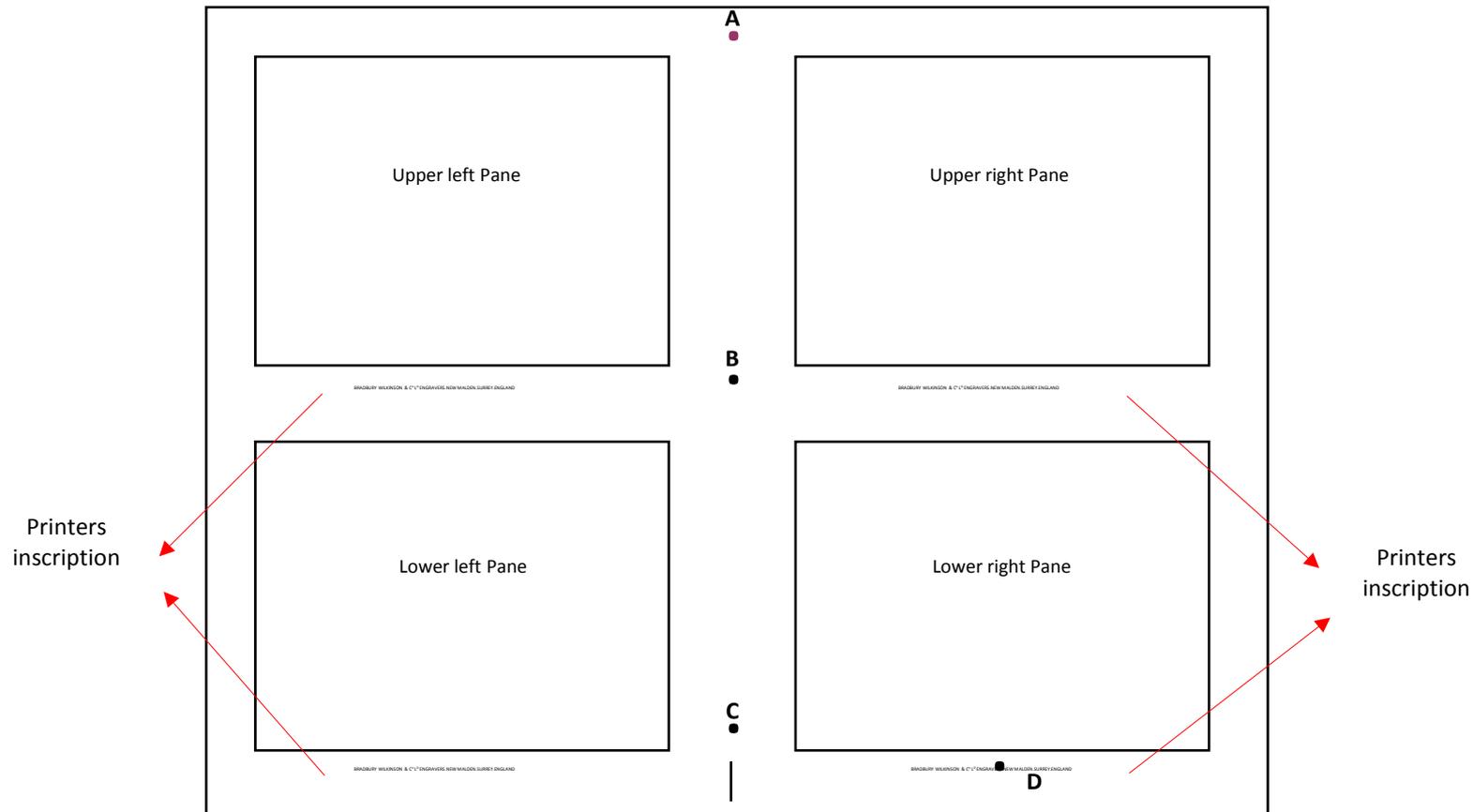
Initially these stamps were printed in a 4 pane format. Bradbury Wilkinson experienced many problems in this format with the perforator alignment and the initial rejection of the first printings. This rejection of the stamps were probably politically motivated as the Controller of stores still had huge stocks of the 2d Kings Head issues in inventory. **(41 Million stamps-approx. 171,000 sheets of 4 panes)** This showed up in the annual figures published by the Post Master General in his report to Parliament.

Later when a shortage was looming the rejected 2d stamps were accepted. Only 591840 of the 5.7 million printed were deemed acceptable. **These were originally printed in August 1925 and finally issued a year and a half later!**



The Four Pane Layout – Bradbury Printings

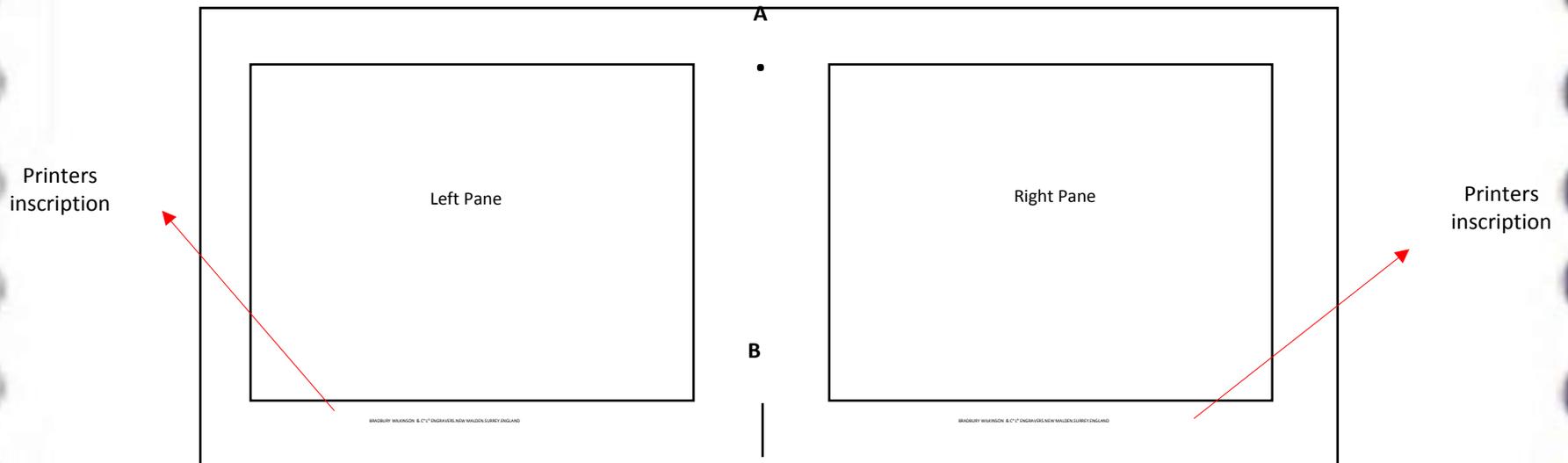
2d value only



A, B, D— Guide dots
C— Guide dot or guide line

The Two Pane Layout – Bradbury Printings

All subsequent printings



A — Guide dot
B — Guide line

The Transition To Local Printing

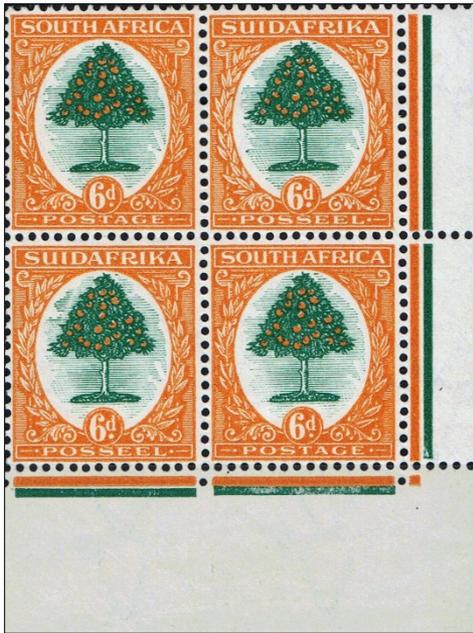
Waterlow was asked in early 1927 to pass the Typograph plates for the ½d, 1d and 6d to Pretoria for printing the stamps locally. The contract they fought so hard for was short lived. Bradbury Wilkinson continued to print the other values till 1929 when they were slowly replaced by the locally printed stamps using the new Goebels Rotary printing press.



The 3 values printed by Waterlow now printed by Typograph in Pretoria from the Waterlow plates with one main identifying feature shown on next page.

The Transition To Local Printing

The differences between Waterlow printings and Pretoria printings

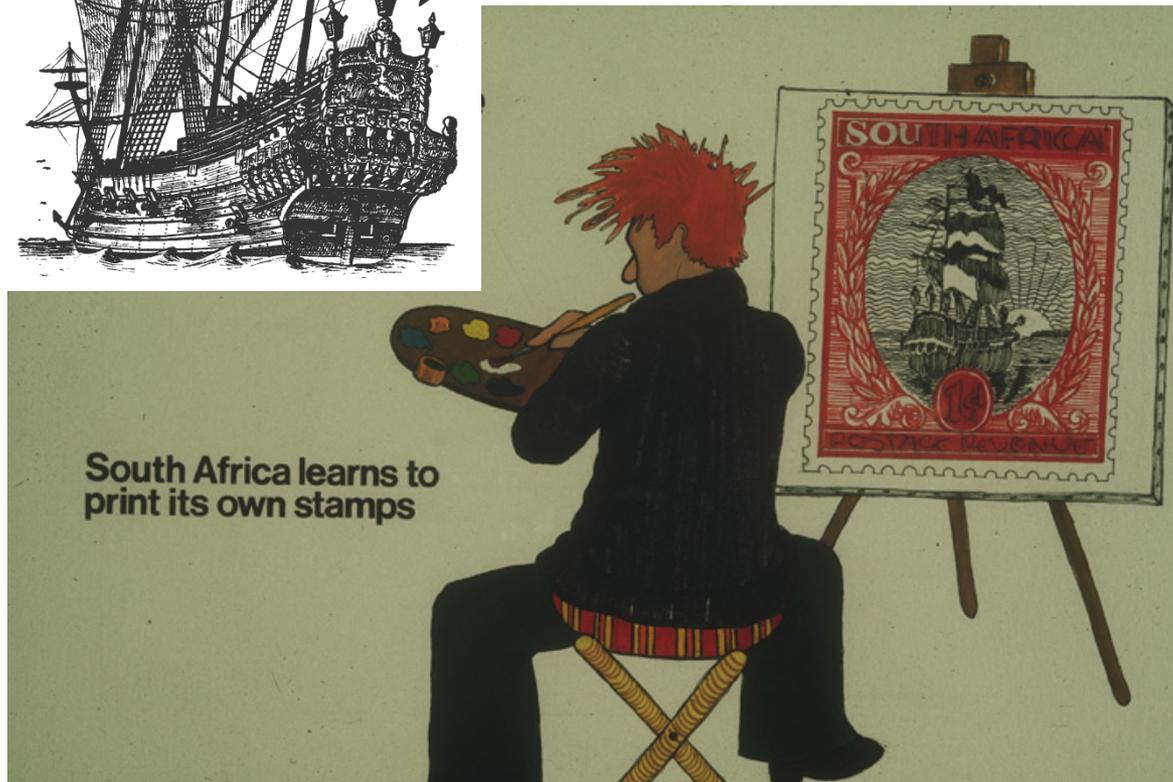
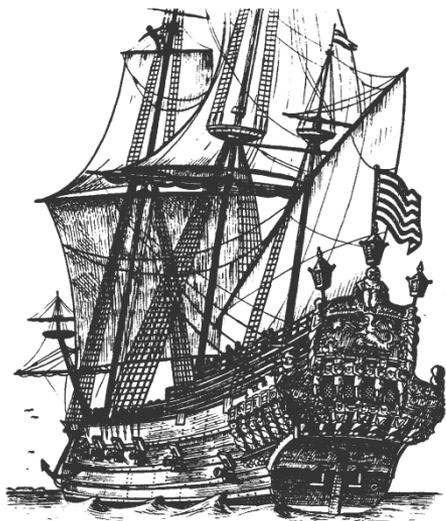


Waterlow Printings were perforated from **right** to left.



Pretoria Printings were perforated from **left** to right.

The Decision to Print Locally



New Printing Press Procured For Local Stamp Production

In 1929 the ½d, 1d and 6d stamps of the Union of South Africa were printed by Typography at the Government Printer in Pretoria. These were from plates supplied by Waterlow & Sons from dies made by the Royal Mint in London. The balance of all the other values were still printed by Bradbury Wilkinson & Co. in London. The Union Government had decided that it wished to print all its own stamps at the Government Printing works in Pretoria.

In 1928, The Government Printer, Col. J.J. Kruger toured Europe, Canada and the USA to evaluate the latest printing methods for stamp printing. After careful study he proposed that a process using photogravure would be the most suitable for the conditions in South Africa. Subsequently a complete printing press using photogravure from cylindrical cylinders was ordered by the Union Government. The contract was handled by the Union Government agents, Hunter Penrose and the order was placed on Goebels AG of Darmstadt in Germany.

This was only the third such machine ordered from Goebels, the other two being supplied to the Italian Government.

The Contract

The purchase contract stipulated that half the purchase price was paid up front and the balance on completion and satisfactory proof that the plant would perform as specified. The particular type of “screenless” process chosen was then a secret process of the “Nederlandsche Rotogravure Maatschappij” in Leiden, The Netherlands.

The design chosen for the trials was that of the 1d Ship currently being printed by Typography in Pretoria. A “black print” was made from the Waterlow plates now in Pretoria. The vignette and frame cylinders were etched in Leiden.

The Controversy of the Darmstadt Trials

Background

In 1938 a report appeared in Scott's monthly journal of a 1d ship issue from South Africa without a watermark. The South African Government Printer denied the existence of such an issue and stated that it did not print stamps on un-watermarked paper.

An investigation was started but WW II intervened and was only resumed after the war. After many meetings and reluctance on the part of the Government Printer to co-operate it transpired that these un-watermarked stamps originated from the Trials held in Darmstadt in 1929. It was only in 1950 when Hunter Penrose went into liquidation and their archives sold off that sheets of these stamps were bought by a Professor Dix in London and he published an article on these trials that the Philatelic Federation in South Africa could get the full story. These trials then became recognized as forerunners to the actual stamps printed in South Africa.



The Controversy of the Darmstadt Trials



Trials were printed on different papers, inks of the frames and the vignettes as well as complete stamps. Initially problems were encountered with registration of the two cylinders as shown in the example above.

The Controversy Surrounding the Booyens Essays

During the time I was doing research on these trials I came across some interesting correspondence regarding trials made by the printer sent to Europe to learn the process of engraving the cylinders at NRM in Leyden. This was J. Booyens (who in later years became the Government Printer), and he had used a design supplied to him by the Tourism department to practice his engraving/etching skills. He printed a few sheets of stamps. Sheets consisted of 80 stamps, 8 rows by 10. Exact quantities are not recorded.



Brown



Violet



Blue



Black

Examples in the frames.

The Controversy Surrounding The Booyens Essays

48 Harvey Road
Bloemfontein
28.4.1954.

Mr. J. Booyens,
Foreman, Stamp Department,
Government Printing Works,
Pretoria.

Dear Sir,

Mr. A.D. Smit, who is a former colleague of yours and with whom I play Tennis here in Bloemfontein has told me that I may refer to him when writing to you.

The reason for my writing to you is that I am doing some philatelic research work and am writing articles in connection with Union stamp problems. I have helped in the compilation of the recently issued Handbook/Catalogue of South African stamps.

Now there is one item about which I would like to get some further information, and I think that you are the most authentic person to supply this information, as the item in question, an essay, was printed by you in 1929 in Darmstadt during trial printings. The item is catalogued on p.79 of the New Union Handbook, depicts a Springbok without horns and is called by us generally the "Booyens Essay" (after you).

I would be greatly obliged to you if you could find the time to answer me the following questions in connection with the Essay:

- (1) What was the purpose of printing these Essays (in sheets of 8 x 10), in violet and in red-brown)?
Was it
 - (a) to test the working and suitability of the new Goebels Rotogravure machine;
 - (b) or to present to the Union authorities some practical proof of your acquired skill by printing these Essays;
 - (c) or to propose a new ld design for the future stamp issue?
- (2) Did you draw the design ("Springbok without horns") yourself, or what was the source of the design?
 - (a) How many sheets (stamps) did you print (if you still can recollect)
 - (a) of the violet stamps,
 - (b) of the red-brown stamps?
- (4) Did you print these sheets also on the new Goebels Rotogravure machine before delivery to South Africa? If not, on what type of machine?
- (5) Do you still possess Sheets (or parts) of your Essay and are you prepared to dispose of them to me?

I hope you do not mind these questions in the Interest of Union philately, and thank you very much in anticipation of a kind reply.

Regards from Mr. Smit,

Yours truly,

Dr. K. Freund

From correspondence uncovered by the writer in the Post Office Archives in the early 1980's it transpires that there was some element of officialdom involved. Johnny Booyens wrote in an unpublished letter to Dr. Ken Freund (a well known South African philatelist at the time) that he was supplied an image of the Springboks head by the publicity department of the Railways and Harbours.

The following correspondence is between Dr. Freund and Mr. Booyens and is reproduced here verbatim as the scans of the originals did not reproduce well.

Letter from K. Freund to Booyens

The Controversy Surrounding The Booyens Essays

4.5.54

Stamps Dept.

Mr Ferreira

P O Publicity

In reply to Dr Freund's letter of the 28.04.50, (sic) I can furnish the following information.

Question

- (1) (a) It was not to test out the Goebel Rotogravure machine.

(b) I did these stamps with the specific purpose of gaining experience.

(c) There was no idea of proposing a new 1d stamp design. A dummy design was chosen on purpose so that it was of no value.
- (2) The Springbok doe head drawing was done by me from a photo supplied by the S.A. Railways and was obtained from the S.A. Legation's office at The Hague.
The Protea border design I based on drawings received from the university of Leiden, Holland.
- (3) As these stamps were not official no check was kept on the number of sheets printed. They were printed in, as far as I can remember, in four different colours, viz. black, blue, red brown and violet.
- (4) These sheets were not printed on the new Goebel Rotogravure machine, that is the reason why they are not perforated.
I printed these trial sheets on a sheet fed photogravure machine in the factory of the "Nederlandse Rotogravure Maatschapy", Leiden Holland, where I was undergoing my course of study.
- (5) No more sheets are available.

Yours
(Signed J. Booyens)

Draft of letter to Dr. Freund

Together with this note I found a letter reprimanding Booyens for intending to supply information to the public on the activities of the Government Printer. He was given a written warning with the threat of dismissal if it happened again. I was not allowed to copy this letter as it was considered to be of a personal nature.

It is clear that these were printed in Leyden on a manual sheet fed machine.

The official reply that was sent to Dr. Freund is reproduced on the next page.

The Controversy Surrounding The Booyens Essays

The official reply from Mr. Booyens

7 May, 1954

Dr. K. Freund,
43 Harvey Road,

BLOEMFONTEIN

Dear Dr. Freund,

I have received your letter of the 28th April and regret to say that as an employee in the Government Printing Works I am not authorised in my private capacity to give information of the nature you asked for in your letter.

Please remember me to Mr. Smit.

Yours faithfully,

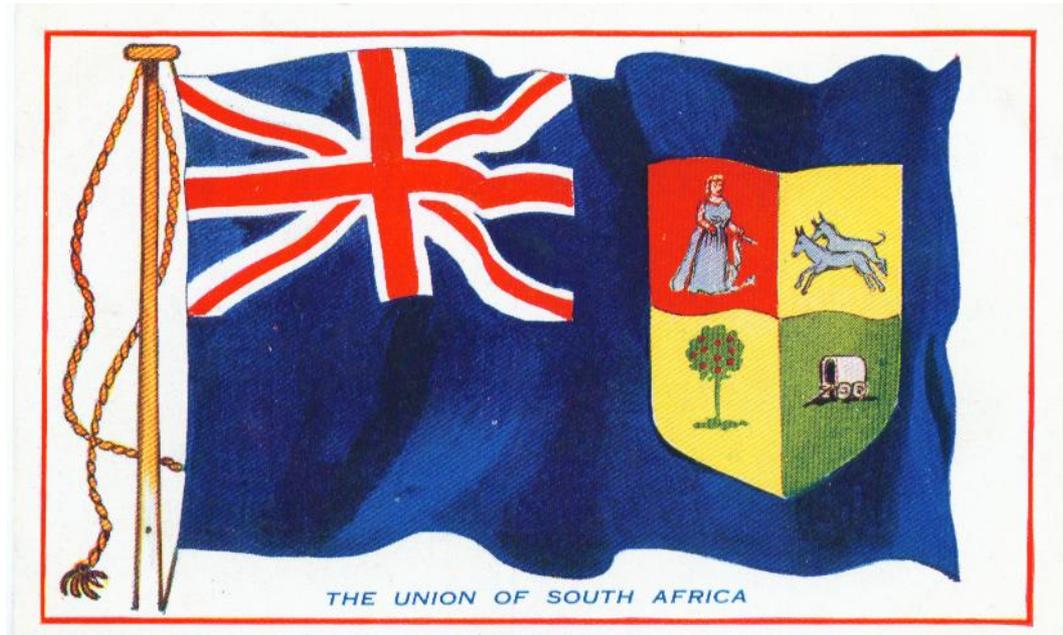
J. Booyens

If this information was made available to the committee tasked to report back to the Philatelic Federation at the time, the decisions regarding the status of these essays might have been different.

South Africa Starts Printing Own Stamps in May 1930

The 1d ship issue was the first to appear in May 1930. First off the newly installed press were the roll stamps and then the sheet issues. The designs were now completely redrawn in South Africa with subtle changes to those produced in London.





The end of an Era and a start to the next.

The Photogravure and Rotogravure definitive issues in similar designs that followed, were replaced by a new series of animals on stamps in 1954. These Pictorial definitive issues have kept collectors of Union definitive's enthralled or frustrated for a lifetime.