

## THE GAMBIA

### The Travelling Post Offices

by Colin McCaig

#### The River

The Colony and Protectorate comprise strips of territory approximately ten miles wide on each bank of the river Gambia, extending for nearly 300 miles from Bathurst at its mouth. The country is dominated by the river which is one of the finest waterways on the West Coast and provides the normal means of transport within the Protectorate. The Gambia is tidal and a slight rise is felt as far as Fattoto, 288 miles from Bathurst. Ocean-going vessels can navigate as far as Kuntaur, 150 miles.

To maintain communication the Government provided a long series of river boats of which the first was the Wilberforce, a wooden paddle steamer introduced in 1843. This was probably an old vessel as she was replaced in 1846 by the Albert, which in its turn was replaced by the ex-Admiralty S.S. Dover in 1849. The Albert had taken part in an expedition up the Niger to Egga in 1841, and during her short life on the Gambia she acquired an unenviable reputation for mishaps. The Dover however appears to have had a long and useful career, being engaged in many expeditions up to 1866 when she was condemned as unfit for further work. During the next decade she was not replaced, possibly owing to the agitation in Great Britain at that time for the handing over of the Gambia to the French. However, this met with successful opposition and in 1875 a new paddle steamer, the St. Mary, was sent to the Colony.

In 1894 the Mansa Kila (King's Messenger) was purchased for £3,500. She was 90' long and drew 5½' so was able to navigate as far as Fattoto. She operated a weekly mail and passenger service to McCarthy Island, about 175 miles up river. This service proved very successful and in 1913 a wooden petrol-driven triple-screw vessel of 70 tons, the Mansa Kila Ba, was introduced. The following year she was joined by the Vampire, 170 tons, which was still in use in 1939. The Mansa Kila Ba survived until 1944.

Notable progress was made in 1922 with the bringing into service of a much larger vessel, the triple-expansion twin-screw steamer Prince of Wales, 400 tons. She had provision for postal facilities on board and apart from being badly holed in the spring of 1943 which put her out of commission until August, 1944, she operated more or less continuously until put up for sale in 1950. The Lady Denham, a twin-screw steamer of 250 tons, was acquired in 1929 and superceded the Vampire in maintaining with the Prince of Wales the regular river service. Some idea of the use made of these vessels is given by the following mileages for 1929 given in the Colonial Report:--

H.M.C.S. Prince of Wales	12,584 miles
do. Vampire	6,366 do.
do. Lady Denham	4,032 do.
do. Mansa Kila Ba	4,260 do.

The Lady Denham was sunk after a collision with the Vic 20 near Kuntaur in 1946. The Vic 20 was a single-screw steamer bought in that year for £5,000 but she does not appear to have been very satisfactory as she was resold in 1950, at the same price, when the Fulladu, a 303 ton single-screw diesel vessel was acquired. The Fulladu had been built in 1941 for the British coastal trade and had some second class cabin passenger accommodation.

In the same year a new ship, the Lady Wright, was delivered and put on the service in 1951. Named after a former Governor, Sir Andrew Wright, she is a 532 ton twin-screw motor vessel designed specially for river work with aluminium upper works to reduce draft and comfortable cabin accommodation. The Lady Wright is illustrated on the 3d. and 10/- values of the 1953 issue.

#### The T.P.O.Services.

The Travelling Post Office was established on the 1st March, 1922, on board the Prince of Wales, and has since been maintained on the basis of a weekly service from Bathurst by two vessels sailing alternately. Interruptions have occurred through ships being out of commission and the departure days and schedules have varied over the years, being affected by the rainy season as well as by trade requirements. During the rainy season, June to October, the upper reaches of the river rise as much as 30 feet and the service is reduced to alternate weeks or even less. Many of the wharfs etc. are, of course, under water.

In 1934 information from the Colony indicated that the boats working alternately were leaving Bathurst at 1 p.m. each Wednesday and reaching Basse at 5 p.m. on the following Friday. They then returned to Bathurst but mails were taken further up river by a travelling postman going overland by cycle. He called at intermediate wharf towns and reached Fattoto, the highest place served, about 12 hours after leaving Basse.

The T.P.O. vessels call at numerous small wharfs along the river banks where all classes of postal business are transacted. Mail is postmarked on board. The Lady Wright accomplishes the round trip to Basse in less than five days, and provides a wireless telegraph service in addition to postal facilities.

#### The Cancellations.

The first canceller was the rectangle (Type 1) enclosing the words TRAVELLING POST OFFICE, the date, and GAMBIA. Reminiscent of the earlier Sierra Leone rectangular mark, this cancellation is extremely scarce, and it is possible that it was only used until the double-circle canceller (Type 2) became available. This second type, inscribed T.P.O./ RIVER.GAMBIA, showed the times 8 AM, 10 AM, 4 PM, or 12 PM over a 2-line date, and the day was nearly always placed before the month. Between 1926 and 1930 the time was omitted but a hyphen was left in its place - not always centralised. Later marks show no time or hyphen, and the last use recorded was in 1936.

From the beginning of 1924 a new canceller is noted reading T.P.O. No.2 (Type 3). As with the second type, during the first year or two the time was included over the date. It seems likely that this canceller was used on board the Vampire which would have been running the service with the Prince of Wales at that time, and the less satisfactory conditions on the older and smaller boat may have accounted for the odd times noted: 8.4 AM, 8.4 PM, 4.10 PM, 4.1 PM, 15.4 PM, and 8 AM. After March 1927 the time was omitted and it was so used continuously up to the end of 1957. A strike has been recorded in violet and during the war the year was sometimes omitted.

A more modern type of canceller with thin lettering and space-lines instead of bars, reading T.P.O. / RIVER GAMBIA (Type 4), was introduced late in 1955.

Some mail received an unusual cancellation in 1946. After leaving Bathurst on the 1st March the Postmaster aboard the Lady Denham, Mr. Fye, found that he had left behind his datestamp. For a substitute he used as a canceller on mail for inter-station delivery posted on the up and down trip between the 1st and 7th March the large "R" stamp which was available for application to registered mail in place of the more usual printed label. Mail posted for Bathurst and abroad was cancelled at Bathurst. Very few examples of this cancellation have survived. (Type R.1).

#### Registered Mail.

Early registered mail received the large unframed "R" handstamp referred to above (Type R.1), but from 1926 to 1928 a handstamped cachet inscribed T.P.O.No.1 or T.P.O.No.2 (Type R.2) was applied in black.

Thereafter standard type labels printed in blue were introduced, and the following inscriptions in the right hand panel over the serial number have been recorded :-

- |                            |             |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| a. T.P.O. 1 over (Gambia)  | 1933 & 1934 |
| b. T.P.O. 11 over (Gambia) | 1929        |
| c. T.P.O. 2 over (Gambia)  | 1934 & 1936 |
| d. T.P.O. 1                | 1938        |
| e. T.P.O. GAMBIA           | 1946 & 1959 |

THE GAMBIA

The Travelling Post Offices.

CHECK LIST

<u>Type</u>	<u>Form</u>	<u>Size in mm.</u>	<u>Wording</u>	<u>Dates noted</u>
1	Rectangle	46 x 27	TRAVELLING POST OFFICE/ 1-line date / GAMBIA	31/3/22 & 26/5/22
2	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16½	T.P.O./ RIVER.GAMBIA enclosing time over 2-line date - time: 8-AM 10-AM 4-PM 12-PM	28/7/23 to 22/10/23 8/12/22 20/1/24 to 24/3/27 24/11/23 to 15/3/24
2a	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16½	T.P.O./ RIVER.GAMBIA enclosing hyphen over 2-line date	2/5/27 to 10/2/30
2b	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16½	T.P.O./ RIVER.GAMBIA enclosing 2-line date	7/1/33 to 18/2/36
3	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16½	T.P.O.No.2/ RIVER.GAMBIA enclosing time over 2-line date - time: 8 AM. 8.4 AM 4.1 PM 4.10 PM 8.4 PM 15.4 PM	4/1/26 to 20/3/27 24/1/24 to 29/12/25 22/3/24 & 12/4/24 21/11/24 8/12/24 21/7/24
3a	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16½	T.P.O.No.2/ RIVER.GAMBIA enclosing 2-line date	13/4/27 to 7/12/57
4	Dbl.Circles	27 & 16	T.P.O./ RIVER GAMBIA enclosing asterisk over 2-line date	17/9/55 to 26/4/59

TRAVELLING POST OFFICE

26 MAY 1922

GAMBIA

1.



2.



2a.



2b.



3.



3.



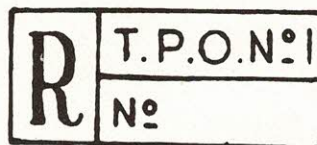
3a.

R

R.1.

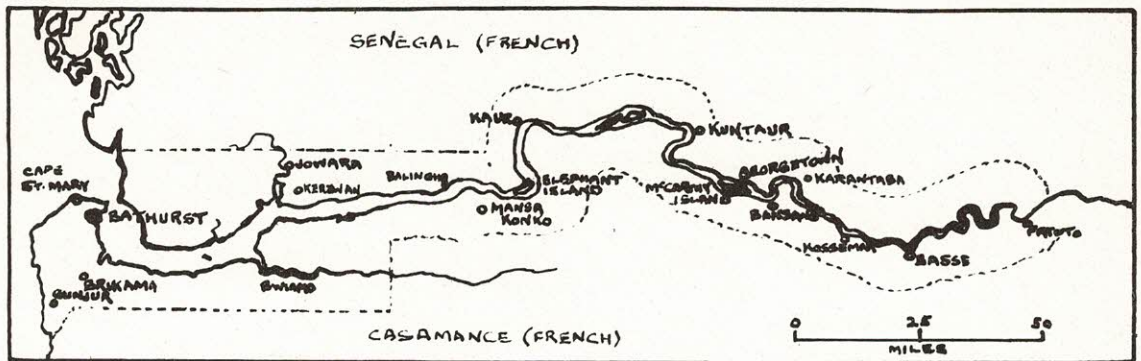


4.



R.2.

# The Gambia



## *Marine Department.*

### The J. P. O. Service - List of distances.

BATHURST	-	WALLI-KUNDA	161 miles
KEREWAN	40 miles	<u>GEORGETOWN</u>	176 "
<u>JAWARRA</u>	52 "	<u>BANSANG</u>	186 "
TENDABA	61 "	KARANTABA	200 "
BALINGHO	76 "	CHARGELL	209 "
SANKUYA	85 "	BANATENDA	217 "
BAI	91 "	DIABUKU	222 "
BAMBALI	99 "	KOSSEMAR	228 "
SAMBANG	105 "	KANUBE	233 "
BALLANGHAR	114 "	DABILAMI	237 "
<u>KAU-UR</u>	118 "	<u>BASSE</u>	242 "
JESSADI	125 "	MADINA-KOTO	248 "
CARROL'S WHARF	130 "	FINDIFETTO	259 "
KUDANG	136 "	FATTATENDA	266 "
NIANIMAROO	143 "	PERAI (KANTORA)	272 "
<u>KUNTAUR</u>	150 "	<u>FATTOTO</u>	288 "

MARINE DEPT.  
BATHURST.  
GAMBIA.

27th. October 1930.

A. D. STEELE  
Harbour Master  
& Marine Supr.