

# **U P U Specimen Stamps**

**The Distribution of Specimen  
Stamps by the International Bureau  
of the Universal Postal Union**

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**Limassol  
Published by the Author**

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Dedicated to my wife, Robyn

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## Foreword

Specimens of new adhesive postage stamps and items of postal stationery were sent to Postmasters and Postal Administrations to acquaint them with their character and to enable comparisons to be made with suspected forgeries. For example, impressions in blue of the three designs used for the 1819 'Cavallini' letter-sheets of the Kingdom of Sardinia were printed on the Proclamation from Turin which announced their issue. In 1840 specimens of the Penny Black and Twopenny Blue adhesive stamps and of the Mulready stamped covers and envelopes were sent with Circulars to all Postmasters in the United Kingdom, before the stamps were put on sale at some of the larger Post Offices. Not having been cancelled in any manner, many of these were undoubtedly used for the prepayment of postage. When the first one shilling stamps were prepared in 1847, specimens sent to Postmasters were handstamped with the word SPECIMEN to prevent defrauding of the Revenue.

The exchange of specimen stamps between the member nations of the UPU via the International Bureau was put into operation in 1879 and Great Britain was among the first of the members to supply 70 sets of the postage stamps in use at that time. All these stamps were overprinted SPECIMEN, as were examples of any new stamps which differed radically in value, colour or design from previous issues. However, after 1892 only stamps of the denominations of 1 shilling and above were given protective overprints, while after 1948 all British specimen stamps were supplied in normal mint condition. The same procedures applied to stamps of Great Britain overprinted for use in British Protectorates or for sale at British Post Offices in the Levant, Morocco, etc.

The earliest sets of current British Colonial stamps supplied for distribution were normally uncanceled. While specimen stamps of Canada, India and New Zealand were with few exceptions provided in mint condition, from 1884 until 1948 stamps of the British Crown Colonies were normally overprinted or perforated SPECIMEN, generally by the printers of the stamps. Specimens of provisional stamps that were overprinted or surcharged in the Colonies were supplied uncanceled or with local SPECIMEN handstamps. Such handstamps were also used to cancel sets of their current definitive issues required for newly-joined members of the Union. Many of these SPECIMEN overprints, handstamps and perforations were also used to cancel stamps required for other purposes.

Non-British Administrations of the Union supplied early sets of their current issues uncanceled; many continued to send specimens of their stamps in that condition. Generally first issues or early printings, they are indistinguishable from ordinary mint stamps, once they have been removed from official archives, unless they are reprints made after it had been discovered that specimens had not

been sent. Exceptionally, specimen stamps were handstamped by the Authority to which they had been transmitted, whether or not they had previously been overprinted. For instance, specimen stamps intended for the Portuguese Colonies were handstamped ULTRAMAR in Lisbon, before they were forwarded.

On the other hand many non-British Administrations used protective overprints of SPECIMEN (or its foreign equivalent), generally for short periods, sometimes after there had been a change of printer. Argentina used MUESTRA overprints for a long period and so did Spain, if one includes stamps underprinted with the serial number A,000,000. Japan submitted collections which included the Dragon issues, all with 'Mihon' overprints.

Detailed information on the specimen stamps of Great Britain and of the Crown Colonies has previously been published by me. Some of it was supplied by James Bendon and he was most welcome to extract anything concerning the UPU he required. I was unable to unravel the puzzle of which overprinted specimen stamps of the old Australian States had been sent to the UPU for distribution; but now a fine job has been made of this. Some information on the overprinted specimen stamps of various territories has previously been published in specialised catalogues and handbooks, but there is generally confusion as to which of them were distributed by the UPU. The UPU specimen stamps of the non-British Nations have now been listed, and their overprints described and illustrated. At last we have a handbook that covers the whole field and gives us new information on the system.

London

MARCUS SAMUEL

## Preface

The present work has several aims.

Foremost has been to compile a detailed reference catalogue of UPU specimen stamps that is worldwide in scope and includes commentaries introducing individual countries. It therefore contains much information and new research not previously published. There was a need also to give guidance on the current market values for these specimen stamps.

The priced catalogue is backed by a handbook section which explains the origin and membership of the Universal Postal Union and how the system of distributing specimen stamps has operated.

Also included is a listing of past and present members of the Union that is in itself a valuable reference.

From research carried out, data is also published giving accurate figures for the quantities of specimen stamps required over the years for circulation. The comparatively small numbers are perhaps not generally appreciated.

### Acknowledgements

These aims could not have been achieved without the help of a great number of people, and it is a pleasure to acknowledge the assistance which they have given.

I must first mention my friends Marcus Samuel, the 'doyen of specimania' and my mentor over many years, and Conrad Latto who throughout the period of research and writing has always encouraged and occasionally goaded me.

Thanks are due to the Director General of the International Bureau of the UPU, the Directors of the Musée de la Poste in Paris, of the Postmuseum in Stockholm and of the Post Museum in Berne, the Manager of the National Postal Museum in London, the Head of Philatelic Collections at The British Library, the Records Manager at the Post Office Archives in London, and their respective staffs, both for assistance given and for permission to publish information abstracted from their records.

I acknowledge, with thanks, permission kindly granted by the Director General of the UPU to reproduce the two documents which form the end-papers to this book.

A number of specialist collectors have been consulted. Those whose contribution has been of special value include Philip Beale, A. Ronald Butler, Florian Eichhorn, Charles Freeland, Robert Gibbs, Andrew Norris and Clive Smith.

Illustrations of the numerous protective markings have been in many cases based on photographs produced by the Photographic Service of The British Library. These have been used by kind permission.

The high quality of printing and binding is the result of meticulous care taken by Zavallis Litho Limited of Nicosia, Cyprus.

The greatest contribution has undoubtedly been made by my editor, James Negus, whose life-long professional experience has proved invaluable. He has also compiled the Appendix 'UPU Membership Dates'.

And finally, thanks are offered in advance to all those philatelists, both amateur and professional, who it is hoped will pose and answer questions, so that a supplement or further edition may be published.

Limassol

JAMES BENDON

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