The 1889 Bechuanaland registration envelopes with a vermilion stamp were made by embossing a 4d British postage stamp, originally used for stamped-to-order envelopes, on the then current McCorquodale registration envelopes. In addition, the envelopes were overprinted ‘BRITISH BECHUANALAND’ and ‘FOR REGISTRATION ONLY.’ The latter overprint was required because the original postage stamp did not specify registration, as was common for the British registration envelopes at the time. The existing trial printings or essays suggest that the overprinting was done in one setting and that the stamp was subsequently embossed (Thy and Inglefield-Watson, 2004; Thy, 2008). Thus both overprinting and stamping were done individually on fully prepared, printed, folded, and glued envelopes.

The interest in the stamp dies for the British stamped-to-order envelopes as well as the Bechuanaland registration envelopes stems from the possibility that the stamp used for the Bechuanaland issues were made using a new working die that thus with some stretch of the imagination could qualify as the first definitive stationary specifically prepared for Bechuanaland.

Huggins (1961, 1970) reports a total of four original stamp dies with two different registration dates (12.11.55 (dies 2 and 4), 26.9.89 (dies 1 and 3)). The 1855 dies were used for production of the British stamped-to-order stationery from December 1855 (Huggins, 1961). We have speculated without substantiating the claim that the 1889 dies were specifically produced for the Bechuanaland envelopes because of the similarity between the registration date and the printing dates (1889-90) of the envelopes (Thy and Inglefield-Watson, 1996). The imprinted stamps exist with either florets (9 dots) or date code plugs inserted into three holes drilled at the base of the stamp (Huggins and Baker, 2007). The earliest known impressions of the stamp are found on a promotional notice to

Figure 1. Summary of dies and plugs. (A) From essay RE E(17). (B and C) From Bechuanaland registration envelopes with 1889 printing year. (D) From 1855 British postmaster notice. (E) From a Bechuanaland registration envelope with 1890 printing year. (F) From proof sheet (see Figure 2). The enlargement scales as well as the colors may not be exact.
British postmasters (Huggins, 1970), dated just after the registration date. Two different stamp dates are shown in Figure 1 (7.12.55 and 8.12.55) from these postmaster notices, suggesting that the date plugs were inserted each day of the printing. Thus, the dates represent the day of printing and not individual printing orders. Huggins (1961) lists that the imprints in the Somerset House record books of dies 2 and 4 are without insets (blank, empty) in the plugholes and that dies 1 and 3 are with inserted dates (26.9.89).

The printing dates for the Bechuanaland are 28.2.89 (Sizes G and H), 1.3.89 (Sizes H and K), 2.3.89 (Size G) (Thursday-Saturday), and 28.4.90 (Sizes G, H, and K) (Monday) (Thy and Inglefield-Watson, 2004). These dates suggest that the Bechuanaland envelopes were produced in two printings. The first printing stretched over three days during late February and early March 1889. The second printing was done in April 1890. Both printings included all three envelope sizes. Envelopes from both the 1889 (Sizes G, H, and K) and 1890 (size G) printings occur with UPU specimen (Type 2) overprint done in 1890 (September) in Vryburg after the 1890 printing was made (Hurst, 2007).

There is, as far as I am aware, no census of the plug dates for the British stamped-to-order envelopes. Huggins and Baker (2007) suggest 1859 as the earliest year of usage and illustrate a stamp with a 23.5.83 date. Huggins (1970) gives the printing dates as between 21.11.61 and 4.1.94, thus overlapping the Bechuanaland printing dates. These British dates appear rather late considering that the stamp die was announced and already to be used for private orders already in 1855. The date plugs were around 1892-94 replaced by plugs with florets (Huggins, 1970; Huggins and Baker, 2007). It is not know, by me at least, how many stamps that were imprinted as part of the British printed-to-order program. It is likewise not known how many envelopes were imprinted for use in Bechuanaland. We can only guess at a maximum total of about 1,500 for Size G envelope and much less for the larger sized envelopes, based on information for the first Bechuanaland definitive envelope about 10 years later (Thy and Inglefield-Watson, 2004).

The early collection of stamp and stationery essays assembled by F.A. Philbrick prior to 1890 (Hahn, 2008) included a sheet with impressions of stamps used for printed-to-order stationery (Figure 2). This sheet included two impressions of the 4d vermillion stamp both with florets inserted instead of date plugs. The Philbrick collection was sold to Phillip de Ferrari in 1888. Since de Ferrari had little interest in essays, he donated this part of the collection to a Viennese stamp dealer that displayed it in his private museum (Sigmund Friedl) until 1896 when his stamp business was liquidated (Hahn, 2008). Although it cannot be proven that the imprint sheet was not added to the collection after being sold in 1888, it is plausible that it was part of the original collection prior to being sold. If this is correct, the floret plugs were probably inserted in the dies when not in use for postage printing and thus were in use long prior to being introduced for stamp printing around 1892-4. Huggins (1970) further shows an impression of the 4d dies (with blank date plugs) on a handmade envelopes what is thought to be an essay made prior to the first envelopes were issued in 1878 after a rate reduction to 2d. Unfortunately, these early imprints and essays were not available for this study in sufficient high resolution to allow detailed studies and comparisons.

So why is the chronology of these early British stamp dies important for understanding the production of the Bechuanaland envelopes? To answer this question, we need to understand how the dies were produced and how the printing was done. The following is largely based on the description in Scott (2001). Printed embossed stamps have the colorless or white parts raised above the colored flat background. Three different dies are involved in producing an embossed working die. The master die is engraved on the surface of a soft steel rod and is used to produce all subsequent dies. The parts that are to be colorless are engraved into the steel below the flat steel surface that will carry the ink. The master die is thus the negative image of the embossed stamp. The master die is after hardening transferred to an intermediate die (hub die) by hard pressing a soft steel rod into the hardened master die. The intermediate die is thus positive with the colorless parts protruding above the flat surface very much like the printed stamp. The intermediate die may be cleaned and sharpen by removing excess metal and may further be modified by reducing the design area (but not enlarged). The working die is made by pressure transfer from the intermediate die and thus is a duplicate of the master die (meaning that it is negative). This means that the working die can be further engraved and modified, however, without reducing or removing embossed parts. Two working dies may therefore not be exactly similar despite originating from the same master and even intermediate dies. A working die may also wear with use and may further require ‘touch-ups’ to improve a deteriorating print product.

The printing is done by pressing the working die against the paper (or envelope) into a resilient plate. The ink is applied only to the flat surface of the working die with the embossed lines and
patches remaining unlinked. What is happening is that the flat inked surface is pressed against the paper and the paper is being pressed into the un-inked embossed parts of the die. Thus, the protruding parts are left un-inked, while the main flat parts are inked.

This method of printing may result in various printing flaws. The first group of these is non-constant flaws when accidentally ink fills or paper flakes cover engraved parts resulting in inking of what was supposed to be embossed. Such flaws do not represent die varieties. The second group of flaws is constant defects that appear on all subsequent imprints. Scratches and other defects in the surface will appear as un-inked embossing on the imprinted stamp. Other die modifications are intentional and represent changes to either the intermediate or working die. These are constant changes to the die and helps identifying the die and their progressive modifications.

Albino embossed imprints are the result of printing either without inking or with more than one envelope at a time fed into the press. Other typical printing errors are off-positioned and multiple embossed imprints. Such printing errors are common for many similarly embossed envelopes, but are nevertheless not reported for the Bechuanaland envelopes, probably due to a good quality control by the printer; although the small quantities produced may share part of the responsibility. Another type of printing error that often is recorded is off-centered back inking. This happens when the press is used without paper and not cleaned before next envelope is fed into the press. Such characteristic back-inking has not yet been reported for the Bechuanaland envelopes. It should here be mentioned that the 1890 Bechuanaland envelopes appear always to show strong bleeding-through of the ink on the reverse suggesting a different ink-type (but not back-inking).

For our purpose, only constant modifications to the dies (intentional or accidental) are of interest for understanding the chronology of printing and the dies used. By observing the eight selected imprints in Figure 1, it can readily be seen that a few characteristic features appears on some, but not all imprints. The weak ‘S’ of ‘POSTAGE’ appears on all examples of the first printing of the Bechuanaland envelopes (1889; Figure 1, A, B, and C), but is not present on the remaining imprints, including the early proof imprints (D and E) and the 1890 Bechuanaland imprint (F). There are other irregularities that can easily be observed. The ‘A’ of ‘POSTAGE’ is partially filled by a gash on the horizontal stroke on all the 1889 Bechuanaland (A, B, C) and the early imprints (D and F). Only, the 1890 Bechuanaland imprint (E) appears to be missing this irregularity. A final irregularity to be noted is the deformed ‘P’ of ‘PENCE’ only seen for the early imprint with florets (F). These irregularities suggest that two distinctly different

Figure 2. Proof sheet with impression of British stamped to order dies (Hahn, 2008). Stamps no. 2 and 3 of the central row is the 4d vermilion stamp used on the 1889 Bechuanaland Registration Envelopes. The image was scanned from Hahn’s book and is thus reduce in size.
working dies were used to produce the two Bechuanaland printings (1889 and 1890).
The low hanging pendant curls of the Queen’s hair dress may also be used to distinguish groups of working dies as done for other British stamp dies (Huggins, 1970). The majority of imprints in Figure 1 show nearly detached curls only hold in place by two thin hair threads. Although more detailed work needs to be done to support the point, it is felt that all the dies show the same nearly detached pendant curls. Differences appear to be caused by variable imprint pressure. It is significant that the 1890 Bechuanaland imprints show very variable degrees of detachments of the curls (Figure 1, A and B), despite many other similarities suggesting that all imprints were made using the same die.
The overall shapes of the Queen’s neck regions are compared in Figure 3. When the neck outline is traced for the 1889 Bechuanaland imprints (Figure 3, B) and overlain on the necks of the 1890 (E) and the early British imprints (D and F). It is clear that the 1889 Bechuanaland dies have had the front neckline reduced and a weak projection of the Adam’s apple eliminated. This reduction is only seen for the 1889 Bechuanaland imprints and not for the 1890 imprints.

These observations suggest that the dies used for the Bechuanaland envelopes represent two intermediate dies produced from the same master die (or a progressive modification of the same intermediate die). The 1890 die shows similarities with (or is identical to) the early dies prepared for the British stamped-to-order envelopes (one of the dies with 26.9.89 registration date). The 1889 die was prepared from a different intermediate die with a slightly reduced Queen’s neckline (one of the dies with 12.11.55 registration date). It is currently not possible to compare the Bechuanaland imprints with those of the British envelopes for the simple reason that the present writer never has seen an example or know of similar studies of the British envelopes. It is thus still possible that the 1889 envelopes were prepared using a working die specifically prepared for the purpose.

Although this study did not provide the final answer to the questions, it hopefully provided enough incitement for somebody to take on the study. Future studies should examine the imprints of the dies made on British envelopes. It would also be useful to obtain information on the quantities of envelopes made (British, Bechuanaland) to gain information of the numbers of dies that may have been required. The question is obviously whether the usage of the dies was so restricted that only two or a low number of working dies could have covered the need. It would also be critical to obtain high quality images of the dies both released and those found on essays and official imprints.

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Of the King George V stamps of Great Britain overprinted for use in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, four values have so far been discovered with inverted watermark. These are the 2d. orange, Die I with simple cypher watermark, and the 1d. scarlet, 3d. violet and 1s. bistre-brown with block cypher watermark.

Of these four values, just two are recorded with control letters, the 1d. and 2d.

Since this may be of interest to members, these two values are illustrated here. The 1d. B24 block is in the collection of the author, and the 2d. R21 illustration has been kindly provided by Jake Jacobson of South Africa. Jake has previously allowed his item to be illustrated in Runner Post, but improvement in printing techniques of the magazine allow for a much improved result.

**References**


**King George V - Controls showing inverted watermarks**

by Brian Hurst

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