

The British West Africa Study Circle

SIERRA LEONE

Notes on the first type 6d

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The First type 6d. is the most interesting stamp of Sierra Leone with a story spread over the 36 years from 1859 to 1895.

The stamps were ordered from Thomas De La Rue & Co. , following the refusal of the General Post Office to allow the use of British stamps in the Colony. The die and plate of 240 multiples were invoiced at £100 on 21st June, 1859. Thanks to the research work of the late Brigadier Montresor and the publication of the De La Rue History we know something of the background to this invoice.

The prototype was the die of the Great Britain 4d. of 1855 which was engraved by M. Joubert de la Ferte for the Board of Inland Revenue. When a head die was required in 1859 for Colonial issues a punch in soft steel was taken from the original die and returned to the firm to be worked up. The working up included the removal of the diadem and other unwanted detail after which the punch was hardened and impressed on a soft steel blank. This blank was in turn worked up by the engraver to include a suitable diadem and border. The new die was first used for the Sierra Leone 6d., the border being designed in an unusual style which is best appreciated when the stamp is seen in blocks or panes.

The sheet format is unusual for Colonial stamps, being based on that used by De La Rue for the Great Britain 6d., which they were printing at that time, - in vastly greater numbers ! The printing sheet comprised 12 panes each of 20 stamps which were arranged in 5 horizontal rows of 4. Above panes 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, and 9 appear the words SIERRA LEONE POSTAGE SIX PENCE, and the same wording appears upside down below panes 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 and 12. Above these latter panes appear the words

Price	6 Pence	2 Shillings	1 Pound
	per label	per row of 4	per sheet of 40

The reference to a sheet of 40 is strange as the panes comprised 20 and the sheet 240 stamps. In the top left and bottom right corners appear De La Rue's serial number 140, and in the other two corners the Plate number 1.

A die proof in black on card in the Queen's collection is dated 3/5/59 in manuscript, but apart from this example most of the surviving proofs seem to have been cut down. The Queen's collection also includes a proof in violet on glazed card cut down to 20 mm x 24 mm.

Imperforate plate proofs in dull purple are fairly common (although blocks are rare) and it was thought for a long time that the first stamps issued were imperforate, being originally listed by Gibbons as Sierra Leone No.1. The dull purple plate proof is known with SPECIMEN overprint in large serif capitals reading NW to SE (RL type SD1 - 22½ mm x 2¾ mm.) and also with red manuscript Specimen between parallel ink lines reading from SW to NE. Col. Danson has an exceptional copy of the proof overprinted with the small block SPECIMEN (RL type SD3 - 15½ mm x 1½ mm.)

The first printing was invoiced on 21st June 1859, and consisted of 100 sheets of 240, i.e. 24,000 stamps. These were in dull purple, perforated 14, on unwatermarked paper. The sheets were perforated at Somerset House in the machine that was used for the G. B. 6d., and which included only a single line of perforation between the panes. Accordingly, stamps at the right and left hand sides of the panes have "wing" margins. SPECIMEN stamps are to be found with a heavy block overprint (RL type SD2 - 15 mm x 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ mm.)

The second printing was of 25,680 stamps invoiced on 23rd August, 1865. The stamps were again perforated 14 but were printed in grey lilac and are quite distinct from the first printing. It has been possible to verify the identity of the colours with these printings from covers in the writers' collections. The Queen's collection contains an example of the grey lilac with the small block SPECIMEN overprint (RL type SD3).

There was no further printing until 1871 when on the 17th November 20,640 stamps were invoiced. These were perforated 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ and are in a fairly bright shade of purple. A small printing of 6,720 stamps was invoiced on 22nd May 1873, and was probably perforated 12 $\frac{1}{2}$. This 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ line perforator can only have been used for these two printings as the next invoice in 1874 covered stamps perforated 14. Robson Lowe records the perf. 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ 6d., with SPECIMEN overprint, but the writers have not seen such a copy.

Printings followed each other in quick succession in 1874, 1875, and 1876. These reverted to the original 14 perforation on unwatermarked paper and all appear to have been in a dull violet which is quite distinct from the earlier printings. Copies are known with SPECIMEN overprints in the serif type S02 - 15 mm x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ mm (McCaig) and block type SD7-14 $\frac{1}{2}$ mm x 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ mm (the Queen's collection.)

We know that the next printing, in 1878 was on the large Crown CC paper used for such large-sized stamps as the Barbados Jubilee, 5/- Natal, etc., so that a well-centred watermark is a rarity. These stamps were in a dull violet shade similar to the three previous printings. It seems clear that stocks of the 6d., had built up in the Colony as it is thought that the watermarked stamps were not put on sale until about 1885 which is the date given by Gibbons.

Printings in distinct shades followed in 1889 and 1895, the latter printing being the last from the original 1859 plate. The 1889 printing was recognised as a change of colour and 400 SPECIMENS were called for. These were overprinted by machine in the block type SD7, and exist on both white and blued paper, lending weight to the theory that the blueing is due to chemical reaction as only one printing was made in brown purple.

It would appear that all printings were made on what was originally white paper despite Gibbons' listing and pricing of white and blued papers. Any blueing is almost certainly due to chemical reaction in the paper about which Warren De La Rue was in correspondence with the Stamp Office of the Board of Inland Revenue in 1859 (see pages 45 and 46 of the De La Rue History.)

Throughout the period of 36 years during which the plate was in use the stamps were printed to a high standard. However, in 1962 Mr. Livermore brought to the attention of the Study Circle a flaw comprising a white dot, like a full stop, after the SIX in the top border and a white dash across the NE side of the octagon surrounding the head. This was later identified as occurring on stamp No.15 on the bottom right-hand pane of the sheet. The flaw has been found on printings from 1865 to 1896 but has not so far been reported on the first printing.

In 1969 Mr. Beale reported a flaw at the right-hand end of the base line of the octagonal surround to the head. So far this flaw has only been seen on the 1889 printing, and its position has not yet been established.

Mr. McCaig has an example in a shade approaching the brown purple, perforated 12 on Crown CA paper. There is another example in the Queen's collection. The significance of this item is not known, but four values of the second Sierra Leone type were perforated 12 in 1884, overprinted SPECIMEN, and sent to the Universal Postal Union for distribution to its members. It is possible that a small printing of the 6d., perf. 12, was specially made for the same purpose, but never overprinted or distributed.

CHECK LIST

<u>Ptg.</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Wmk</u>	<u>Perf.</u>	<u>Colour</u>
1st	21. 6. 1859	24,000	None	14	Dull purple
2nd	23. 8. 1865	25,680	"	"	Grey lilac
3rd	17.11. 71	20,640	"	12½	Purple
4th	22. 5. 73	6,720	Probably perf.		12½ purple
5th	19. 2. 74	13,200	"	14	Dull violet
6th	12. 3. 75	22,800	"	"	" "
7th	27. 7. 76	28,320	"	"	" "
8th	27 11. 78	37,920	Crown CC	"	" "
9th	3. 9. 89	17,580	"	"	Brown purple
10th	31. 7. 95	30,600	"	"	Purple lake

This last printing may be found with inverted watermark.

CHECK LIST OF SPECIMEN OVERPRINTS

<u>on</u>	<u>RL Types</u>	<u>mm</u>	
Plate proof	SD1	22½ x 2¾	Serif
" "	SD3	15½ x 1½	Small block
Dull purple 1st ptg	SD2	15 x 2¾	Heavy block
Grey Lilac 2nd ptg	SD3	15½ x 1½	Small block
Purple perf. 12½	noted by RL but not seen by writers		
Dull Violet			
5th, 6th or 7th ptg	SD2	15 x 2½	Serif
"	SD7	14½ x 2½	Block
Brown Purple 9th ptg	SD7	14½ x 2½	Block

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