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Yesterday in STAMPS: **The Provisional Stamps of Bermuda**

Arthur D. Pierce

(From STAMPS Magazine, June 28, 1941, with images added)

Bermuda's "Christmas provisional"—the current 1d pictorial surcharged "Half Penny"—came as a Yuletide surprise to collectors, and is undoubtedly the most interesting philatelic development of the war, as it has affected a country in our Western Hemisphere. Whereas other issues, such as the 3d on 2-1/2d Bahamas overprint, have been the result of changes in postal rates, the new Bermuda stamp is the consequence of an exhausted supply with replacements held up in transit due to the conflict, and belatedly delivered by Transatlantic Clipper.

This Bermuda provisional may serve to draw the attention of more collectors to the other equally interesting provisional issues of Bermuda, some of them decidedly mysterious in their origin, and at least two of them unique in a philatelic way. The following notes are intended to tell the story of these old provisionals and to condense most of the available information concerning them.

The 3d Provisionals of 1874

On March 10, 1873, Bermuda issued its first three-penny stamp, for prepayment of letters to the United States, the rate being 3d per half ounce. The initial supply consisted of 9,800 stamps, and the demand for them appears to have been heavy as the supply was exhausted within a year. When replacements failed to arrive, the postal authorities then as now, decided on a provisional. Minutes of the Bermuda Legislative Council for February 21, 1874 read: "The Council approve of the issue of a portion of the redundant One Shilling postage stamps in store as Threepenny stamps, with a distinct crossing of 'three' or '3d' if possible of different colored ink."

With this authority the Colonial Postmaster of Ber-

muda ordered the provisionals, issue of which is recorded in three batches of 4,500 each—one batch on March 12, another March 20, and the third on May 9, of 1874.

The first mystery arises from the two types of surcharge: (a) a surcharge in Roman capitals (Scott's No. 10), and (b) a surcharge in fancy italic capitals (Scott's Nos. 11 and 12).



Left to right: Scott 10, 11, and 12

Why two types? No records ever have been found giving an answer. Nor is there information which type overprint appeared first, but since the one in fancy capitals (Sc. 12) was the first to be noted in the philatelic papers of the time it is generally regarded as the earlier issue.

The second mystery arises over the printing. No record has been found of that, either. In the Royal Philatelic Society's *Postage Stamps of the West Indies*, Major Edward B. Evans, long editor of *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal*, suggested that the printing probably was done by Government clerks, "though there was a tradition that some work of this kind had been done by the Royal Engineers, who had a small press in their office."

Most evidence points strongly to the first of these choices, i.e., government clerks, inasmuch as these stamps were not overprinted on a press, as H. R. Holmes has pointed out, but were handstamped one at a time, a fact which would account for the blurry and faulty impression of many of the overprints and also their varying register. The first suspicion of forgery in these stamps is invited by perfection of overprinting; the forgeries smell at once of the press, and most of the forgeries the writer has seen also are a trifle smaller in size.

An alternate printing possibility is suggested by John J. Bushell, who thinks the stamps may have been surcharged by the King's printer; and if so, were either done singly, or a very few at a time, since each surcharge contains four of the letter "e," whereas an entire font in those days probably had no more than a dozen or so of the "e", and it is unlikely the printer had more than one of this fancy "job font."

In any event, at least three handstamps were used: one in Roman Capitals and two in italics. One of the italic handstamps has a plain italic "P" in "Pence," the top of the letter being flat, whereas in the much rarer variety, Scott's 12a, the "P" of "Pence" is rounded, with what some call a "forelock," similar to the "R" in "Three." These letters with the "forelock" were not, of course, of a different type font, but were initial letters, intended for use at the beginning of words or sentences, though not always confined to that use where printers were careless.

Another interesting point as to the use of a handstamp is found in a pair of the No. 12a in the writer's collection, both stamps having the "P" the same as the "R." This indicates that the variety was not just a single "error" in a large setting, but that it probably occurred over a part or full sheet, depending on how many overprints were turned out by the person employing that particular handstamp.



*Left, Sc. 12; right, Sc. 12a pair with top of "P" like the top of an "R".
This may be the same pair referred to by the author.*

Use of the handstamp is probably responsible also for the variety in the Roman Capitals overprint which is listed in the Robson Lowe Regent catalog as a “partial double surcharge” [not listed in Scott]. While I have one of these, there is no evidence it was constant and probably was due to an unsteady hand.

Most fascinating mystery of all in the 1874 provisionals surrounds the fancy italic surcharge “Three Penny” on the One Penny rose (Scott’s No. 11).



This stamp is the most disputed in Bermuda’s history, many experts insisting that it is not a stamp at all. As far back as 1887 Major Evans pronounced it an essay, but others, including Sir Edward Denny Bacon, declined to agree, although Sir Edward admitted it might be impossible ever to obtain positive proof one way

or the other.

Experts aside, here is the evidence which the writer has gathered to date. In favor of listing the “Three Penny on One Penny” as a stamp are these factors: (a) its existence; (b) agreement of even the Royal Philatelic Society that genuine copies of the Fancy Italic surcharge have been found on the 1d stamp; (c) the fact that most of the known specimens were found, according to Major Evans, in the Receiver General’s office, indicating an official connection; (d) the opinion of the then Receiver General that the stamps had been purchased by his predecessor; (e) the statement of Sir Reginald Grey, (president of the Legislative Council, a collector, and the man into whose hands most of the specimens passed after the part sheet was found) that he knew at least one sheet of 1d stamps had been overprinted and that some were used.

Against listing the stamp and in favor of the essay theory, are: (a) the complete lack of evidence that the overprinting of 1d stamps was authorized; (b) absence of any mention of the stamp in the Receiver General’s records for the postoffice; (c) traditional insistence of the Royal Philatelic Society that no genuine used copy exists

(although both Sir Reginald Grey and Sir Edward Denny Bacon disputed this); (d) the fact that Major Evans' contention is plausible, that it was unlikely a single sheet or even two sheets of the 1d would have been overprinted except for trial purposes.

To my own astonishment, it never seems to have occurred to any of the debaters that this stamp is probably an error; that the only explanation which fits all the facts on both sides of the argument is the explanation that a sheet or two of the 1d value was mixed among the sheets of shilling stamps sent to the printer for overprinting. It is unlikely that the printer would have noticed the mistake, but it is apparent that the Receiver General did, since he removed the 1d stamps which were left and put them in the drawer of his office desk where they subsequently were found.

A whole article could be written around this stamp alone, but my belief that this stamp is—let us say an “error of color”—is confirmed to some extent after correspondence with W. E. Hawkins, who once possessed a block of six and two blocks of four of this “Three Penny on One Penny,” all of which he purchased from Sir Reginald Grey in Bermuda. Moreover, the writer is convinced that the stamp does exist in genuine used condition, since Sir Reginald Grey said definitely that he had received a copy of the stamp on a letter, and a man in his position almost certainly would have known if essays were being used for postage. There is evidence also that some of these stamps were used some years later, possibly for philatelic purposes, possibly because they had lain around in someone's desk.

It should be mentioned that the philatelic press, in 1875, reported specimens of the 2d blue, with fancy italic surcharge. These have been found definitely bogus. Likewise, the double overprints and inverted overprints of any of these 1874 surcharges.

[In the 2012 Volume 1, Scott footnotes, “No. 11 is stated to be an essay, but a few copies are known used. JFD.]

The Provisionals of 1875

By comparison, the Bermuda provisional stamps of 1875 [Scott 13-15] are gems of philatelic propriety, and the records concerning them are quite clear.

New supplies of the 3d stamps had arrived in July of 1874, but at the beginning of 1875 the supply of one penny stamps was exhausted and more overprints were ordered.

This time it was decided to overprint three values—2d, 3d and shilling stamps—inasmuch as the stocks of all values were none too plentiful. The “One Penny” overprint, in plain 10-point pica type, was done at the office of the *Royal Gazette* in Hamilton, and it seems likely that 60 stamps—one pane of a full sheet of 240—were overprinted at a time. The records show one overprinting of the 2d blue—4,800 copies on March 31, 1875; one printing on the 3d yellow—12,000 copies in April of 1875; and three overprintings on the shilling value, as follows: 14,400 copies on March 11; 6,270 copies on March 31, and 2,380 copies on April 16, of 1875.



*Above, left to right,
Sc. 13-15;
left, Sc. 13a,
without the period
after Penny;
right, Sc. 15c,
round O*

The major error in these stamps is the inverted overprint on the shilling value. Varieties with the period missing after the word “Penny” have been recorded from time to time, but their authenticity is extremely doubtful. These varieties have popped in and out of the catalogs for years. At present Gibbons lists two “period missing” varieties, on the 2d and shilling value; at one time the same catalog listed the variety on all three stamps, yet only ten years ago recognized it on the shilling value only. Scott lists the “period missing” on the 2d (No. 15b) but no others [The 2012 Scott lists it on the 2d and 1sh, but still not the 3d]. Robson Lowe’s Regent Catalog declares all three are bogus.

At one time, the Rev. Earee, who wrote the famous “Album Weeds,” distinguished genuine copies of these surcharges from forgeries by stating that in the genuine the “O” of “One” was directly over the “e” of “Penny,” whereas in the fakes the “O” was a bit to the right. Blocks of these surcharges and copies on cover show this to be wholly incorrect.

Indeed the new 1940 Bermuda provisional warns against just such hasty generalizations, since the settings vary in it, and whereas on most stamps the “H” of “HALF” is well to the left of the “E” of “PENNY,” on three stamps of the sheet the “H” of “HALF” is directly over the “E” of “PENNY.”

The Postcard Provisional of 1893

Why both the Scott and Gibbons catalogs ignore the Bermuda “Postcard Provisional” of 1893 is beyond the writer’s ken. Here is one of the most unusual items in philately, and while it is technically classified as postal stationery, the surcharge here is not on a postcard but on stamps—stamps affixed to a postcard. Surely a surcharge on stamps deserves to be classified as a surcharge on stamps.

In 1884 the rate on postcards to points outside Bermuda was 1-1/2d. The Bermuda postal authorities had the Royal Gazette print a postcard, with two ruled spaces for stamps; after which postoffice clerks were given the

task of pasting two stamps on each card: a copy of the 1/2d stone of 1880 in the left hand space, and a copy of Bermuda No. 1 (the 1d rose with CC watermark) in the right hand space.

Bear in mind that the postcards had no franking value in themselves; they were invalid until stamps had been pasted upon them. Hence, these were not postcards in the normal sense of postal stationery, but more akin to an ordinary commercial postcard which is also labeled “Post Card” but which is not mailable until stamps have been attached. The sole difference here is that the cards were printed by the Postoffice authorities, and the stamps pasted on by clerks instead of by customers.

A considerable batch of these 1884 postcards, with the 1/2d and 1d stamps affixed, were evidently placed in stock. At any rate, in 1893 the rate for postcards was reduced to 1d, and a surcharge—“One Penny”—in two lines of a bold, extended type, was applied to the normal “Queen’s



1893 Postcard Provisional

Head” postcards then in issue (and valid for postage in themselves) and the same overprint also was applied to 87 remaining copies of the 1884 postcards with the stamps attached. The overprint was across the two stamps.

Since the records show that only 87 copies exist, this item is rare indeed. In his pamphlet on Bermuda, H. R. Holmes mentions a story that “all of the specimens were purchased by a clerk in the postoffice.” That this is only partially correct, if true at all, is indicated by the fact that Holmes says he has seen copies on correspondence to

England and Germany, and I have seen a copy used on a card to Italy.

So, if you ever come across a Bermuda 1/2d or 1d stamp bearing half a surcharge (which is admittedly unlikely), don't toss it away as a fake. It may have been soaked off one of these cards, years ago, before most collectors bothered with them.

Catalogs or no, these certainly are surcharged stamps and as such belong in any list of Bermuda postal issues. It should be noted that these "Postcard Provisionals" are listed in the Regent catalog, which prices them at 6 pounds mint, 10 pounds used.

The Farthing Surcharge of 1901



In 1901, Bermuda issued yet another unusual stamp with a story attached—the "One Farthing" on "One Shilling". This stamp is not really a provisional but is included here because many collectors have been led to so regard it.

In 1900 the Bermuda Legislative Assembly levied a rate of one farthing per two ounces on newspapers, which previously had gone through the mails gratis. The act was to become effective January 1, 1901, and plans were made for issuance of a new farthing stamp. Several designs were submitted, but apparently they were unsatisfactory for the postal authorities devised the makeshift stamp we now know as Scott's No. 26.

A cable was sent Messrs. De La Rue, printers of all Bermuda stamps up to that time, calling upon them to use the regular plate for Bermuda shilling stamps but to print new stamps in grey (the normal shilling stamps then were brown)—these grey stamps to be overprinted "One Farthing," with a black bar obliterating the words "One Shilling."

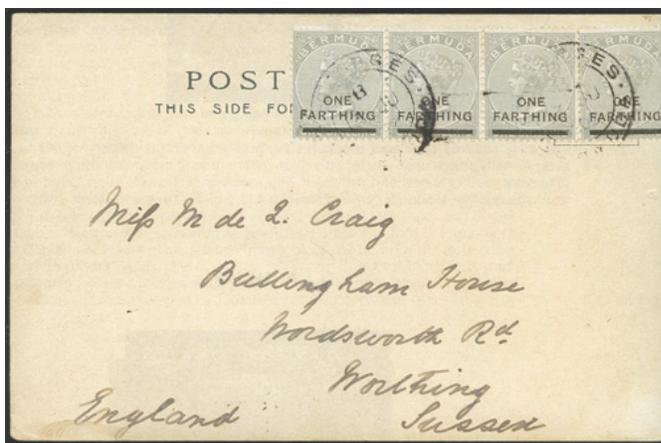
As it was, this curious production arrived in Bermuda ten days late and then the entire supply was bought up on the first day of issue by speculators. It was an issue which lent itself to such a venture. All indications were that it would be temporary, as usual with provisionals.

Besides, the face value was very low and the entire supply of 192,000 stamps could be purchased for less than a thousand dollars.

So, on its day of issue this stamp, according to *Gibbons Monthly Journal*, was being sold in Bermuda for as much as a shilling a copy. The postal authorities acted promptly, however, ordered a new supply, and in a few weeks had broken the back of the boom.

Thenceforth this stamp became the longest-lived “provisional” of philatelic history, remaining in use from 1901 to 1908, when it was supplanted late in the latter year by the Farthing “dock type” stamp.

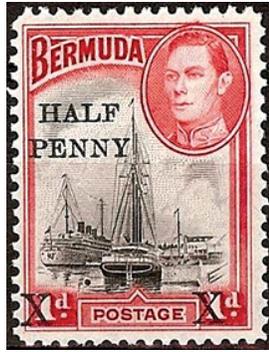
There is one constant variety in this surcharge, a “G” of “Farthing” which looks like a “C.” The stamp also appears in several shades, two of which are distinct and which are listed by Gibbons as “dull grey” and “Bluish grey.” My copy of the stamp overprinted “Specimen,” which was of the first printing, is in the dull grey shade.



Not mentioned in this article, there is another variety. Seen here is the One Farthing Provisional in a strip of four on cover tied to a post card by “St. Georges/Bermuda/13 JU 02” double circle c.d.s. Using the pdf magnifier you can see that the “F” in the left stamp is different from that on the other three. It is believed that the F in this position on the plate became damaged, so the “F” was inserted into this position by hand. Sc. 26b, only five unused and two used examples of this variety are known.

The “Christmas Provisional” of 1940

Finally, a few notes on the most recent provisional, the “Christmas provisional” of 1940. Due to exhaustion of supplies of the pictorial Half Penny, the current pictorial 1d was overprinted “HALF PENNY” in two lines, and at the



Sc. 129

lower corners of the stamp two “X” marks to obliterate the 1d tablets. Total printing of this stamp was 348,000. It was issued December 20, 1940, and withdrawn on January 21, 1941.

The surcharging was done by the Government printers, set on the linotype, in sheets of sixty stamps. There are no errors, but examination of full sheets reveals some extremely interesting setting

varieties. First, the spacing between the bottom of the word “Penny” and the top of the “X” marks varies in different rows of the sheet. This spacing is 13.5 mm. in rows 1, 3 and 4; 13 mm. in rows 8 and 10, and a scant 14.5 mm. in rows 2, 5, 6, 7, and 9.

Second, there is the interesting variety in which the “H” of “Half” appears directly over the “E” of “Penny.” This variety does not appear at all in the first printing of the surcharge. In the second printing it does appear, on each of the three right hand stamps on the third row from the bottom, i.e., stamps 46, 47, and 48 of the sheet. In a third printing, this variety appears on the three left hand stamps of the third row from the bottom, i.e., stamps 43, 44 and 45. I have heard of a fourth printing in which the “H over E” variety appears but once in the sheet, but have not yet seen it. A further variety, in the second printing only, is a broken “X,” the right hand “X” on stamp No. 54. In the same printing there is a constant break in the “L” of “Half” in Stamp No. 36.



“H” over “E”
variety of Sc. 129

Material for this study has come from *Postage Stamps of the West Indies*, published by the Royal Philatelic Society; *Bermuda*, by B. W. H. Poole; *Bermuda*, by H. R. Holmes; *The London Philatelist*, *Stanley Gibbons Monthly Journal*, the Gibbons and Regent catalogs, and, individually, W. F. Hawkins, E. F. Hurt, John J. Bushell, Miss Ethel Harper—plus, of course, personal research.