

BECHUANALAND RECAP

First stamps of British

Bechuanaland: 1886

First stamps of Bechuanaland

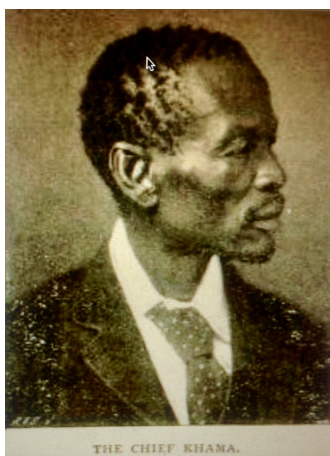
Protectorate: 1888

As recounted elsewhere, “British Bechuanaland” and “Bechuanaland Protectorate” have had intertwined postal histories. Or rather, their histories represent the untwining of one part of Bechuanaland from another.

In a prior blog post (April 2018) I told the remarkable story of Tswana King Khama III, 1837?-1923 (left), who teamed with the British to maintain his territory as a protectorate, starting in the 1880s. Khama founded a dynasty that endured to become a democracy, Botswana, in 1966. The FMF Stamp Project offers a page-by-page look at stamps from the two early postal authorities

(February 2019) and another illustrated essay about Bechuanaland becoming Botswana (March 2019). What follows is mainly a rumination on colonial motives and ambitions.

Why was British Bechuanaland split off from Bechuanaland Protectorate? While the protectorate remained under loose but direct supervision from London, the southern province became a British crown colony, and in 1895 was annexed by the Cape Colony.



Above and below are stamps from British Bechuanaland in the 1880s; some are quite pricey! The top examples are overprints of Cape of Good Hope stamps; below are profiles of Queen Victoria that look like bas reliefs engraved on pink and green marble tablets.





Here are some nice stamps from Bechuanaland Protectorate in the 1890s. The complete set of overprinted stamps are from the British Jubilee series of the 1890s, commemorating Queen Victoria's sexagenary (that's 60 years on the throne).

One version of the story is that the British stepped in to thwart the schemes of Germans and Boers in the region, more particularly the upstart republics of Stellaland and Goshen. There also was disquiet in the colonial office over Cecil Rhodes and his brash expansionism. Queen Victoria dispatched Sir Charles Warren, who arrived with 4,000 colonial troops and irregulars and prevailed without bloodshed. Both Boer republics collapsed. Indeed, some Boers grudgingly welcomed British administration — probably because they had so much trouble managing their own public affairs. At one point, Boer farmers assisted British troops crossing a waterway, receiving

fees of 2 pounds a day for their trouble. It turned out later that some of those helpful Boers were Goshenites, who saved up their fees and were able to buy farms later on.

My rumination has to do with other colonial motives. Imperial interests in Africa always focused on extraction of resources as well as geopolitics, and the diamond-rich area around Kimberley was particularly attractive to British colonial prospectors. I suspect the British carved out a chunk of southern Bechuanaland for their prospectors and extractors, and left the rest to its indigenous stewards. If you know otherwise, please tell me.

That the Tswana rulers wanted British protection from the Boers is clear enough. King Khama was appalled by the Boers' combativeness. He objected to their enslavement of native people, and complained about their drunkenness.

"There are three things which distress me very much," Khama wrote to Sir Henry Barkly in 1876, "war, selling people and drink. all these things I shall find in the Boers ..."

After the early years of the protectorate, the British hoped to turn over administration to neighboring Rhodesia or the Cape Colony (later South Africa). But Chief Khama and others prevailed on the queen to extend her protection

from the Boers, the Germans, Cecil Rhodes and his swashbucklers, as well as the demon rum.

Amid the negotiations and territorial disputes, the parties hammered out an agreement that created the Caprivi Strip, a nonsensical-looking land corridor extending east from today's Namibia, which was supposed to preserve imperial Germany's access to the sea. You can go into excruciating detail on the negotiations that led to this agreement, which did little more than create a geopolitical headache of minuscule, but apparently eternal, proportions (recently there were reports of a Caprivi independence movement). But stop! Remind yourself: Why are the Germans and the British creating strips and rearranging borders and ruling territory in the middle of Africa to begin with? What are they doing there?! This land doesn't belong to them!

The parties also agreed at the outset not to export alcohol to the Bechuanaland Protectorate, as per King Khama's desire. British colonial administrators managed affairs for the protectorate — with their headquarters, awkwardly enough, located outside Bechuanaland in Mafeking. I like to think that this remote control suggests British rule in the



In a remarkable example of philatelic atavism, the same design appeared on sets of stamps for three British monarchs, George V, left (up to 1935), George VI (until 1952) and Queen Elizabeth II (coronated in 1953). Not only that: If you examine the stamp on the left, you will notice it is from Botswana, which Bechuanaland became with independence in 1966. Thus you have a fourth replication which transcends colonialism, independence and neocolonialism in some dizzying fashion.



This early first-day cover from independent Botswana might cost you \$20 or more on eBay.

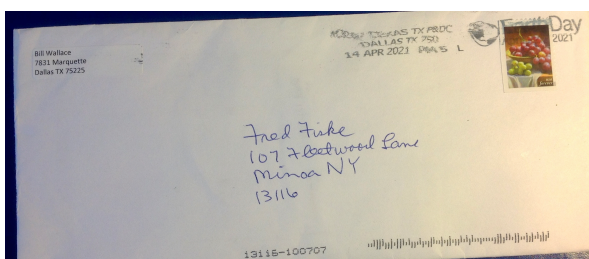


Continuing the dynasty: Khama Ian Khama was elected president of Botswana in 2008 and had a successful 10-year presidency. Here he is meeting with U.S. President Obama. Some day this biracial president may be known as Africa's Obama; or will the former U.S. president — also the son of an interracial couple — be remembered as America's Khama?

Bechuanaland Protectorate was with a light hand, with few demands and considerable deference to the king and his chiefs, who were manifestly capable of ruling their own people. The discovery of more diamonds in Bechuanaland/ Botswana didn't hurt. A workable relationship continued through the decades, up to Botswana's independence day in 1966 and beyond — one hopes to this very day.

ADDENDUM

You may remember that I use these stamp essays on specific countries as an opportunity to examine my collection with an eye to filling in gaps. My wife and I recently found ourselves flush with cash, so I dashed online and checked out the Bechuanaland listings. I pounced on a few, and suddenly found my bill rising past \$100. After a conjugal financial consult yielded an agreement to squander \$150 on stamps (oops, it ended up more like \$180-something), I returned to my happy task. I placed my order, and payments went winging their electronic way, one to Texas, the other to China. Within days, the letter from Texas arrived, with the bulk of my order. What fun. (see details on next page)





I spent more than \$130 on these beauties. Top left is an early pair that fills out a set — wait till you see how they look in my album! I paid \$33 for the tall stamp in the middle — a one shilling stamp surcharged one shilling. The beautiful mint set of George V stamps along the bottom row also cost me \$33. A fair deal. (You might ask: What's the difference between the two George V one shilling stamps on the right? The answer is: different watermarks. If you want to know more, you may consult a future FMF Stamp Project essay on watermarks that I am dreading to write, because the topic is so tedious.)

Alert readers ask: What about the stamps ordered from China? Indeed, it's been a month, and all I know is that the stamps were marked sent — a month ago. (I have a sudden fear that this is the same outfit in China I had trouble with some time ago. (I just checked my FMF Stamp Project blog and sure enough, there's a short essay from December 2018 that involved a shipping problem with the same seller.) At least I “only” spent about \$48 on this order. And look at a couple of interesting stamps I ordered (see images below, captured from my online order). Will the stamps ever arrive, undamaged by the elements? Wish me luck and keep your philatelic phingers crossed



Here are two examples of the 1/2d Jubilee stamp from Great Britain. The left one is overprinted British Bechuanaland. The stamp on the right is a I head-scratcher: the already-overprinted 1/2d stamp gets another ragged overprint saying “Protectorate” and in addition is surcharged “Fourpence.” However, the surcharge is shifted so far left, it reads:

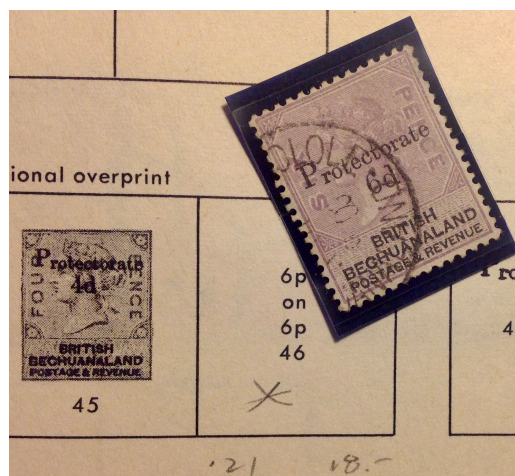
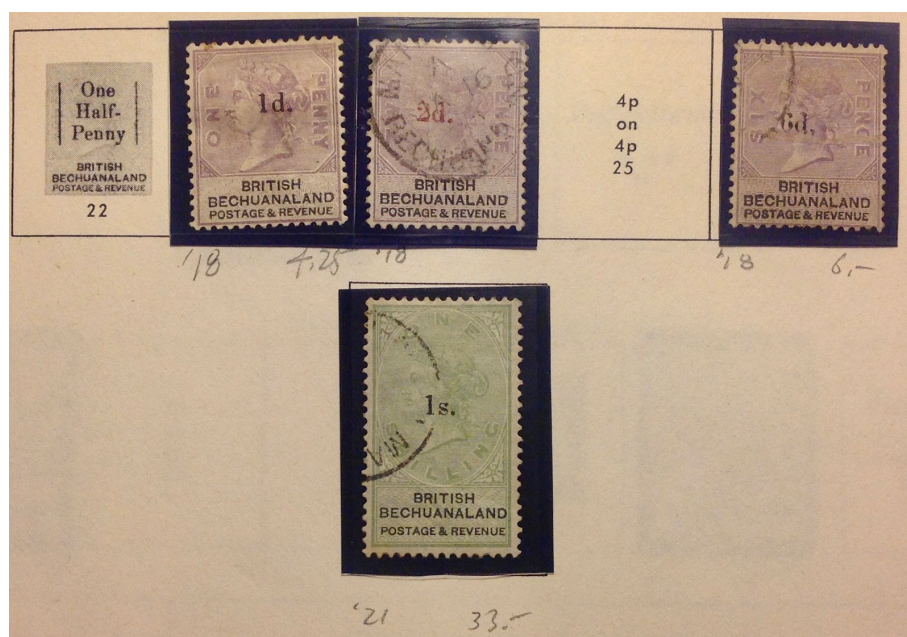
“ourpence F”
Do you think postal patrons were confused? I am confused! (These two stamps cost me \$3.90.)



Well, let's go with what we've got, mount my terrific new stamps in the British Africa album, and enjoy the result.



This is the most fun way I have found to present to you the pleasure of mounting stamps in an album. At left I have "thrown" on the page my two newly acquired British Bechuanaland stamps from the first set — strategically, so that you can see the two spots waiting for them. At right the two stamps are mounted and I display the whole set — missing only the one shilling value, which is priced at more than \$100. The 4d blue may look undistinguished, but I paid \$27 for it, and it catalogues at over \$50.



Here are two more "mountings" — above and left. Note the hefty prices paid. Oof! Can you identify the difference between the 6d surcharge in the top pictures and at left? SPOILER ALERT: at left, the "Protectorate" overprint has been added.



At left I have strewn my new George V Bechuanaland Protectorate stamps artfully on the page. Below is the finished page — now I only need one more stamp, the first 6d, to make two complete sets with both watermarks.



POSTSCRIPT

After waiting more than a month for my Bechuanaland and Malta stamps from China, my time had run out to file a complaint. Luckily I found the address of the sender (by scrutinizing digital images or correspondence that I used in the blog in 2018!). I sent a note to huasin@live.cn>

Greetings. I have not received my order from last month (4/10/2021)

The order numbers are:

xa0778 — Malta (\$42.95)

xa0069 — Bechuanaland (\$.95)

xa0411 — Bechuanaland (\$2.95)

The total charge, plus \$2 postage, was \$48.80.

I did not lodge a complaint because I did not want to hurt your business, and kept hoping the stamps would arrive. Please advise.

Thank you. Fred Fiske

A note back arrived promptly:

发件人: Du Wei <huasin@live.cn>

发送时间: 2021年5月12日 8:51

收件人: Fred Fiske <fredmfiske@gmail.com>

主题: 回复: order not received

Hi, It shipped out on April 11, register #: RA555827660CN. The tracking info shows that it went to the airport on May 6 and leaving for oversea same day.

Usually mails to US take about 3-4 weeks, but we do expect delays during the pandemic. Delivery and update are slow sometimes. I will put this mail on my tracking list, and, If you like, I will keep you informed with new updates.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further questions or concerns.

Best regards, Du Wei

Geez. Amazon delivery this ain't. If this is the best China can do — holding the letter from April 11 to May 6, then blaming the pandemic — I wonder how China has become a world superpower, vs. the US with Bezos and Amazon, not to mention the efficient USPS.

There followed promptly this update:

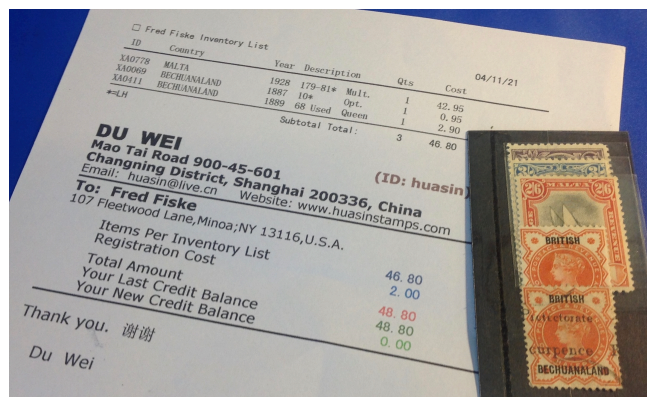
Arrived New York distribution center on May 19. The item is currently in transit to the destination, as they put it. Seems it's near you. Du We

I sent back a simple “thank you,” because it looks like things will work out, as they usually do on the Peaceable Planet of Philately!

On May 20 came another update from China:

It arrived New York distribution center on May 19. Arrived Syracuse center on May 20, and departed the center same day. Is currently in transit to the destination, as they put it.
Du Wei

And *mirabile dictu*, on May 21, this was awaiting me in my mailbox:



Above and at right are the stamps I ordered from China, which finally arrived! Isn't it nice to know there still can be happy endings? Notice the three Malta beauties — which have nothing to do with Bechuanaland, the supposed target of my latest collecting blitz. As so often happens, in seeking out stamps, this collector is diverted by tempting offers and strays from the path.