RHODESIA RAILWAYS:
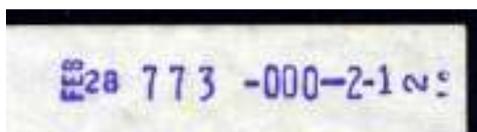## RAILWAY PARCEL STAMPS

Geoff Brakspear

I have been attempting to study the Railways Parcel stamps in more detail than I have been able to read up on in various articles produced in different publications. Although most of the works have gone into some detail of what the stamps were about, how they were used and so on, I have been unable to find any articles that deal with the classification of the stamps themselves. There are articles that show there are different types but nothing comprehensive, this I hope to rectify.

Within the RSC Journal the main articles are those by Cecil Russell published in RSCJ 140 (pages 154 to 159) and RSCJ 141 (pages 30 to 36). I list other articles that I have been able to obtain, which have been of assistance, at the end. I hope that this article will add to our body of knowledge on these stamps.

General

The Railway Parcel stamps were available from 1st August 1951 and were last used commercially on waybills on 31st August, 1969 within Rhodesia. Railway Parcel stamps however did continue to be used in Zambia until at least 1979/80. These stamps would not have been used in Bechuanaland until after Rhodesia Railways took over running the railway from Bulawayo to Mahalapye on 30th November 1959.

Initially parcel stamps were used at most railway stations throughout Southern & Northern Rhodesia. The major stations however, due to volumes of parcel traffic, instead adopted a system using National Cash Register equipment. These stations were Bulawayo, Gatooma, Gwelo, Que Que, Salisbury and Umtali in S Rhodesia, and Broken Hill, Livingstone, Ndola and Nkana-Kitwe in N Rhodesia. Waybills from these stations had a machine printed marking running vertically in the bottom right corner, shown below is one from a Gwelo waybill.

There is some evidence that parcel stamps were produced for Bechuanaland prior to decimalisation and linkage to the South African Rand. The majority of stamps for this section of railway are denominated in South African Rand.

The stamps

All the stamps produced for Rhodesia Railways consisted of three primary elements – the background, the face value and the station code. All stamps appear to be on the same type of paper and are all line perforated 12½ through all margins. The sheets consist of 120 stamps (12 across by 10 rows), without printed marginal notations of printer's imprint, cylinder numbers or sheet value. The only marginal notation shown being the sheet number.

There was a standard colour for each denomination of stamps issued according to a colour palette of specimen stamps sent to the printers. There were some colour differences with each printing. Listed below are the principal colours, some with slight variations. This is divided between those produced for the Rhodesia's in £sd and those for Bechuanaland/Botswana in Rand/cents

Rhodesia's	Colour	Bechuanaland
1d	Red/ orange-red	1c
2d	Blue	2c
3d	Purple/violet	-
4d	Pale emerald	3c
5d	Light blue/pale blue-grey	4c
6d	Light blue	5c
9d	Magenta	-
1/-	Deep blue	10c
2/-	Emerald/dull grey-green	20c
2/6	Orange	-
5/-	Yellow brown	50c
10/-	Lemon/ochre-yellow	R1.00
£1	Grey/grey green	R2.00

There was an error of colour for the Bechuanaland Francistown stamps with 10c in light blue and 20c in magenta.

The face value of each denomination would have been separately printed on to the correct coloured background.

Station codes were given to each railway station consisting of 2 or 3 letters (some stations having both a 2 and a 3 digit code). A full list of these codes can be seen on page 157 of RSCJ 140. The station codes were probably the last aspect printed onto the stamp. This would have been a tiresome task. The one copy of an order found by Cecil Russell (see RSCJ 141 pg 32) showed that one station required five sheets each in three values, whilst another was for 5 sheets each in 8 values.

Stamp background

The simple design of the stamps was produced by the RR Commercial Branch at the Railway Art Studio. "Rhodesia Railways" was printed and repeated across the stamp in 16 lines so that the first vertical row read "Rhodesia Railways". At the top of the stamp was a tablet containing "R.R" and another at the foot reading "Parcels Stamp".

There were two types of background, Plate 1, being the first, and is identified with two stamp types. The easiest way to distinguish it is to look in the bottom right corner of stamp, where the end of last line of script reads "**AR/**".

Plate 1

Plate 2 is the replacement plate and is used in four stamp types. Again the easiest place to look is the bottom right corner, where the end of the last line reads "**ARAI**".

Plate 2

Printers

According to numerous references the first stamps were printed by Messrs. Waterlow & Sons in the UK, these being the Plate 1 printings. With printing later transferred in August 1959 to Rhodesian Printers (Pvt) Ltd of Bulawayo, the change of printer is probably the reason for the introduction of Plate 2.

The printing process indicates that a single background plate was used for all stamps, with the plates being cleaned between each stamp run.

Cecil Russell suggests that after the background was printed the sheets were then perforated before the printing of the face value and station code. This may be because he has seen, or indeed possesses, examples of imperforated sheets, and perforated sheets, both without face values or station codes. On the more practical level I cannot

understand a printer severely reducing the strength of the printed sheets by perforating them before running the sheets through the printing presses twice more to add the face values and station codes. After the background, values and station codes were printed separately and completed, I suggest the printers would then perforate the sheets.

I have been uncomfortable about Waterlow printings for some time. I could not understand why the stamps are all stamps are perforated 12½. Surely Waterlow, a well known international printer, would have comb perforated the stamps, or, at the very least, have used a different line perforator?

In Cecil Russell's article in RSCJ 141, page 32, he showed an order form for the printing of parcel stamps for 17 stations, in only four instances was the whole range of values ordered. Whilst I appreciate that this was for the last order, it does indicate that that orders may have been only placed for stations with greatest need. It also suggests to me that the station codes were probably printed on the stamp sheets as and when needed, except possibly for the first printing.

If Waterlow was indeed the printer of the Plate 1 printings, then I suggest that this printer could have printed background to the stamps and, possibly, the face values. But it did not print the station codes nor perforate the stamps, these were probably undertaken by the local printers. It is also interesting that some of the station codes have the same type font for both Plate 1 and 2 printings.

Cecil Russell records in RSCJ 141 that Rhodesian Printers fulfilled six orders for stamps from 1959 to 1963, with Mardon Printers (Bulawayo) printing the last three orders from 1963 to 1965. There is, however, sufficient evidence to show that some of the Plate 2 printed stamps were in use five years before 1959. I suggest that when Cecil did his research at Mardons Bulawayo, well after the stamps had been withdrawn, these are the only orders that could be found and that Rhodesian Printers were involved in the whole printing process from about 1955. In addition I suggest that Rhodesian Printers probably printed the station codes onto the Plate 1 printings and perforated the sheets.

Classification of the stamps

The classification of the parcel stamps is firstly differentiated by the background Plate 1 or 2 and then by the printing of the face values and station codes. The background plate can be a reasonable first step in identifying the stamps, although with the 10/- is can be difficult due to the colour. However it is just as easy to look at the face value and station code fonts in separating the types.

In studying these stamps I have kept a note of the examples from each type against station codes, the dates of use and whether they are used or mint. The illustrations for each type I show a "d" value, an "s" value, the 2/6 and the £1, where possible, to give a good illustration of each type.

Plate 1 - Type 1A

This type is probably the easiest type to recognise, the face value font are much larger than for any of the other types. Station codes have serifed letters, but this is not important in type identification. So far I have not seen any examples of the 2/- and 5/- values in this type, I am uncertain whether these were printed.

There are a reasonable number of these stamps in used condition, with few mint examples in circulation. The earliest date of use I have found, so far, is for Luanshya on 18th November 1952. Stamps of this type continue to be used to 1968. No doubt in the early years the destruction of waybills, in accordance with regulations, happened more meticulously than in later years, resulting in fewer examples coming to light.

Plate 1 - Type 1B

The numerals and station codes fonts are without serifs and are smaller, with the pence values the "d" is in superscript (i.e. raised); the shilling "s" has a full stop after and its base is slightly higher than the base of the numeral. The £1 value having a sloped upright.

This is probably the most numerous of the stamps in used condition found. Mint stamps are also common for some stations which tend to be mainly for the N Rhodesia. Shamva (SZ) and Pemba (EP) examples of this type have only been found in mint condition. The earliest example found is for Kalomo on 5th January 1954, with usage carrying on through to 1969 in Rhodesia, and beyond in Zambia

Plate 2 - Type 2A

This is the first Plate 2 stamp type, they too are easy to recognise. The face values are larger than Type 1B and both the values and station codes have serifed fonts. The "d" in the penny values is the same height as the numeral. The key point in the shilling and 2/6 value are the font serifs. The £1 has a more perpendicular upright with a bottom loop. So far no stamps for the 1d, 2d, 3d, and 4d

values have been seen by me, this is probably due to the large number of Type 1B stamps printed of these values.

A reasonable number of used examples have been seen, but there are few mint stamps circulating. The earliest example was at Wankie (WK) on 3rd September 1955, with use continuing through to 1968.

Plate 2 - Type 2B

This type is a transitional variety with the station name in a serifed font as in Type 2A, and the face value is a non-serifed font used in Type 2C.

I have found limited used examples of this type, which are

Bindura (BNA)	6d, 9d, 1/- and 2/-
Sinoia (SO)	1/-
Wankie (WK)	10/-

Usage of this is first recorded for Bindura (BNA) on 25th August 1959, and usage is only for a limited period to 1964. No mint stamps have been seen to date. It is probably the type with the least numbers produced.

Plate 2 - Type 2C

With this type the face values are much the same size at Type 2A, but with the font lacking serifs. Like Type 2A the "d" of the penny values is full height. The £1 value is erect without coils. The station codes are similarly in a non-serifed font and are larger than other stamp types

Examples of this type are high for used stamps, with some mint stamps being available. This type has probably the second highest number of examples after Type 1B.

My first recorded use of this type is for Francistown on 5th December 1960, just before Bechuanaland changed its currency to the South African Rand in February 1961. The earliest S Rhodesia example is for Bindura (BN) for 1st January 1961.

Plate 2 – Type 2D

The only real reason I have separated this from Type 2C is because the stamps have a different currency for use only in Bechuanaland/Botswana. The station code was however only printed on the stamps for six of the 13 stations – Francistown (FT), Mahalapye (MAG), Palapye (PY), Seruli (SR) Shashi (SHH) and Tsessebe (TES).

Used examples have been found for all these stations, except Shashi, whilst mint examples have only come to light for Mahalapye, Shashi and the higher values for Tsessebe. The usage of the stamps appears to be shortly after decimalisation to the end of 1969, at much the same time as Rhodesia ceased using the stamps.

Station code overprints

Overprinting is probably not the right term to use for another section of the parcel stamps, where stamps have had the station code stamped on with a rubberstamp, but I will stick with this as it is a form of overprinting.

Cecil Russell in RSCJ 141 provided a list of station codes that have been applied by a rubberstamp, I have not had sight of all of these. However from what I have seen I suggest that there are four types of overprint, which I will denote firstly with an X and then a number.

Type X1

These are where station codes have been handwritten on to the parcel stamp. I have only seen three station codes handwritten on the stamp, but no doubt there are more.

MPO (Mpopoma) on blank Type 1B stamp
FT (Francistown) on OZ (Odzi) on Type 2A
SHI (Shashi) on PY (Palapye) on Type 2D

The Francistown overprint on Odzi stamps appears to have been used in late 1969 just before the stamps ceased being used. All Shashi stamps have the handwritten overprint, but this was not the case with Francistown.

Type X2

These overprints have the station codes in a serifed type font, almost like a typewriter font, and are about 5 mm high. These overprints are mainly on stamps where no station names have been printed, i.e. are blank, and most of them are on Type 1B stamps. The only exception I have seen on a Type 1A stamp is a 10/- overprinted MUF for Mufulira.

The FT (Francistown) is unusual as it only has the 'T' serifed, and other FT overprints are without serifs

Type X3

These overprints are rubberstamped in non-serifed font about 4 mm high, they appear on blank stamps as well as stamps with other station codes, usually crossed out manually. The overprints of blank stamps are usually the Bechuanaland/Botswana stamps (Type 2D), indeed some stations like Gaborone, Lobatsi and Pilane only have station codes overprinted. Most of these stamps are for the Rhodesias on Type 1B, 2A and 2C stamps.

Type X4

The last overprint is a large rubberstamped Zambian station code in a serifed font, and are easily distinguishable at they are some 7 mm high. Various colour inks have been used including black, red and violet. From the dates of use of these overprints on Rhodesia Railways stamps they appear to have been used in the late 1970's on what must be remainder stock. Interestingly the stamp values do not appear to have been altered when using this sized font, which is well after the country changed its currency to Kwacha.
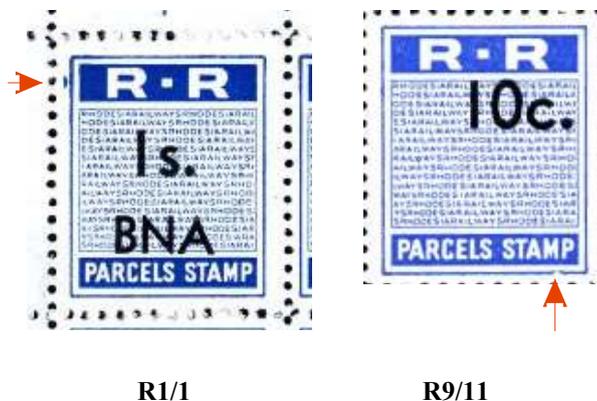

Varieties

As Cecil Russell reported in RSCJ 141there are very few varieties of the railway parcel stamps. Cecil reported an error of perforation, which I have not seen. He then spoke of the error of colour for the two Francistown 10c and 20c which I mentioned earlier.

I think the one that was the most intriguing is that of the error of type-setting where the station code SI for Shabani was inverted for the top row first three stamps. This I illustrate again below (it looks better in colour!)

When I borrowed Cecil's collection of parcel stamps which contained complete sheets of stamps in various stages, he pointed out to me another variety in the top left margin of the stamp in Row 1 Column 1, which is a large dot opposite the top tablet. This dot was present on many of the sheets and blocks for this corner, but not all. They are all definitely from the Plate 2 background.

R1/1   **R9/11**

Whilst there are some other blemishes, the other one I noted as being fairly constant was a gap in the line of the outline frame under the 'M' of Stamp at position R9/11.

In the overprints I have also come across three varieties that are of interest. The first is with the Fort Victoria VAS station code where the 'S' is in lower case. The other two are for Gaborone (GS) and Lobatsi (LI) where the second letter steps down. These are all illustrated below.

Zambia Railways

Before finishing it is worth taking a quick look at what happened to railway parcel stamps following the breakup of the Federation. Zambia got its independence on 24th October 1964, on 30th June 1967 Zambia Railways took over the railway from Victoria Falls northwards, and finally the Kwacha and ngwee was introduced on 16th January 1968.

Whilst the Imperial currency was in operation the Rhodesia Railways stamps continued to be used. In preparation for the currency conversion Rhodesia Railways designed the new stamps which were printed by Mardon Printers Bulawayo. The design followed the lines of the Rhodesia Railways stamps, but saying "Zambia Railways" in 17 lines and "Z.R" in the top tablet

All of these stamps were printed in green with the currency figures of 1n to 10n, 20n, 25n, 50n, K1 and K2 (15 in total), and the station codes printed in a non-serifed font. I have only seen station codes for Choma (CHA), Monze (MZ) and Nkana/Kabwe (NKA), although blank stamps

have also been noted, with or without station code overprints.

Mardon printed 2, 000 sheets of stamps, being 120 stamps per sheet (12 x 10). Interestingly the printing of these stamps must have taken place shortly after sanctions were imposed on Rhodesia!

The use of these stamps following their introduction is rather interesting due to their mixed usage. The example below shows the use of the Rhodesia Railways parcel stamps as well as those of Zambia Railways. Here 1d and 5d Type 1B stamps were used with handwritten 'n' over the 'd'; a 2/6 Type 2B stamp without alteration; and a 50n Zambia Railways stamp. More examples similar to these have been seen.

In 1969 the printing of the parcel stamps were taken over by Kabwe Press Ltd, and up to eight printings were undertaken. The design was based on the earlier Zambia Railways stamps, but generally the printing was very poor. Each value was however attributed its own colour, and the face value was printed on, but no station code. The station code then had to rely on being overprinted with a rubberstamp, handwritten or not added at all. All stamps were rouletted and not perforated

The stamp colours seen are: 2n light green; 5n dark green; 5n light blue; 10n green; 10n dark blue; 25n green; 25n red; 50n brown; K1 yellow and K2 light green.

There is an interesting variation to these designs, where the top 5 or 6 lines of the background lettering are inverted. From the blocks and strips of stamps that I have examined, I cannot see a pattern to this variety.

Finally on the Zambian parcel stamps, the Railway appears to have continued using the parcel stamps long after Rhodesia had ceased. Judging from the use of old Rhodesia Railways stamps with the large Type X4 overprint, I suggest that the usage of stamps ceased in 1979/1980.

In conclusion

Given that the stamps when attached to waybills should have been destroyed after auditing, a remarkable number have survived. Mint stamps on the other hand are largely remainder stock that the railways offloaded.

If all 71 smaller stations were supplied with the eleven Type 2A stamps, then there should be 781 different stamps. With the Type 2B stamps, which are the most numerous, this would increase to 923. Taking this through the Plate 2 stamps we could potentially be in excess of 4,000 stamps. What I have examined has been a small fraction of this amount, between 10% and 15%. I do not think it possible for anyone collector to get over the 20% mark.

It is however important that the RSC members try and gather as much information as possible of what was issued, and to have it recorded. I have started a data base and would welcome member's lists based on the categories I have identified. I am happy to send the database to you in Excel format, if you would advise me of what additional material you have in your collection. Any legible dates for these stamps would also be welcome.

Cecil Russell is probably right that the most interesting way of collecting these stamps are on complete waybills, but how many of these are available and how does not store and display them?

I would welcome views and further discussion on my findings.

My thanks go to Cecil Russell, Geoff Cooke, Dave Trathen, and Jefferson Ritson for providing material to study.

References

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3. "Rhodesia Railways Parcels Stamps" W F Simms, Railway Philatelic Group, December 1975
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6. "Check List and Scarcity Rating of Rhodesia Railways Parcel Stamps", Cecil Russell and others, unpublished
7. "Rhodesia Railways Parcels Adhesive Stamps", Cecil Russell, unpublished.