

Stamps of the British Empire issued during the reign of King Edward VII

John Williams

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Introduction

Why King Edward VII ?

When King Edward VII came to the throne on 22 January 1901 the British Empire was at its height. The dominions, colonies and protectorates all had their own issues of stamps and in some foreign countries British post offices also operated to provide British residents and business interests with a more efficient, secure and reliable service than was often available locally. In all, over seventy jurisdictions around the world issued "British Empire" stamps. In the great majority of territories, issued postage stamps had borne up to that time the portrait in one form or another of the late Queen Victoria. The accession of a new monarch created an instant problem for the postal authorities, both in Great Britain itself and also in the various overseas territories.

In the first place, new designs incorporating a portrait of King Edward VII had to be prepared and approved: this in itself caused great controversy when an Austrian (Emil Fuchs), rather than a British artist, was chosen to draw the portrait.

Secondly, the whole process of printing and issuing new stamps for a great number of territories around the world was immense, particularly as in most cases the stamps themselves had to be printed in Great Britain and shipped overseas. So, while in Great Britain it was not long before stamps appeared bearing the portrait of King Edward VII, issues in the rest of the empire continued in many cases to bear the portrait of Queen Victoria for some years.

The reign of King Edward VII lasted just under ten years, from 22 January 1901 to 6 May 1910. This decade coincided with attempts to eliminate forgery and fraud by introducing fugitive inks and chalk-surfaced paper (both of which resulted in stamps drastically changing their appearance and colour if cancellation marks were washed off in water), and by changes in watermarks.

The introduction of Universal Penny Postage (by New Zealand in 1901 and by many of the other territories in the years which followed) also led to a great increase in the use of the postal services within the empire during this period.

All these measures, taken together with the relatively short timespan of the reign, make the worldwide stamps of King Edward VII a fascinating study and I hope you enjoy the display. Please bear in mind that it is essentially a "collection" and that I have had to be very selective in deciding which sheets to include

in the display so as not to be too repetitive by showing several issues from the same territory which differ only in that they involve changes in the colours of some denominations or in the watermarks. There are also inevitably "gaps" in the collection which still have to be filled !

I have written (mainly for my own interest) a more detailed overview of the political and postal histories of British overseas territories issuing stamps between 1901 and 1910: a copy is available in the display room for 'consultation' by anyone interested in more information about any particular territory.

The following notes may be helpful in identifying key items of interest:

Frame 1

- a signed sketch by Emil Fuchs (reproduced on the front of this handout) for the portrait of King Edward VII which was used for the stamps of Great Britain and many colonial issues.
- a number of items in the King's handwriting (including a cover addressed to W E Gladstone at 10 Downing Street, written when Prince of Wales).
- essays by Bradbury Wilkinson which may have been submitted as a possible design for colonial issues: perhaps they had in mind the contemporaneous German colonial issues featuring the royal yacht *Hohenzollern*?

Frame 2

- stamps of New Zealand overprinted for use by British Antarctic Expeditions in Victoria Land and King Edward VII Land.
- Aden: the first post office was opened in 1839 (stamps of India being used when the territory was placed under the Bombay postal authorities) but separate stamps of Aden did not appear until 1937 ; stamps of Great Britain were often used for mail taken on by passing ships.



The five shillings value bearing a portrait of King Edward VII

- Antigua: the first local stamps were issued in 1862 but were withdrawn in 1890 and only stamps of the Leeward Islands were in use until 1903 when a local issue was reintroduced depicting the "seal of the colony" (only the five shillings value bearing a portrait of King Edward VII).
- Ascension Island: from 1897, stamps of Great Britain were provided for use by the local post office until the issue of the first local stamps in 1922.

Frame 3

- Australia: although the six individual colonies came together in January 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia, the latter only issued postage due stamps initially and the first prepaid postage stamp did not appear until 1913 ; in the meantime, the individual states went on issuing their own postage stamps, many simply continuing with designs using the portrait of Queen Victoria or pictorial themes.

[issues by the individual states are shown in the frames which follow]

Frame 4

- New South Wales: an item of particular interest is the ninepence value which was first introduced in 1903 as a result of cooperation between New South Wales and Queensland and bore the word "Commonwealth" for the first time ; all the other states already had a ninepence value and did not take up this initiative.



[The Queensland Chalon Head](#)

Frame 5

- Queensland: if one is allowed a "favourite stamp", for me the Queensland Chalon Head wins by a wide margin !

Frame 6

- South Australia: much use was made of the 'long' design bearing the portrait of Queen Victoria (first introduced in 1886 and continuing right up to the introduction of the first Commonwealth postage stamps in 1913).
- Tasmania: the various pictorial scenes may be pretty and interesting but become rather repetitive in successive issues.

Frame 7



Victoria King Edward VII

- Tasmania (continued).
- Victoria (the only state to issue stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII).

Frame 8

- Western Australia (the famous "swan" design being well represented).
- Bahamas (the first islands in the West Indies discovered by Columbus in 1492, the area being called baja mar by early Spanish geographers): the first issue of stamps during the reign of King Edward VII depicted the "Queen's Staircase" in Nassau, the portrait of King Edward VII not being used until the issue of 1902-1910.

Frame 9

- Barbados, which did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII: of particular interest however is the locally surcharged issue to raise relief funds following a devastating earthquake in Jamaica in 1907 and which produced a wide range of varieties - surprising perhaps is the fact that Jamaica itself never issued any stamps to raise relief funds.



Bechuanaland overprints

- Bechuanaland, whose stamps are unique in postal history in that for nearly fifty years (1885 - 1932) they relied entirely on the stamps of other countries through the simple expedient of overprinting.
- Bermuda, which did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII.

Frame 10

- British Central Africa and Nyasaland: the first issue (1903-1904) to bear the portrait of King Edward VII was inscribed "British Central Africa Protectorate", subsequent issues being inscribed "Nyasaland Protectorate" following the change of the name of the territory in 1907.
- British East Africa Protectorate: it was only in 1895 that political responsibility for British territories in East Africa was handed over to the British government by the Imperial British East Africa Company, and King Edward VII was already on the throne when the "Uganda Railway" from Mombasa to Lake Victoria was completed in 1902.

Frame 11

- Uganda Protectorate and East Africa and Uganda Protectorates: the areas under British control in East Africa went through a variety of changes of name at the turn of the century, with the issues of stamps reflecting these changes.
- British Guiana, which did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII.

Frame 12

- British Honduras.



British Levant

- British Levant: arrangements for the establishment of British post offices within the Ottoman Empire were first included in a commercial treaty in 1832 but did not come into operation until 1857 when a post office for civilian use replaced an army post office set up in Constantinople during the Crimean War ; ultimately, there were five British post offices in operation in Beyrouth, Constantinople, Stamboul, Salonica and Smyrna, with (during the reign of King Edward VII) stamps on sale being
- unoverprinted stamps of Great Britain (identified only in a used condition)
- stamps of Great Britain surcharged in Turkish currency
- stamps of Great Britain overprinted "Levant".

Frame 13

- British Solomon Islands, which did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII.



The 'line through B of Labuan' can be seen in the circular frame just above the "R" of the overprint

- British Virgin Islands: the first local stamps were issued in 1866 and were inscribed simply "Virgin Islands", not being inscribed "British Virgin Islands" (to distinguish them from the United States Virgin Islands) until 1968 ; in the early days, mail was frequently sent by way of Saint Thomas in the Danish West Indies (which were purchased in 1916 to become the United States Virgin Islands).
- Brunei: a point of note is the constant "line through B of Labuan" variety, also found on the Straits Settlements issue of 1906-1907 (see frame 47) and on the stamps of Labuan itself (see frame 25).

Frame 14



1903-1912 issue of Canada

- Canada: when the first new King Edward VII stamps of Great Britain were printed, they merely replaced the head of Queen Victoria with the Emil Fuchs portrait of the new monarch within the old design, with just four values in a new design. King Edward VII soon let it be known that he much preferred the new stamps of Transvaal to these new designs and De La Rue prepared the Transvaal essays as alternative designs for the four Great Britain stamps. However, these essays were not pursued and in the meantime the coronation of King Edward VII took place, following which a new royal portrait appeared showing the monarch in his coronation robes. This new portrait was used for the 1903-1912 issue of Canada, and also for the Bradbury Wilkinson essays (see frame 1): it was never used for any other territory.

- Cape of Good Hope: the stamps of King Edward VII were the last stamps to be issued by the Cape of Good Hope as the territory ceased to have a separate postal existence when the Union of South Africa was established in 1910.



Dented frame below "A" of "Cayman"

- Cayman Islands: of particular interest are

(a) the dented frame ("Glover flaw") variety which is also found on the keyplate issues of Gambia (see frame 18) and Seychelles (see frame 42)

(b) the number of provisional issues to overcome temporary shortages of low denominations.

Frame 15

- Cayman Islands (continued).

- Ceylon: the Sinhala epic poems sandesa kavi romantically narrate how swans, parrots and peacocks provided a wondrous courier service for communication between the island's centres of population ; more mundanely, the network of roads in Ceylon had developed to such an extent that the first mail-coach

service in Asia was able to come into operation in 1832, with the first adhesive postage stamps being issued in 1857.

Frame 16



Penrhyn Island only issued stamps bearing his portrait some years after his death!

- Cook Islands (including Aitutaki and Penrhyn Island): the Cook Islands did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII, while Aitutaki and Penrhyn Island only issued stamps bearing his portrait (overprinted stamps of New Zealand) in 1911 and 1914 respectively (some years after his death!).

Frame 17

- Cyprus.

- Dominica: the two issues during the reign of King Edward (1903-1907 and 1907-1908) both depicted views of the capital of Roseau from the sea, with only the five shillings value bearing a portrait of King Edward VII.

- Falkland Islands (including South Georgia (see frame 18), where a handstamped underprint was issued for use at the Grytviken whaling station in conjunction with Falkland Islands stamps, the underprint being sometimes imprinted on the stamp itself but more properly immediately below the stamp).

Frame 18

- Federated Malay States (with an amazing number of catalogued shades on the "springing tiger" issues).

- Fiji (whose stamps were also overprinted for use in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (see frame 19) and in the New Hebrides (see frame 30)).

- Gambia: the King Edward VII keyplate issues of 1902-1905, 1904-1906 and 1909 all featured the "dented frame" variety referred to at frame 14.

Frame 19

- Gambia (continued).
- Gibraltar (whose stamps will appear again under Morocco Agencies (see frame 28)).
- Gilbert and Ellice Islands: the first stamps issued for general use in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands were overprinted stamps of Fiji.
- Gold Coast: the Queen Victoria keyplate design of 1899 was continued into the reign of King Edward VII, with the head of the new monarch first appearing in an issue of 1902 ; a new design was introduced in 1908 but only for the penny value (not displayed).



Hong Kong 5 cents

Frame 20

- Grenada (whose postage due stamps are somewhat unusually inscribed "surcharge postage" - see also Trinidad at frame 50).
- Hong Kong (including British Treaty Ports in China).

Frame 21

- India (the "Jewel in the Crown" of the British Empire, in the words of Disraeli).

Frame 22



Overprinted "C.E.F." (China Expeditionary Force)

- India (continued, including the China Expeditionary Force and the British Railway Administration): following the outbreak of the Boxer Rising in northern China, the diplomatic legations in Peking were besieged by rebels in June 1900. An international force, including Indian Army units, relieved the legations in August 1900 but operations continued against the rebels for some years, the last Indian Army units not leaving until 1923. Mail from the Indian Army units were sent through field post offices using stamps of India overprinted "C.E.F." (China Expeditionary Force).

A vital train link was captured by the Russians during the operations against the Boxer rebels and in 1901 control of the line was assigned to the China Expeditionary Force, a British Railway Administration being set up to manage it. Travelling post offices had responsibility for the despatch of mail, with a late letter service carrying an additional fee of five cents (for which a surcharged half cent value of China was used).

- Indian Convention States (Patiala, Gwalior) being those states which used the services of the Indian Post Office and had overprinted stamps of India supplied to them) ; the numerous Indian Feudatory States issued their own stamps which are not included in this collection.

Frame 23

- Indian Convention States (continued) (Jind, Nabha, Chamba).



Designs of the stamps of Johore are noteworthy in that the values were also expressed in Chinese characters

Frame 24

- Iraq.

- Jamaica (which issued only one stamp with the portrait of King Edward VII, a twopence value issued in 1911, a year after his death !).

- Johore: the designs of the stamps of Johore are noteworthy in that the values were also expressed in Chinese characters, in deference to the large numbers of Chinese immigrants ; this remained a feature of all issues by Johore until the Second World War.

Frame 25

- Labuan: see the note at frame 13 regarding the "line through B of Labuan" variety.

- Lagos: the twopence halfpenny values of the Lagos issues of both 1904 (not displayed) and 1904-1906 were printed with the figures and letters of the value in two different sizes.

Frame 26



Overprinted stamps of Ceylon were supplied in 1906

- Leeward Islands: the twopence halfpenny values of the Leeward Islands issues of 1902, 1905-1908 and 1907-1911 all had a variety showing a wide "A" in "Leeward".

- Maldives Islands: overprinted stamps of Ceylon were supplied in 1906 but, when supplies ran out, unoverprinted stamps of Ceylon were used until 1909 when the first issue of local stamps appeared.

- Malta.

Frame 27

- Mauritius: the "Express delivery" stamps were surcharged locally with a variety of different settings and wordings.

- Montserrat: the five shillings value was the only value issued by Montserrat bearing the portrait of King Edward VII.

Frame 28

- Morocco Agencies: there were many constant varieties in the overprinted stamps of Gibraltar: for reasons of space (and the possible boredom of viewers !) only those relating to the issue of 1903-1905 are displayed.

- Muscat: local postal services were under the control of the Indian Post Office.

Frame 29



The 'royal family' issue of 1897-1918

- Natal: the stamps of King Edward VII were the last stamps to be issued by Natal as the territory ceased to have a separate postal existence when the Union of South Africa was established in 1910.

- Newfoundland: the 'royal family' issue of 1897-1918 shows King Edward VII as Prince of Wales, as well as the Princess of Wales, King George V and Queen Mary (as Duke and Duchess of York) and the Duke of Windsor (as a boy).

Frame 30

- Newfoundland (continued).

- New Hebrides: as an Anglo-French Condominium, stamps were issued by both the British and French authorities, the first by the British authorities (in 1908) being overprinted stamps of Fiji.



Universal Penny Postage

- New Zealand: there was a very large number of stamp issues by New Zealand during the reign of King Edward VII and it has been necessary to be drastically selective, but some pride of place has to be given

to the stamp issued on 1 January 1901 to introduce Universal Penny Postage, in which New Zealand led the world.

Frames 31, 32 and 33 - New Zealand (continued).

Frame 34

- New Zealand (continued): of particular interest is the 'imperforate between' halfpenny postage due value which also shows an unrecorded (and possibly unique) variety with the watermark missing on both stamps.



'imperforate between' halfpenny postage due
value

- Niue: because of its proximity to the Cook Islands, the island of Niue is often mistakenly considered to be part of the Cook Islands and local resentment was caused when administrative control of Niue was transferred from Great Britain to New Zealand in 1901 (as being part of the Cook Islands) ; in consequence, the island was recognised as a distinct New Zealand dependency in 1902, with a separate issue of stamps.

Frame 35

- Niue (continued).

- North Borneo: the first postal service in North Borneo operated through Labuan (see frame 25) but in 1883 the British North Borneo Company started to issue its own stamps, initially inscribed simply "North Borneo" but over the years inscriptions were to undergo a variety of different forms (firstly "British North Borneo", then "State of North Borneo" - the latter subsequently being overprinted "British Protectorate" in 1901 - and finally "State of North Borneo: British Protectorate" in 1909).

Frame 36

- North Borneo (continued).



Initially, former Orange Free State stamps were overprinted

Frame 37

- Northern Nigeria: when the charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked in 1900 and the British government took over direct control of the company's territories, the northern parts of those territories were organised as the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, with the issue of its own stamps (which ceased when the territory became part of Nigeria in 1914).

- Orange River Colony: in 1900, the Orange Free State was overrun by British forces during the Boer War, becoming the Orange River Colony in 1902 following the Peace of Vereeniging ; initially, former Orange Free State stamps were overprinted by the British authorities, followed by the overprinting of Cape of Good Hope stamps before the first Orange River Colony stamps appeared in 1903.



Odd variety showing the word "postage" as "postagie"

Frame 38

- Papua: the well-known "lakatoi" design may be somewhat unimaginative and monotonous but what makes these issues interesting is the changeover of the name from "British New Guinea" to "Papua" (initially by overprinting), the positioning of the watermark, the various types of paper used, the different methods of perforation and the significant number of varieties (all rather confusing at first but worth the study !).

Frame 39

- Papua (continued): the two shillings and sixpence value of 1907-1910 is of particular interest in that it has an odd variety showing the word "postage" as "postagie".

Frame 40

- Rhodesia: the first stamps were issued by the British South Africa Company in 1892 and it was not until 1909 that the name "Rhodesia" was used, appearing initially as an overprint on the current company stamps.



A figure of Christopher Columbus

- Saint Christopher-Nevis (being one of the few territories not to use a portrait of King Edward VII but rather a figure of Christopher Columbus and another design showing a medicinal spring).
- Saint Helena: the pictorial designs in the issue of 1903 are of Government House and the wharf where all supplies were brought ashore, and still are (pending the construction of an aircraft landing strip) ; the halfpenny value of this issue is also found on 'bluish' paper although this variety is currently unlisted.

Frame 41

- Saint Lucia (the famous volcanic "Pitons" feature in the commemorative issue of 1902).
- Saint Vincent: although the first stamps issued during the reign of King Edward VII were in the traditional keyplate design, subsequent issues fell back on the use of the arms of the colony.
- Samoa: the various islands of Samoa existed partly as an independent kingdom and partly under German control, the latter territory being taken over by New Zealand forces during the First World War and leading to the issue of overprinted stamps of New Zealand in 1914, which are included in the collection as they bear the portrait of King Edward VII.

Frame 42

- Sarawak: initially under the personal administration of the Brooke family, Sarawak was placed under British protection in 1888 although the stamps continued to bear the portraits of the Brookes.
- Seychelles: of particular interest are

(a) the number of varieties found in the surcharged issues of 1901 and 1902

(b) the "dented flaw" varieties also found on the keyplate designs of the Cayman Islands (see frame 14) and Gambia (see frame 18).

Frames 43 and 44

- Sierra Leone: unlike the practice in the early days of many other territories, stamps of Great Britain were never officially used in Sierra Leone although examples from ships of the (anti-slave) West Africa Squadron do exist with local cancellations. The first Sierra Leone stamp was issued in 1859 and issues during the reign of King Edward VII were of the regular keyplate design.



The one anna value from the issue of 1903 with the stamp at the right showing the second missing "I" of "British"

- Somaliland: with the assumption of administrative authority by Great Britain in 1885 (when Egyptian army garrisons were withdrawn), stamps of India were used until 1903. The first 'local' issue continued to be stamps of India overprinted "British Somaliland" until 1904 when British Somaliland stamps appeared. The main points of interest in the overprinted stamps of India are the constant varieties on both the ordinary postage stamps and on the official issues.

Frame 45

- Somaliland (continued).

- Southern Nigeria: two separate dies were used for printing the head plates for the issues of 1905-1909 and 1907-1911 ; Die A shows a line of dots in some parts of the shading on the King's cheek whereas in Die B the lines of shading are regular.

Frame 46

- Southern Nigeria (continued).

- Straits Settlements: stamps of India were used in the Straits Settlements until they became a separate colony in 1867 and 'local' stamps were issued. The first King Edward VII keyplate issue appeared in 1902, the watermark inverted variety of the three cents value shown here being the only example recorded to date of this stamp in mint condition.

Frame 47



Unique? (SG 111w)

- Straits Settlements (continued): when Labuan was incorporated into the Straits Settlements in 1906, the current Labuan stamps were overprinted "Straits Settlements".

Sudan: following the battle of Omdurman in 1898 (which put an end to the twenty-year revolt by the "Mahdi", during which General Gordon had been killed in Khartoum), an Anglo-Egyptian condominium was established and there first appeared the famous "camel postman" design which was to serve for the stamps of Sudan for nearly half a century.

Frame 48



The famous "camel postman" design

- Sudan (continued). Unique? (SG 111w)

Frame 49

- Transvaal: as mentioned at frame 14, King Edward VII was known to have disliked the design for the frame of the new penny value of Great Britain and to have shown a preference for the design for the Transvaal issue of 1902.

Frame 50



- Transvaal (Central South African Railways and Pietersburg). After the fall of Pretoria to British forces in 1900, the government of the Boer South African Republic withdrew to Pietersburg in the north of the country and some post offices continued to function under its jurisdiction: makeshift issues were produced when stocks of local stamps ran out.



The postage due stamps of Trinidad were inscribed "surcharge postage"

- Trinidad, which did not issue any stamps bearing the portrait of King Edward VII: like Grenada (see frame 20), the postage due stamps of Trinidad were inscribed "surcharge postage".

- Tristan da Cunha: in 1886, the Admiralty in London authorised the commander of the Royal Navy station in the Cape of Good Hope to arrange an annual visit by a warship which would "afford the only certain means of sending letters and parcels to the island". This facility was withdrawn (as an economy !) in 1904 and the islanders had to rely again on casual shipping. The first of the island cachet handstamps came into use in 1908 but it was not until 1952 that the first Tristan da Cunha stamps (overprinted stamps of Saint Helena) were issued.

Frame 51

- Turks and Caicos Islands: the first stamps for the combined colony of the Turks and Caicos Islands were issued in 1900, the Turks Islands having had their own issues since 1867 and the Caicos Islands never having had a separate issue.

- Zanzibar: in 1895, the posts were handed over from Indian to British East African administration, the first distinctive Zanzibar stamps (bearing the portrait of the sultan) appearing in 1896.

That's it ! I hope you enjoy the display.