

The Niger Coast Provisionals of 1893-4

Whenever a series of British Colonial issues has been locally surcharged in the colony, the possibility of errors in the printing arising is very high. The 1893 and 1894 Provisionals of Niger Coast have given rise to many such errors and varieties and the study of them has been a fascination to philatelists for more than 100 years. The Gian-Maria Rossi collection, to be offered by Warwick and Warwick on June 8th, contains a superb selection of these provisionals, including unique items and rare se-tenants, where the only other known examples are in the Royal Collection.

The 1892 Issue.

The first British Consul, Sir Claude MacDonald, brought with him, in 1892, the set of 5 Jubilee issues, together with the 1d. lilac with the overprint BRITISH PROTECTORATE / OIL RIVERS, in 2 lines (SG 1-6). One sheet of the 1d. lilac was printed incorrectly, by De La Rue, with the 2 lines of the overprint transposed. It was initially believed that all the stamps so printed, with the exception of 8 stamps from the bottom row, were destroyed. However, after having plated copies, by reference to their constant flaws, M. P. Nicholson demonstrated that one known example was from row 9. The Rossi collection contains a mint single.



SG 2a

All 6 values of the first set were overprinted Specimen, for distribution to UPU member states. Somerset House was concerned that the overprint might be obscured, thus rendering the stamps valid for postage, so they experimented with a series of cancellations. The Rossi collection contains several pairs and singles with trial cancellations.



1/- pair with trial cancel

The September 1893 Old Calabar Provisionals.

By the beginning of September 1893, the post office at Old Calabar had run short of $\frac{1}{2}$ d. stamps, so 4 half sheets of 120 stamps of the 1d. lilac were surcharged locally by a diagonal line, running from the bottom left to the top right corners, each half thus formed being handstamped $\frac{1}{2}$ d, parallel to the diagonal line. The surcharge was applied in a setting covering one horizontal row at a time. The top row of 10 stamps (20 surcharged stamps) of the first sheet was surcharged in violet ink. However, it was thought that the colour did not contrast sufficiently with the body colour of the stamp and vermilion was selected for the remaining rows. The Rossi collection includes a block of 4 surcharges, F.U., from the first 2 rows of the first sheet, the top pair showing the surcharge in violet and the lower pair in vermilion. This block is ex Preston and Dale-Lichtenstein.



SG 7f

Errors of this surcharge, in both violet and vermilion, are known. The unsevered top marginal pair with surcharge in violet double is unique.



SG 8b

On only the 1st sheet of the 4 surcharged, on row 3, stamps 3 and 8 both received the diagonal dividing line running from top left to bottom right, with the orientation of the ½ d. overprint similarly reversed. It is believed that two unsevered pairs with reversed surcharge are known. The Rossi collection includes a F.U. se-tenant block of 4, one unsevered pair with surcharge reversed and one pair normal.



SG 7b/7a

The December 1893 Old Calabar Provisionals

The protectorate was extended into the interior and the name changed to Niger Coast Protectorate. A new set of stamps was printed by Waterlow (SG 45 – 50), but the whole allocation of 9,000 ½ d. stamps was used up by philatelic demand and postal usage in a very short time. As a result, the 2d. green and carmine and 2 ½ d. purple on blue of the 1892 issue were surcharged “half / penny”, with a bar cancelling the original value. The surcharging was carried out by natives inserting the metal typeface into handstamps and a considerable variety of typefaces and ink colours were used. It is believed, however, that the examples recorded, where two or more stamps exist se-tenant with surcharges in different typefaces, surcharge positions or colours, are from trial sheets. It is thought that 3 trial sheets were printed.

The following illustration shows SG 10a surcharge in carmine setenant with SG 11 and is ex Pilkington and Danson. Two examples are known.



SG 10a/11

The following shows 2 copies of SG 20 se-tenant with SG 9c, the vertical surcharge.



SG 20/9c/20

The following illustration shows the se-tenant pair of SG 13 and SG 26, unique outside of the Royal Collection.



SG 13/26

Of the single stamps, the most highly rated is SG 22, the ½ d. on 2 ½ d. with SG type 7 surcharge in blue. Porter stated that the number printed was 4 and Nicholson confirmed that only one had been reported. This unique item is ex Forsyth, Pilkington and Isleham.



SG 24

Covers bearing the provisionals are, of course, very rare. The Rossi collection contains a registered cover from Old Calabar River, to Sierra Leone, bearing the 1892 1d. lilac strip of 3 and a vertical strip of 3 of the SG type 9 surcharge in blue on the 2d. value. This is probably the largest known multiple of this value. The cover was purchased in a previous Warwick and Warwick auction.



The December 1893 1/- Provisional

There was an alleged shortage of the 1/- value at the Old Calabar post office and this was countered by surcharging the 1892 2d. green and carmine with the words "One / Shilling" and a bar through the old denomination. As in the ½ d. provisionals, a trial sheet was issued, with the surcharge in 2 types and 3 colours, violet, vermilion and black and various positions.

The pair below shows SG 37 se-tenant with SG 38b, surcharge diagonal. This is one of two known examples and is ex Hind and Dale-Lichtenstein.



SG 37/38b

Three examples are known of SG 37a, with surcharge inverted, in violet.



SG 37a

It is believed that the black surcharge only existed on the trial sheet and that it was found to be unsuitable. The Rossi collection contains a black surcharge vertical. This is one of two known and is ex Pilkington, Isleham and Cosmos.



SG 39b

Used stamps with the vermilion surcharge, are extremely rare and most were probably cancelled to order. This one, on piece, has setting B.



SG 38

There exists a further type of the surcharge in black only and copies were not offered on the market until 1932, when a block of 4 and 2 singles were sold. Porter, in an article in "The Philatelist", in 1956, mentions a total of 18 stamps all with this subtype of surcharge, in black, all having emanated from the same source. The Rossi collection contains one copy of this rarity.



SG 39

The 1893 High Value Provisionals

At the same time as the 1/- surcharges were created, it was also decided to create a 5/-, 10/- and 20/- value by surcharging the 2d., 5d. and 1/- values of the 1892 issue respectively.

The postal need for high value stamps, in a territory where postal traffic was minimal, is clearly not proved and since only 5 of the 5/- surcharge, 3 of the 10/- and none of the 20/- have ever been found used, it would appear that the prime reason for these surcharges was to satisfy the philatelic need. H. G. Porter was of the opinion that 28 of the 5/- value and 32 of the 10/- value were surcharged. The 20/- value was surcharged in violet, vermilion and black and Porter's print quantities were 5, 3 and 3 respectively.

The illustration below shows the 5/- surcharge vertical and is unique.



SG 40b

The Rossi collection also contains a 5/- pair, one with surcharge normal and one with surcharge inverted. The Royal Collection contains a similar pair, otherwise it is unique.



SG 40/40a

The Rossi 20/- surcharge is in black and it is from the collections of Col. Green and Dale-Lichtenstein.



SG 44

The Opobo Provisionals

The Opobo sub post office ran out of ½ d. stamps in May 1894 and supplies could not be obtained from the head post office at Old Calabar, which was awaiting a shipment from England, so permission was granted to Tanner, the Opobo postmaster and vice-consul, to oversee the local surcharging of the 1894 1d. dull blue (SG 46b). Every stamp in one sheet was bisected vertically and surcharged “½ “ in red. In June, a sheet of the 1894 1d. pale blue was similarly surcharged.

Provisionals were also resorted to when supplies of the 1d. blue stamps became exhausted and a half sheet of 60 stamps of the 1892 2d. green and carmine was similarly bisected and surcharged “1”. This created 120 stamps and when these were exhausted a further quantity of 240 was surcharged. There was no printing press in Opobo and the surcharges were printed by hand, using a carved wooden block. The size of the surcharge figure was smaller on a very small quantity of the 360 stamps created and these are regarded as Tanner’s proofs, before he decided on the optimum size of the surcharge.

As one would expect when the surcharges were applied individually by hand, a number of errors occur. The Rossi collection includes a 1d. surcharge double M., ex Ferrari, Forsyth and Pilkington.

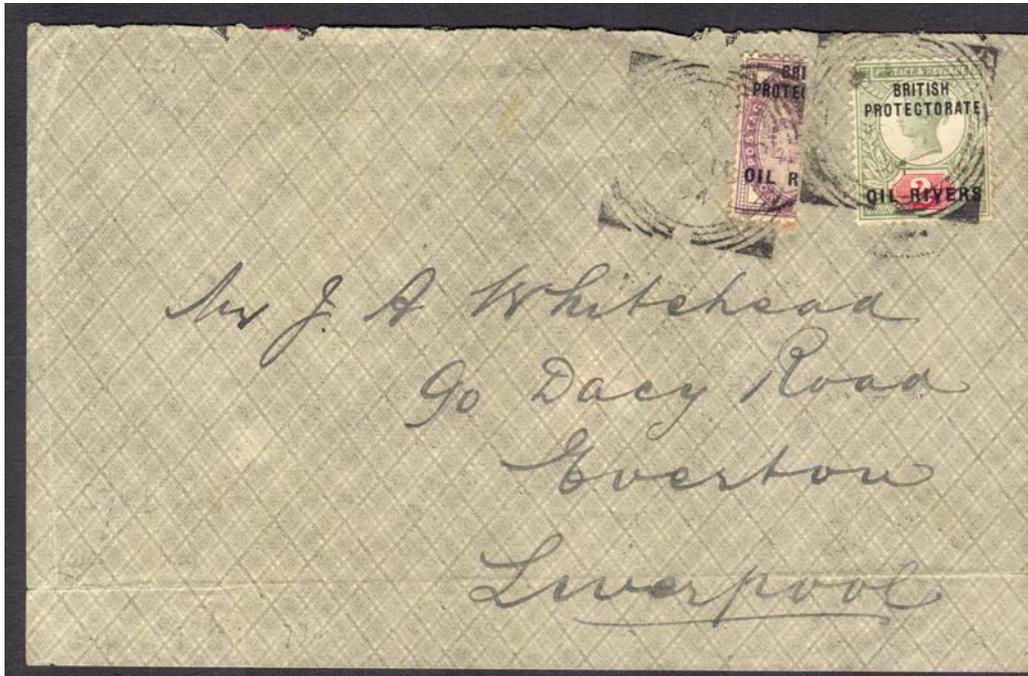


SG 59a

The Bonny River Bisects

In August and September 1894 the Bonny River post office ran out of ½ d. stamps. The postmaster there did not resort to surcharging other denominations, but simply bisected the 1893 and 1894 1d. stamps (SG 2, 46, 46b and 52). Inevitably this led to a shortage of 1d. stamps, so the 2d. stamps (SG 3, 47 and 53) were also bisected to make 1d. stamps.

The following cover to Liverpool bears an 1892 2d., together with a 1d. lilac bisect, forming the 2 ½ d. rate.



SG 2b

Bibliography

- “Oil Rivers and Niger Coast Protectorates” by F. J. Melville (1924)
- “The Local Bisects and Surcharges of the Oil Rivers and Niger Coast 1893 – 1894” by M. P. Nicholson (Cockrill Series Booklets no. 30)
- “The Postal Services of the British Nigeria Region” by J. Ince and J. Sacher (1992)
- “The Royal Philatelic Collection” by Sir John Wilson (1952)

The Rossi Collection

The above illustrations are all from the magnificent collection of Great Britain Overprints formed by Gian-Maria Rossi, of Monaco.

The collection has been carefully assembled over many decades and contains a wealth of extremely rare and, in some cases, unique items. It comprehensively reflects all aspects of the philately of these fascinating issues and includes proofs and trial overprints, specimens, varieties, multiples, cancellations and postal history.

There are particularly spectacular sections of British East Africa, Bechuanaland, Morocco Agencies, Nauru, Mafeking and Zululand, whilst the collections of Niger Coast and Oil Rivers must be amongst the best ever assembled.

The sale will take place on Wednesday 8th June, at the Court House, Warwick.

The fully illustrated catalogue will be available approximately 4 weeks before the sale and can be viewed on our website. A printed version is available at a cost of £10, to include postage. Warwick and Warwick catalogue subscribers will automatically be sent a complimentary copy.