



# Sierra Leone to 1961



**Frank Walton RDP FRPSL**

**The Royal Philatelic Society London**

**19 May 2016**

# Plan of Display

| Frames  | Subject                                           |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 1 - 12  | Queen Victoria Stamps                             |
| 13 - 15 | King Edward VII Stamps                            |
| 16 - 18 | King George V Small Format Stamps                 |
| 19      | King George V Large Format Stamps                 |
| 20      | King George V Rice Fields Stamps                  |
| 21      | King George V Wilberforce & Silver Jubilee Stamps |
| 22 - 25 | King George VI Definitive Stamps                  |
| 26      | King George VI Commemorative Stamps               |
| 27 - 28 | Queen Elizabeth II Stamps                         |
| 29 - 30 | Early Postal History                              |
| 31 - 33 | Instructional Marks                               |
| 34 - 36 | Censorship                                        |
| 37 - 40 | Air Mail                                          |
| 41 - 42 | Travelling Post Offices                           |
| 43      | Meter Mail                                        |
| 44 - 50 | Village Postmarks                                 |
| 51 - 52 | Miscellaneous                                     |

*Front cover illustration:* Pane 7 of 6d stamps from the De La Rue reference sheet on enamelled card, circa 1872.



# Introduction

Why Sierra Leone? This collection started in the mid-1980s when I reached that dangerous point in any philatelist's life: I had everything I could afford from my then favourite collections, and a new challenge was sought. At that time, I was the exchange packet secretary for the Midland Bank Philatelic Society and a seller sent me a book of mint Sierra Leone Queen Victoria stamps to circulate. The book did get circulated - but only after I'd taken about 90% of it out! My previous collections had all been 'stamps only', and both mint and used copies were sought. I rapidly realised that all this did was double the cost of acquisition, and so I vowed that for my new collection would be 'mint only'. But then, inevitably, used stamps started turning up in mixed lots etc. - and I was soon fascinated by some of the evocative village names on the postmarks. There really were places called Kissy and Torma Bum.

Perhaps the next part of this story shaped my philatelic life: I joined the West Africa Study Circle, the specialist society covering Sierra Leone. Through this I was introduced to the doyen of this subject, Philip Beale FRPSL. The Royal was just about to publish Philip's seminal work *The Postal Service of Sierra Leone its History, Stamps and Stationery until 1961* and I bought a copy as soon as it was published. That purchase opened up another horizon - something existed that was called The Royal Philatelic Society London...

My interests in other collections waned, and soon the whole of my philatelic focus was on Sierra Leone. I wanted to expand my knowledge of the postal markings, and so I tried to buy the specialist book on the subject. But there wasn't one. I did have the benefit of working in the same building as Philip Robinson FRPSL who, in addition to being a Regional Representative for the Royal, was also an experienced philatelic author of postmark books. He simply suggested that if there wasn't a book on the subject, then I should write it! He encouraged me to research as widely as possible, and this led to the publication of *The Postmarks of Sierra Leone 1854 to 1961* in 1990. That book was well received and 25 years later it has finally been superseded by a second edition. This was co-authored by Walton, Quirk, Hamilton & Horry - and is much improved!

Membership of the Royal followed in 1994, and I started attending meetings at No. 41 on a regular basis. It took my secretary at least a year to work out why I was often in London for business meetings on a Thursday morning, but with an empty diary in the late afternoon...

In 1996 I took on the editorship of the West Africa Study Circle's journal *Cameo*, and a few years later I was asked to meet Gavin Fryer RDP FRPSL and George Barker RDP FRPSL to discuss the possibility of me succeeding George as Hon. Editor of *The London Philatelist*. I was flattered to be asked, and I took on the rôle from June 2001. This led directly to an *ex-officio* role as a Council member at the Royal, and some years later I was delighted to become the Society's President.

The Sierra Leone collection was developing throughout this period, and I decided to dip my toe into the exhibiting world. I have found this most rewarding and enjoyable, and after outings to Washington and Vienna, I was delighted to be awarded a Large Gold medal at London 2010.

It is that collection which is being shown today in 52 frames. One piece of advice I would give to anyone who gives a 1 pm display at No. 41 is to start writing-up at least a year before you think you need to!



Frank Walton RDP FRPSL

### Frames 1 - 3: Queen Victoria First Sixpence

Sierra Leone was one of the earlier stamp issuing authorities in the world, with the first issues appearing in 1859. They chose De La Rue as their printers, an exclusive relationship that was to prevail until 1931. Until 1872 the only face value printed was 6d - the single letter rate to the United Kingdom. At the time there was no internal letter service within the colony, and so no further values were needed.



Die proof of the first Sierra Leone stamp

|                                     |                                                                                     |                     |             |                                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| 107                                 | Name                                                                                | Specimen            | No on Plate | Paper                                             |
| Sierra Leone Postage 6 <sup>d</sup> |  | 12 panes of 20 Each | 240         | P.P. Postage 5/8<br>24 x 10 1/2<br>Size of Howell |

Specimen taken from the De La Rue reference ledgers

The print numbers were relatively low, which meant that the plate did not suffer too much wear and lasted for almost 30 years. Between 1859 and 1895 there were ten printings made for postage stamps, and one further printing of an abortive revenue overprint. In total, there were 1,077 sheets produced. Perhaps inevitably over this 26-year period, a variety of shades, watermark and perforations were used. The *Stanley Gibbons Catalogue* distinguishes six different stamps from the ten printings.

The sheet layout mirrored that of its contemporary British equivalent in that the large sheet comprised twelve panes, each of 20 stamps. There are two constant varieties on the sheet, the 'SIX Dot' and 'PENCE Dot'. These appear on Pane 12 Stamp 19 and Pane 11 Stamp 4 respectively. They are equally prominent, but for reasons I have never been able to understand, Gibbons only list the first one.

Of the ten printings, fine examples of the second printing are most difficult to find. Around 1889 a very small trial printing was made in the shade of the ninth dispatch. This was exceptional in that the stamps were printed on Crown CA paper and perforated 12 - neither of these appeared on a regular issue. Only three examples are known, one of which is in the Royal Philatelic Collection.





'SIX Dot' variety



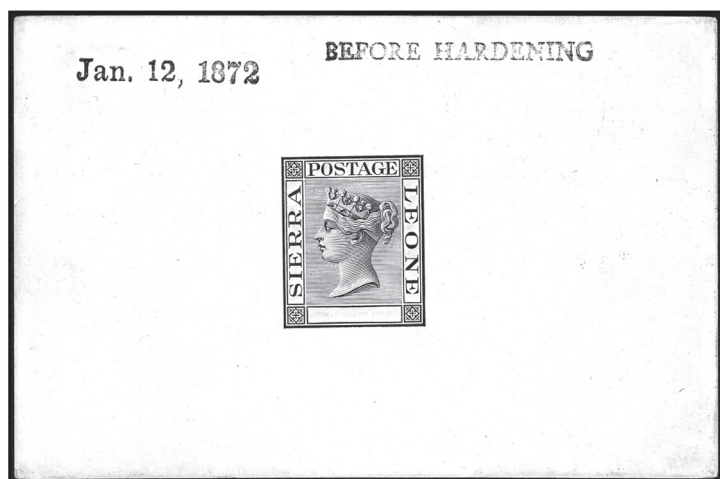
'PENCE Dot' variety



Trial printing on Crown CA paper and Perf. 12

## Frames 4 - 7: First Queen Victorian Key Plate

In 1872 further face value stamps were required as there was now an internal postal service, and the rate to the UK was now 4d rather than 6d. The Sierra Leone Post Office opted to use the key and duty plate system that De La Rue were beginning to develop. Note that a new 6d was never issued as the authorities did not feel the need to replace a still-usable plate. Several watermark and perforation combinations were produced, as well as a series of new colours when it was necessary to adhere to UPU guidelines. Some of the De La Rue proof and trial material is available on the market.



Die proof of key plate



Key and duty plate proofs



Top value of first key plate series used on cover



## "Fugitive Inks."

|                                                                                     |      |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                 |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Date.....18                                                                         | lbs. | oz. | No. <b>769</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | Colour <i>Deep Red.</i>         |  |
|    |      |     | <u>"Sierra Leone 1<sup>d</sup> Postage."</u><br><br>Same as 1 <sup>d</sup> Cape Good Hope Postage.<br>Recipe N <sup>o</sup> 687.                                                                      |                                 |  |
|                                                                                     |      |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                 |  |
| Date.....18                                                                         | lbs. | oz. | No. <b>770</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | Colour <i>Magenta.</i>          |  |
|   |      |     | <u>"Sierra Leone 2<sup>d</sup> Postage."</u><br><br>Same as Recipe N <sup>o</sup> 432.                                                                                                                |                                 |  |
|                                                                                     |      |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                 |  |
| Date.....18                                                                         | lbs. | oz. | No. <b>771</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | Colour <i>Phosphine Yellow.</i> |  |
|  |      |     | <u>"Sierra Leone 3<sup>d</sup> Postage."</u>                                                                                                                                                          |                                 |  |
|                                                                                     |      |     | 1 " Phosphine Yellow.<br>8 Long Silvine Varnish.<br>6 Middle " "<br>1/2 Thin                                                                                                                          |                                 |  |
| Sample as received from Laboratory. never afterwards used.                          |      |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                 |  |
| Date.....18                                                                         | lbs. | oz. | No. <b>772</b>                                                                                                                                                                                        | Colour <i>Italian Blue.</i>     |  |
|  |      |     | <u>"Sierra Leone 4<sup>d</sup> Postage."</u><br><br>Same as Centi bentesimi Postage,<br>Recipe N <sup>o</sup> 625. or<br>Same as Cape Good Hope 4 <sup>d</sup> Postage,<br>Recipe N <sup>o</sup> 447. |                                 |  |
|                                                                                     |      |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                 |  |

Reconstructed page from De La Rue Ink Recipe Books

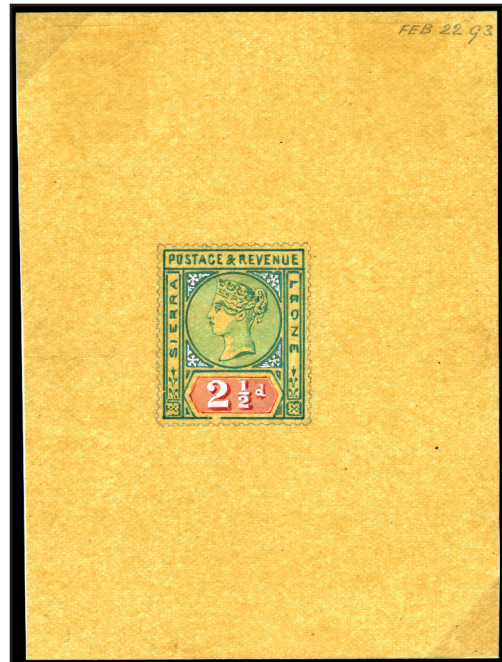


## Frames 8 - 9: Second Queen Victorian Key Plate

As early as 1893 De La Rue informed the Sierra Leone authorities that both the first sixpence and original key plates were showing signs of wear, and needed replacing. It was decided to utilise the Imperium, or 'Postage & Revenue' key plate process, but the trials lasted a number of years before the first printings were made in 1896.



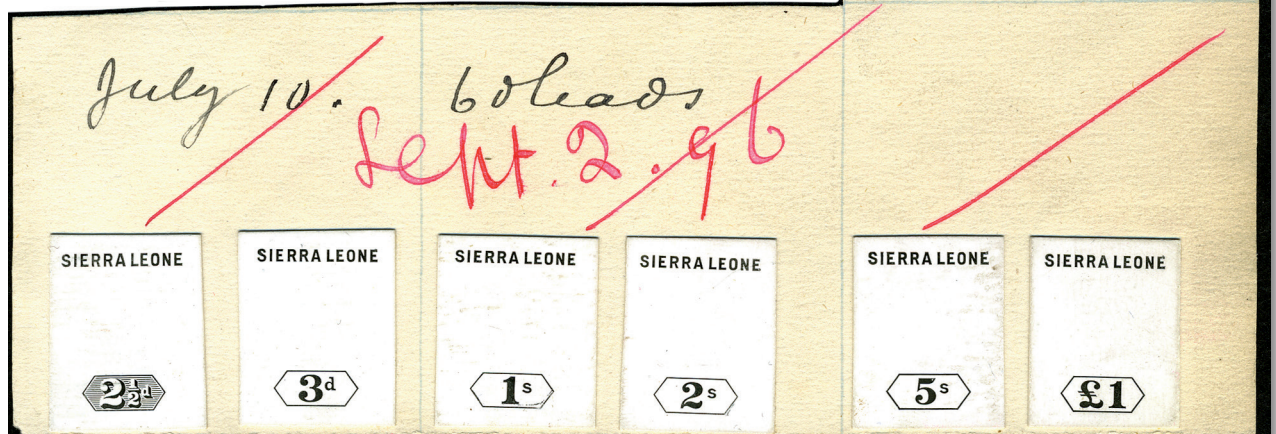
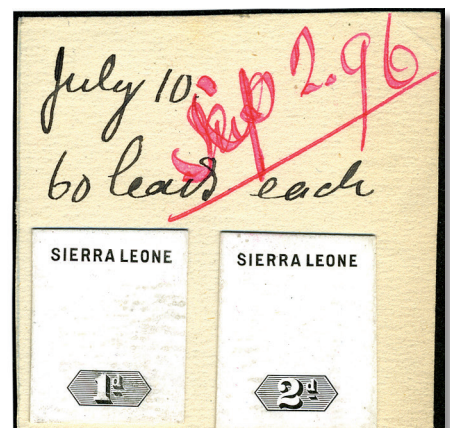
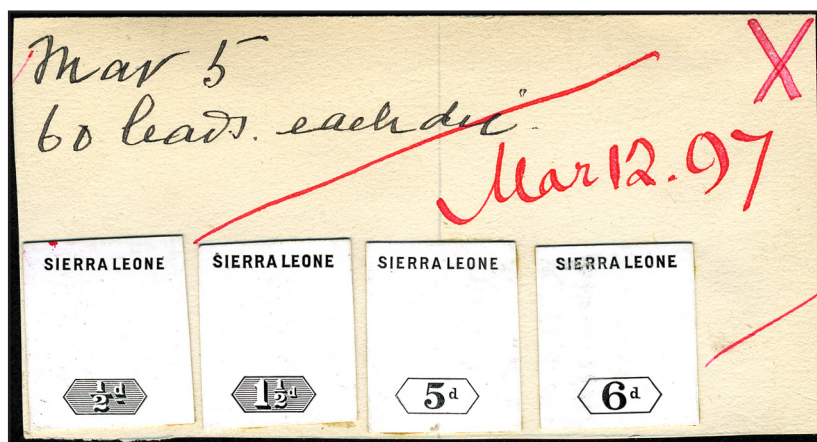
Essays with country name hand-painted



Hand-painted essay



£1 Plate block



Duty die proofs



## Frames 10 - 12: Queen Victoria Tall Revenue Issues

These iconic stamps are amongst the rarest stamps for the whole British Commonwealth, with just four sheets of the 2½d on 2s overprint being produced. Perhaps rather strangely, no forgeries of these great rarities have ever been recorded by the RPSL expert committee. One explanation of this is that the unoverprinted 2s revenue stamp is itself rarely encountered, and thus cannot be used as a host for a forgery.



Right-hand half of the overprint form of 30, showing four of the five fonts used for the '2½d.' on the shilling values. Note the 'Broken Large 2' variety on the penultimate stamp on the top row; this is constant but not catalogued by Gibbons.

As well as the 2½d overprints, there were POSTAGE AND REVENUE and ONE PENNY for different purposes. Double overprints of these are just as rare as the famous double overprints of the 2½d on 3d - but only a fraction of the cost!



Double overprint



Double overprint



£1 Revenue

## Frames 13 - 15: King Edward VII Issues

The Sierra Leone issues during the Edwardian period mirror the rest of the British Colonies: three series showing a change of watermark and then the UPU colour standardisation.

The interest is in the different key plate usages and a limited number of colour trials. There were three key plates: Plate 1, Plate 2a and Plate 2b. The later George V key plates have been studied in great detail, but there is still scope for original research into the Edwardian equivalents.



3d Key Plate 1 and the rare Key Plate 2b





3d Key Plate 1 with inverted watermark and Spaven flaw on Stamp 3



£1 CA watermark Plate 1



De La Rue file copy of new UPU colour for 2½d value

## Frames 16 - 18: King George V Small Format Key Plate

Including variations of face value, watermark, colour and plate number, there are 73 different combinations needed to build a complete collection. This has proven to be one of the greatest challenges a collector can take on. Although the stamps themselves are often catalogued under a pound, a plate block of four can realise over £100 on a well-known internet auction site... But then you can sometimes pick up the same block for a fiver at Stampex. All part of the thrill of the chase!



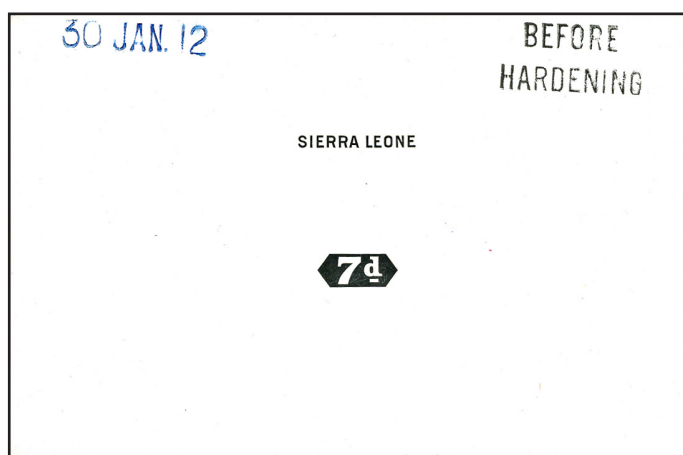
An apparently common stamp - but an example of the very rare De La Rue sheet number Font A



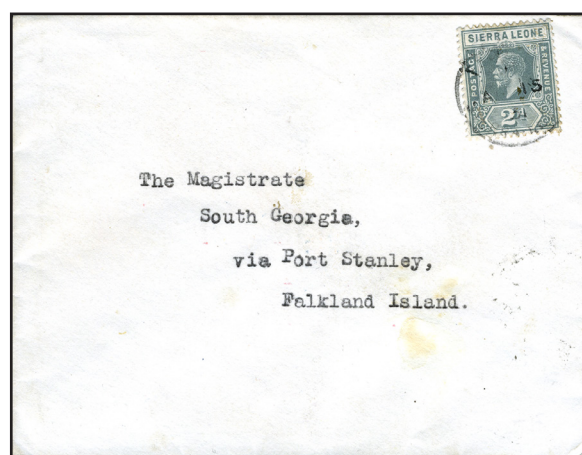
4d Plate 5 Die I MCA Watermark



10d Plate 11 Die II MSCA Watermark



7d duty die proof



2d colonial rate to South Georgia

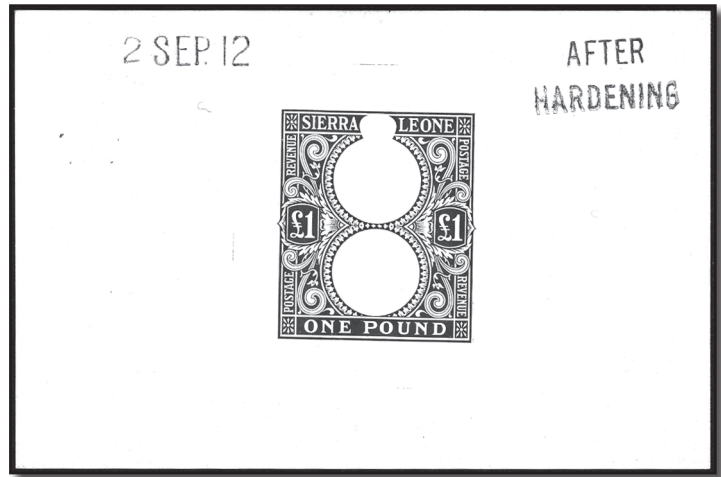


### Frame 19: King George V Large Format Key Plate

In the definitive reference book on Sierra Leone philately, Philip Beale wrote about this design “an elaborate design ... which looks fine on an album page”. He was right. There were two watermarks for all values other than the 3d and £1. The £5 creates a curiosity as the printing figures were 12,240 for the first issue on MCA paper and just 1,020 for the later Script paper. Despite this huge variation in the numbers printed, SG value the earlier one higher than the second.



Head and duty die proofs



Head Plate 1 was used for all values

### Frame 20: King George V Rice Field Issues

In 1931, after 62 years of working exclusively with De La Rue, the contract for postage stamp printing was passed to Waterlow & Sons for the values up to 1s, and to Bradbury Wilkinson for the higher value items. The Sierra Leone government wished to have a pictorial design which reflected the country rather than just the De La Rue key plate. The instructions include “The design is to be ... similar to the 2c and 4c British Guiana Centenary stamps”.



The issued stamps showing the same three-quarter facing image of George V

ex Bradbury Wilkinson archive



## Frame 21: Wilberforce Death Centenary

One of the great campaigners for the abolition of slavery was the British politician William Wilberforce. The centenary of his death in 1833, sadly just a few weeks before the abolition of slavery bill received the Royal Assent, was commemorated with a series of stamps to the face value of £1.

These stamps are still recognised today for their creative and thought-provoking symbolism. The contract for printing these stamps was awarded to Bradbury Wilkinson.



De La Rue artwork for the ½d value from failed tender, with an enlarged portion of the issued stamp

## Frame 21: Silver Jubilee of King George V



Extra Flagstaff



Lightning Conductor

Sierra Leone joined many other colonies in using the omnibus designs. As with the Rice Fields and Wilberforce issues, these were printed by Bradbury Wilkinson.

## Frames 22 - 25: King George VI Definitives

In 1999 a good friend and fellow collector of Sierra Leone, Don Carter, asked me a very simple question: "Was the KGVI £1 stamp printed from border and vignette plates as with the other stamps of the Freetown Harbour design, or were they printed from a single working plate as they were monochrome?" It was a simple question, but not an easy one to answer... I spent many hours over the following months discovering for the first time what a joy it was to work with a primary source: in this case the Crown Agents' and Waterlow & Sons' archival material held by the Philatelic Collections at the British Library. These archives hold a wonderful amount of information about the number of sheets printed, the plate numbers used, the dates of printing and dispatch etc. So much information was gleaned that I decided to record everything I had learned in a book *Sierra Leone King George VI Definitive Stamps* (WASC, 2001). In comparison to other colonial countries, Sierra Leone does not offer a great deal for the KGVI specialist - but there are still some plate varieties and plate number rarities to look out for. And the answer to Don's question: 'a single working plate'.





Revenue usage of £1 value



Vignette plate constant variety:  
vertical scratch to rear of stern



Waterlow & Sons'  
Plate No. 41004

## Frame 26: King George VI Commemoratives

In common with many British colonies, Sierra Leone took part in the four standard George VI omnibus issues: 1937 Coronation; 1946 Peace & Reconciliation (aka 'Victory'); 1948 Silver Wedding and 1949 75th Anniversary of the UPU. These stamps did undoubtedly see service in Sierra Leone, but commercially used examples on cover are tricky to find. Taking the Silver Wedding as an example, a total of 1,545 sheets were printed, but only 45 of these (3%) were actually sent to Freetown. Thus postally used examples are seldom found - and only one mint example with a sheet number has been recorded. Sheets sold through the Crown Agents in London were not numbered.



Corner numbered examples from the relatively small number of sheets that went to Freetown



The UPU set was split between Waterlow & Sons (1½d & 1s) and Bradbury Wilkinson (3d & 6d)



Bradbury Wilkinson: both plate numbers of the UPU 6d value



## Frames 27 to 28: Queen Elizabeth II Issues

Prior to independence on 27 April 1961, only the 1953 Coronation and 1956 Definitive set were issued. Waterlow & Sons recess printed the elegant bi-coloured stamps, although only a single Plate 1 1 combination was used for each value limiting the philatelic interest. Three of the values, ½d, 1½d and 3d exist with Waterlow & Sons' 'punched hole' security markings from their archive.



Punched stamps ex Waterlow & Sons' Archive



£1 Vignette Plate 1 and Border Plate 1

## Frames 29 to 30: Early Postal History

These two frames cover the early mail services both to and from Sierra Leone. The first regular packet between Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom was established in 1848 when the Royal Navy provided a monthly service from Plymouth. Prior to this, mail was carried on an *ad hoc* basis as ship letters whenever the opportunity arose. In the first few decades of the 19th century mail was carried by ships owned and operated by the Sierra Leone Company. Letters were addressed to the company secretary at 26 Birchin Lane in London and were carried in wooden boxes. In the example shown, Zachary Macaulay is named as the agent; he had been Governor in Freetown in the 1790s, and retired to work for the colony in London.



Letter dated 1815 from Scotland to Freetown, one of only three known examples of mail forwarded through the Sierra Leone Company. The contents are mostly of mundane business matters concerning the price of rice, although after several pages the writer mentions 'your mother died a few weeks ago'.





16 February 1828 - London to Sierra Leone by Private Ship via British Post Office

As there was no direct service provided by the Post Office, mail from the UK to Sierra Leone was sent via the South American service and charged at half that rate. In 1828 the charge to Brazil was 11d for postage from London to Falmouth plus 2s 7d packet rate, total 3s 6d. Hence the letter was charged half of this total, 1s 9d.



15 April 1841 - Sierra Leone to London. Charge 3s 8d crossed out and replaced with 1s 4d. London Ship Letter handstamp. The inland UK portion had been incorporated into the ship letter rate of 8d per ½oz.



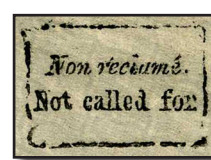
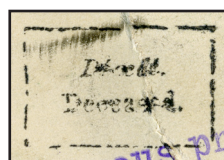
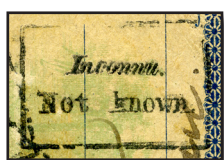
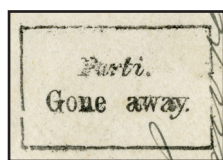


5 December 1872 - London to Freetown, Sierra Leone. Arrival backstamp of 23 December 1872 in Freetown. Carried by the British & African Steam Navigation Co. SS *Senegal* departing Liverpool on 13 December 1872.

Prior to October 1872 the mail contract was run by the African Steam Ship Company. A British GPO Notice of 9 October 1872 announced that the previous contract had expired and that mail would “be despatched by each opportunity that offers”. In the six-month period when no formal contract was in place, mail was carried as ship letters. This cover received a red Liverpool 3d accountancy mark confirming the status as a ship letter. It would have been 1d as a packet letter.

### Frames 31 to 33: Instructional Marks

Sierra Leone used a great variety of instructional markings, but many are seldom encountered. These handstamps generally had a long period of use, with some of the Victorian marks surviving until independence.

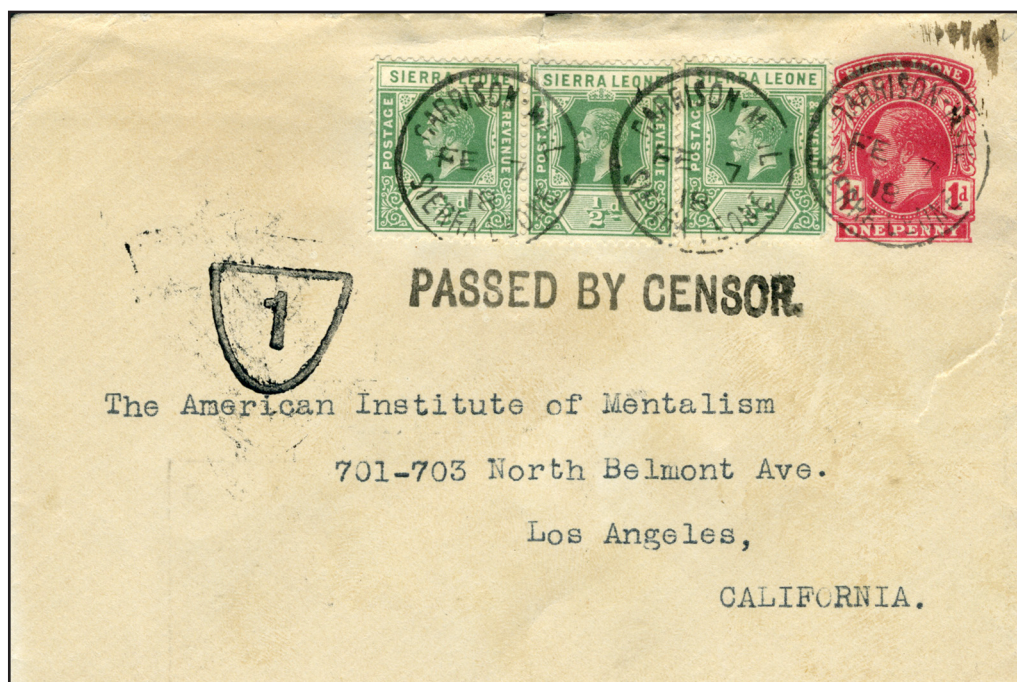


Examples of the four Victorian boxed handstamps

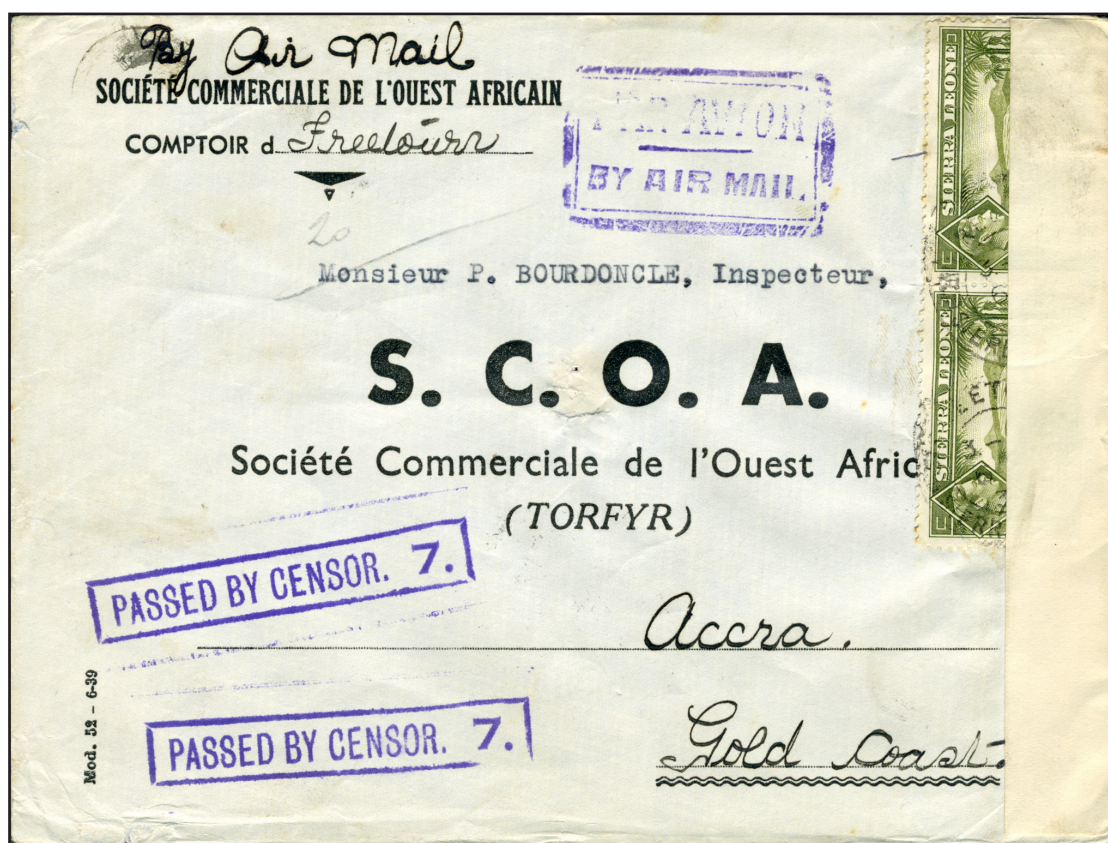


## Frames 34 to 36: Censorship

Both civil and military censorship was carried out in Sierra Leone during the two World Wars. This subject has been covered in great depth in *West African Censorship*, a book which has now reached its third edition.



7 February 1918 - Freetown Garrison to Los Angeles, USA. Military use with Censor Number 1.



1939 - Freetown to Accra, Gold Coast. Censor Number 7. Rate 10d for double-weight air mail.



## Frames 37 to 40: Air Mail

With respect to air mail services, Sierra Leone suffered from not really being on the way to anywhere... The German and French services to Bathurst and Dakar respectively were used from 1926 with a steamer link to Freetown. From 1938 a service between Freetown and Bathurst was operated by Elders Colonial Airways.



27 September 1928. Registered letter from Freetown to Switzerland using the French service between Dakar (29 Sep) and Toulouse (1 Oct). Rate 3d surface plus 10d air surcharge for the first half ounce, plus registration fee of 3d.



9 September 1936. Letter from El Obeid, Sudan, to Freetown via Nigeria. It went to Khartoum by train, and then flew to Kano (WAS 33), carried by *Daedalus*. This left Khartoum on 16 September and arrived at Kano the following day. It then travelled to Lagos by train and on to Freetown by sea.



## Frames 41 to 42: Travelling Post Offices

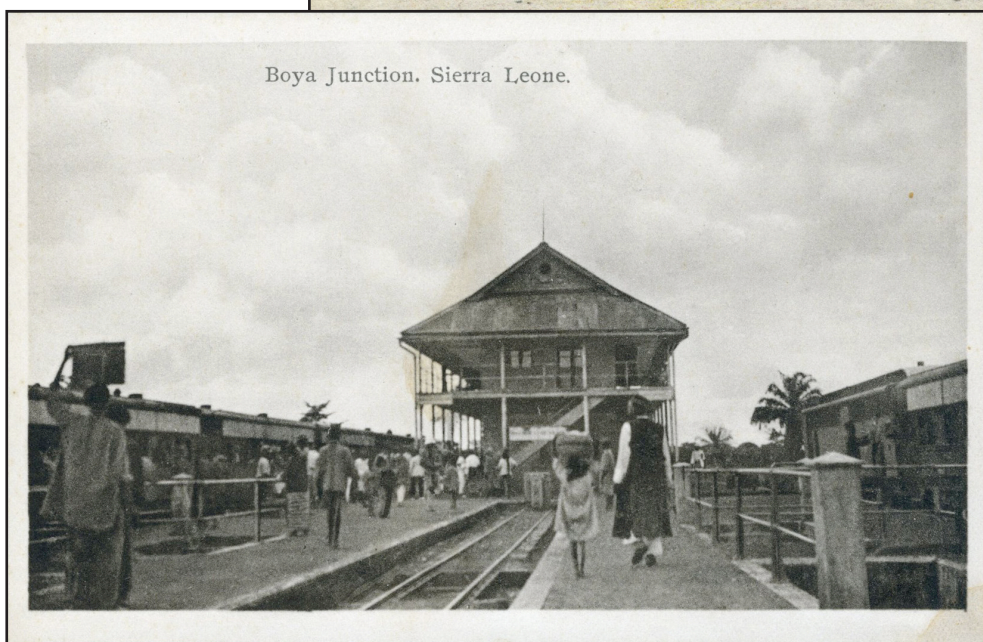
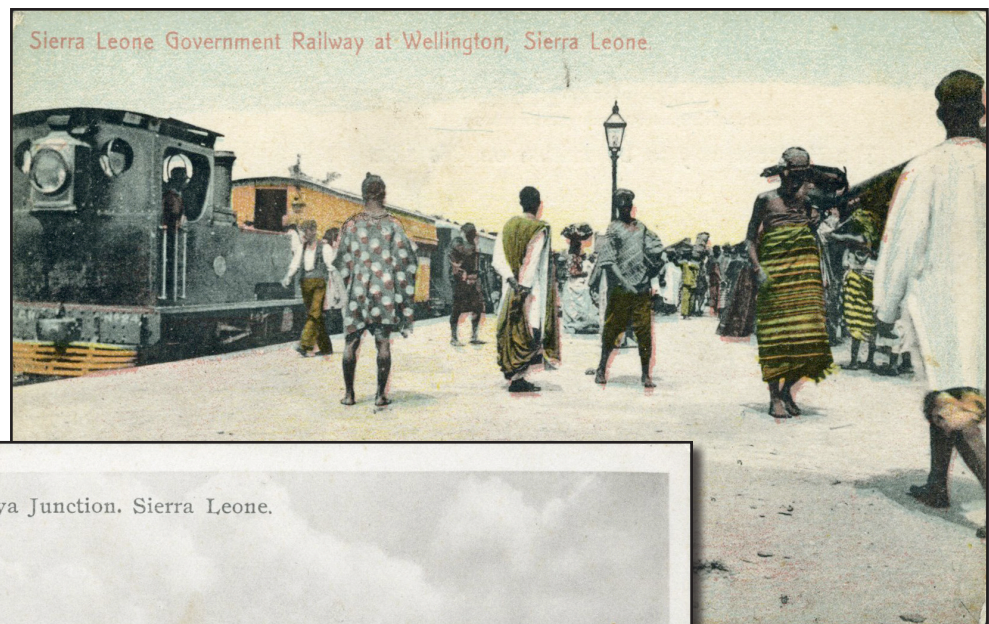
Mail that used the railway system began to be postmarked with TPO handstamps in 1906. The main line had major sections breaking at Freetown - Bauya - Bo - Pendembu, and the northern branch line was routed Bauya - Yonnie - Makeni. These town names featured in the postmarks.

The railway was integral in routing mail into the interior, with most towns and villages away from the coast having their mail routed to the nearest railway office, from where it went by carrier.



Three handstamps used on the Freetown to Bo service

Picture postcards featuring railway scenes



Boya (or Bauya) was the only junction on the entire system



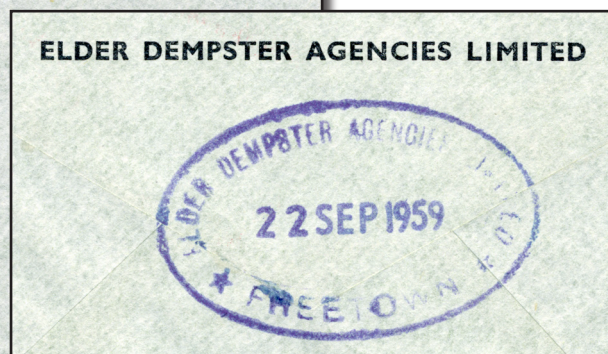
### Frame 43: Meter Mail

What is the difference between rare and expensive? This is a conundrum I have enjoyed debating on numerous occasions with other collectors. An example of material that is rare but not expensive is Sierra Leone pre-independence meter mail. My definition of rare is that visiting every booth at a major National or International exhibition searching for a specific item is unlikely to result in success. Sierra Leone meter mail fits exactly this scenario: but if you do find one, the chances are that it will cost only a few pounds...

11 Sep 1957.  
Proof strike of Code S4.  
S4 has been identified  
as Fourah Bay College,  
Freetown



22 Sep 1959.  
Code RN 10 = Elder  
Dempster Agencies Ltd.  
Airmail to Belgium,  
rate 1s 3d





## Frames 44 to 50: Village Postmarks

One of my passions in Sierra Leone philately is the village postmarks. In 1990 I wrote *The Postmarks of Sierra Leone 1854 to 1961* and after 25 years, Philip Quirk, Michael Hamilton and Horry joined me to publish a second edition. The two books side-by-side certainly demonstrate how far philatelic publishing has come.

The normal practice in Sierra Leone until approximately 1910 for any post offices in the interior receiving mail was to strike their handstamp on the envelope, leaving the adhesive to be cancelled at Freetown. As there was little mail from these remote offices and survival rates of covers are low, the chances of finding the village strikes today are small as they very infrequently appear on loose stamps.



11 February 1910 - Bonthe village postmark struck on envelope

### Customs Offices

In the late Victorian period a handful of coastal customs offices were opened as post offices as well. These had distinctive oval handstamps which are now sought-after by collectors.



Combraymah, Lavanah, Manoh Salijah, Shaingay and Sulymah



## Non-Standard Handstamps

Most offices used single-ring datestamps of approximately 23 mm diameter. However, a small number of offices received unusual handstamps which are highly collectable today.



9 December 1907 - Baiima to Freetown. Inland letter rate 1d per ½oz

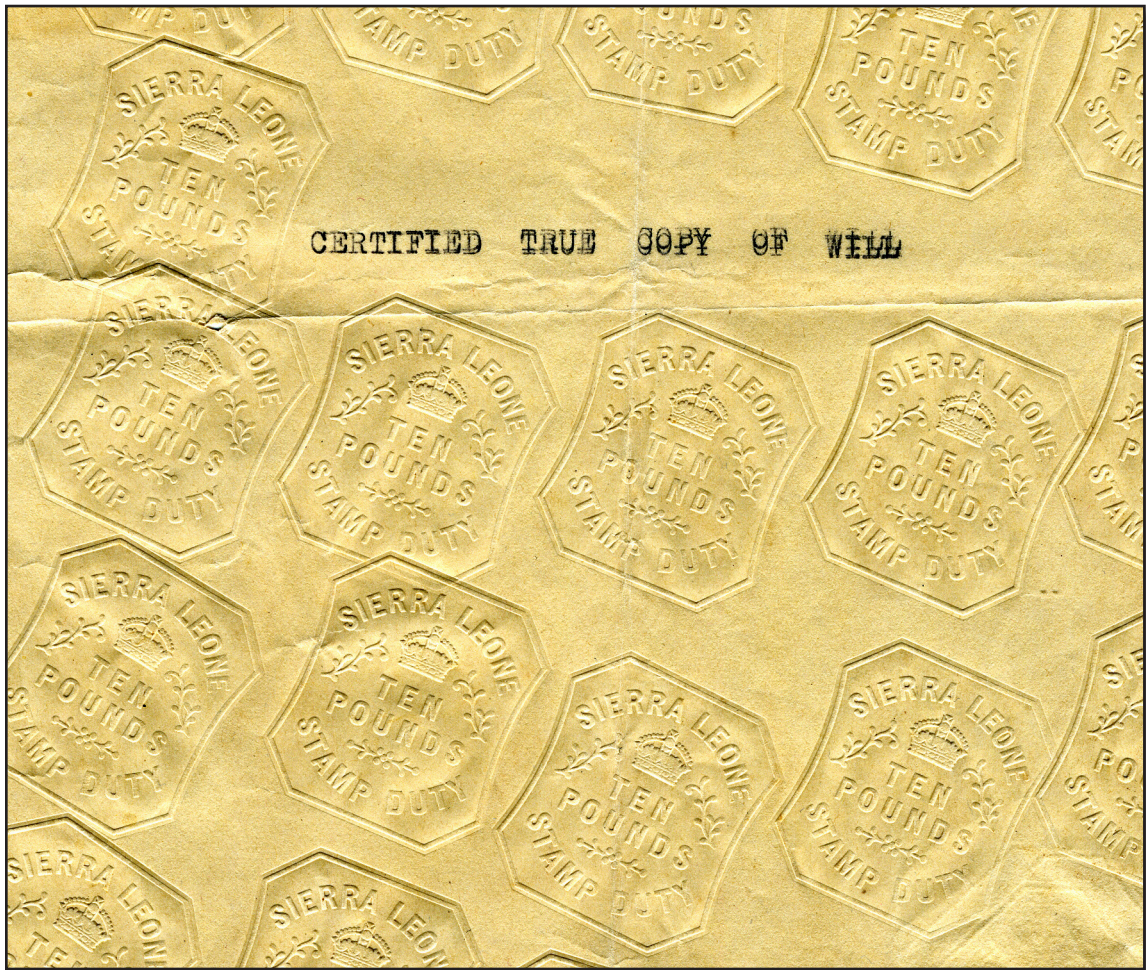


4 January 1905 - Edward VII 1d postal stationery envelope from Kambia to London



## Frames 51 to 52: Miscellaneous

Quite simply an eclectic mix of items that didn't fit into any other category.



Front sheet of a will bearing £357 in stamp duty, comprising 35 strikes of the £10 and seven of the £1 handstamp. These dies were produced in 1884. Although this piece is not dated, it was probably created in the 1920s. This is the only recorded document bearing any of the embossed revenue impressions.



9 May 1896 - Telegram sent from Berne in Switzerland to Freetown



# Sierra Leone

## Selected Philatelic Bibliography

| Author                                          | Title                                                 | Publisher    | Date    | Ed. | ISBN          |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|--------------|---------|-----|---------------|
| Beale P.O.                                      | <i>The Postal Service of Sierra Leone ...</i>         | RPSL         | 1988    |     | 0900631163    |
| Beale P.O. & Walton F.L.                        | <i>West African Postal Notices of 19th Century</i>    | WASC         | 2001    | 1st | 0953747417    |
| Beale P.O., Martin J.J. & Walton F.L.           | <i>West African Post Office Impression Books</i>      | WASC         | 2001    |     | 0953747433    |
| Best J.R.                                       | <i>History of the Sierra Leone Railway 1899-1949</i>  | Unpublished  | 1949    |     |               |
| Clarke J.I.                                     | <i>Sierra Leone in Maps</i>                           | Hodder       | 1976    | 2nd | 0340090855    |
| Dickinson T.A.                                  | <i>Sierra Leone Picture Postcards</i>                 | WASC         | 2013    | 2nd | 9781905647156 |
| Martin J., Walton F.L., & Harris R.             | <i>West African Censorship</i>                        | WASC         | 2014    | 3rd | 9781905647132 |
| Office of Geography                             | <i>Sierra Leone Standard Names Gazetteer</i>          | US Board     | 1966    |     |               |
| Poole B.W.H.                                    | <i>Sierra Leone</i>                                   | Field        | 1911    |     |               |
| Proud E.B.                                      | <i>The Postal History of Sierra Leone</i>             | Proud Bailey | 1994    |     | 1872465188    |
| Walton F.L.                                     | <i>Sierra Leone King George VI Definitive Stamps</i>  | WASC         | 2001    | 1st | 978952568780  |
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