

THE 1d. LILAC UNIFIED STAMP PART 4: GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT OVERPRINTS

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In previous articles Robert Galland described the basic 1d. lilac stamp and its usage (*GSM* March-May 2024). In this and a following article Robert provides an overview of the 1d. lilac stamp which has been overprinted for various reasons. Here he describes the overprints produced for use by British Government Departments.

Official mail passed free between most offices of government. The Inland Revenue had its own overprinted stamps from 1882. Government Parcels overprinted stamps were introduced in 1883 and were used by almost any department. It was to be almost another 14 years before another specific department had overprints for its stamps. Overprinted stamps for both the Office of Works and the Army were issued in 1896.

Inland Revenue

In addition to the 1d. lilac, the Victorian stamps eventually overprinted for use by the Inland Revenue department were the 6d. Plate 18, ½d. deep green from the Provisional issue, ½d. slate-blue, 2½d., 1s. from the Lilac and Green issue, ½d. vermilion, ½d. blue-green, 2½d., 6d., 1s. dull green, 1s. green and carmine from the Jubilee issue and 5s., 10s. and £1 brown-lilac and £1 green high values.

The overprint used for the low value stamps is shown in *Figure 1*.

Essays

Three types of essay are described:

- 'OFFICIAL/I.R.' with the components of the overprint reversed (*Fig 2*). Some 12 examples are currently recorded which includes one in the Royal Philatelic Collection.
- Different letters to the accepted overprint which are thinner and 'C', 'A' and 'L' differ in shape from normal. Only five are currently known one being in the Royal Philatelic Collection.
- Overprinted in red. There is a photograph of a complete sheet in the British Library. The item is believed to have been once held at Somerset House. Whether the original still exists is unknown.



Fig 1 The 'I.R./OFFICIAL' overprint was applied in two lines and used uppercase, sans serif letters in black ink



Fig 2 An essay of the Inland Revenue official overprint with 'OFFICIAL/I.R.' instead of the adopted 'I.R./OFFICIAL' format



Fig 3 An imperforate 1d. lilac with the 'I.R./OFFICIAL' overprint. This is probably from one of the two imperforate registration sheets produced



Fig 4 A marginal strip of four I.R. Officials from the later X control period

Registration

Three overprint plates were used for 1d. lilac stamps and one of each was registered and is in The Postal Museum. One of these sheets was perforated and stamps from it cannot be differentiated from normal stamps, other than by markings on the reverse. Imperforate stamps probably come from the two imperforate registration sheets (*Fig 3*).

Printing

With only three overprint plates being made, which were used for a long time, they suffered considerable wear. The typeface thickened and spread slightly with use. This led to overprints being described as thin, medium and thick. Broken letters can also be found.

The stamps were issued from October 1882 and about 120 million stamps were produced. *Figure 4* shows a marginal strip of four with control letter X.

Varieties

In addition to shade variations of the basic 1d. stamp, throughout the 16 years of use varieties include 'OFFICIAL' omitted, double overprint, worn letters and the use of blue-black ink.

De La Rue produced some 20 or so types of black ink. They were making blue-black inks from the mid-1870s any of which may have been used for overprint experiments. Blue-black ink is recorded on stamps removed from registration sheets, including the imperforate examples described earlier. They are not associated only with stamps of the N control period as sometimes stated. In total about 100 examples are recorded, but this is probably an underestimate.

The first stamp in the strip of three shown in *Figure 5* illustrates either that a foreign body has landed on the plate before printing or that a crack in the plate has developed. The flaw extends from the top almost to the bottom of the stamp.

Stamps handstamped 'SPECIMEN' and 'CANCELLED'

Examples are known handstamped 'SPECIMEN' Type 9 and it is reported a top right block of six and a top left block of 12 with Type 18 'CANCELLED' handstamp are in The Postal Museum.

A 1d. lilac stamp together with a ½d. green and 6d. Plate 18 (lower corner letters LE) are known taken from a page, headed 'IR. Official' in manuscript, from WH Mulock's book (*Fig 6*). Mulock was Head of the Confidential Enquiry Branch at the GPO. The book comprised about 18 pages with stamps of 1880-1890 mostly overprinted 'SPECIMEN'.

Government Parcels

The first of these Government Parcels departmental stamps to be issued was the 1s. orange-brown (Plates 13 and 14) in August 1883. The subsequent Victorian stamps to be overprinted were the 1½d., 6d. and 9d. from the Lilac and Green issue, 1½d., 2d., 4½d., 6d., 9d., 1s. dull green and 1s. green and carmine from Jubilee issue. In June 1897 the 1d. lilac became the penultimate stamp of this series to be issued.

Established in 1883 the parcel post led to the introduction of stamps with 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprints. Railway companies received 55 per cent of the postage paid for parcels, except for those of government departments. Use of stamps with 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprints indicated that no charge should be made. By the early part of the 20th century more than 50 departments used these stamps. Most were used by the Post Office, Inland Revenue and War Office. As they were to be used for parcels their use on letters was not allowed, although covers are occasionally seen from the late 1880s. One such is

Fig 5 The first stamp in this strip of three I.R. Officials contains a flaw caused by either a foreign body on the plate or a crack in the plate



Fig 6 The centre stamp on this page, taken from a book produced by WH Mulock of the Confidential Enquiry Branch at the GPO, shows a 1d. lilac I.R. Official with a Type 9 'SPECIMEN' overprint



Fig 7 The 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprints were not allowed for use on letters, although some covers from the late 1880s are known with overprinted stamps (Reduced)



**GOVT
PARCELS**

Fig 8 The 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprint, in black ink, was applied in two lines and used uppercase sans serif letters. The 'T' is smaller and elevated with dot beneath it



Fig 9 A 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprint variety featuring the missing dot variety below the letter 'T'

the OHMS envelope dated 10 January 1901 used within Honiton shown in *Figure 7*. The overprint used is shown in *Figure 8*.

Printing

The date of issue was 18 June 1897, but the earliest known usage is reported as being 2 June 1898. About 6000 sheets were printed, all during control letters V and W periods.

Varieties

Varieties include displaced overprints and a number of broken or displaced letters and missing dot below the letter 'T' (*Fig 9*). It is also known with watermark inverted. There is some evidence that the overprint may also have been printed in blue-black ink.

Overprint inverted.

An inverted overprint was first recorded in 1898. About 40 unused and 20 used copies are recorded. (Fig 10).

Forgeries are not uncommon. Figure 11 shows an example with the letter 'T' too close to the 'V'; the cross bar of the 'T' is therefore shortened and there is a line instead of a dot below the 'T'.



Fig 10 About 40 unused and 20 used copies of the 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprint are known with the overprint inverted



Fig 11 A forgery of the 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprint. The letter 'T' is too close to the 'V', leading to a shortened cross bar, and there is a line instead of a dot below the 'T'

Stamps handstamped 'SPECIMEN' and 'CANCELLED'

Examples cancelled 'SPECIMEN' Type 15 (Fig 12) are uncommon as are those with 'CANCELLED' overprints.

Office of Works

The Office of Works was essentially responsible for maintenance of royal and public buildings. A Post Office circular to Postmasters announced the issue of overprinted stamps on 24 March 1896, the same month that the overprint was registered. Perfins had been deemed unsatisfactory. Overprinted stamps were to be issued to Assistant Surveyors at eight major cities in England and Scotland and to Clerks of Works and Embassies abroad. In addition to the 1d. lilac, other Victorian stamps overprinted included the ½d. vermilion ½d. blue-green, and the Jubilee 5d. and 10d. The overprint used is shown in Figure 13.



Fig 12 A 'GOVT/PARCELS' overprint with 'SPECIMEN' overprint

O. W.
OFFICIAL

Fig 13 The Office of Works 'O.W./OFFICIAL' overprint was applied in two lines, with uppercase, sans serif type in black ink

Printing

The Office of Works was a small department and so compared with other departmental overprints quantities produced were small. Consequently, forgeries are relatively common. In all, fewer than 500 sheets of the 1d. lilac were produced during the U, W and X control periods. The stamp is used on an 'H.M. Office of Works, /EDINBURGH.' envelope dated 6 December 1900 in Figure 14.



Fig 14 A 'H.M. Office of Works, EDINBURGH.' cover postmarked 6 December 1900 with an Office of Works 'O.W./OFFICIAL' stamp (Reduced)

Varieties

As with all overprints, damage to the letters because of wear resulted in a number of flaws.

Stamps handstamped 'SPECIMEN' and 'CANCELLED'

'SPECIMEN' Types 9 and 15 (Fig 15) and 'CANCELLED' Type 18 (De La Rue colour standard) handstamps are all recorded. None are common.

Army

Operational Army Post Offices tended to take supplies of the basic 1d. lilac without overprint with them. Requests by the Army for an overprinted stamp for use by civilians working in the Army Post Office and other parts of the War Department in Britain occurred almost in parallel with those of the Office of Works. The overprinted stamp was registered in July

Essays

A number of essays are known, they are all rare. Mostly they relate to the gaps between the two lines of the overprint.

Printing

The stamp was first issued 1 September 1896. Almost 95,000 sheets were printed during the U, V, W and X control periods. Figures 17 to 19 show marginal pairs from the first and last of those periods and a used stamp on a small piece from the U control period. Figure 20 shows a block of six with 'ALDERSHOT' cancellations.

Varieties

The overprint is known displaced to the left or right (Fig 21). Extensive use produced broken, deformed and worn letters. These include the broken 'L' that resulted in 'OFFICIAI' on row 13, stamp 7 of one plate (Fig 22), a thick or short foot to the 'L' (Fig 23), a shorter first I, a dot between the legs of the letter 'R' (Fig 24) and a shortened leg to the letter A of ARMY (Fig 25).

Stamps handstamped 'SPECIMEN' and 'CANCELLED'

'SPECIMEN' Type 9, a UPU sample overprinted diagonally 'SPECIMEN' with unserifed letters from the Natal Post Office, and a De La Rue colour standard 'CANCELLED' Type 18 are all recorded. None are common.

Next month I will discuss examples of 1d. lilac overprinted for use in African countries.



Fig 15 An Office of Works official with a Type 15 'SPECIMEN' handstamp

ARMY
OFFICIAL

Fig 16 'ARMY/OFFICIAL', in black ink, was applied in two lines and used uppercase sans serif, 11.75 mm apart



Fig 17 A mint corner marginal pair of the 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint from the early U control period



Fig 18 A used 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint from the U control period



Fig 19 A mint corner marginal pair of the 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint from the later X control period



Fig 20 A block of six 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint with 'ALDERSHOT' cancellations



Fig 21 A pair of the 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' with the overprint displaced to the right



Fig 22 An 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint with the 'OFFICIAL' variety



Fig 23 The bottom stamp of this vertical pair has the short foot to the 'L' variety



Fig 24 An 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint with a dot between the legs of the letter R



Fig 25 shortened leg to the letter 'A' of ARMY on an 'ARMY/OFFICIAL' overprint