

Falkland Islands: The 1891 Provisional Issue

By Michael J Y Roberts FRPSL

When the UK Post Office announced that it would reduce the Empire rate from 4d. per ½oz. to 2½d. per ½oz., with effect from 1 January 1891, the Falkland Islands Post Office was invited to do the same. However, as new stamps to facilitate the change didn't arrive until ten months after the introduction of the new rate, a provisional issue had to be created. Michael Roberts FRPSL tells us more.

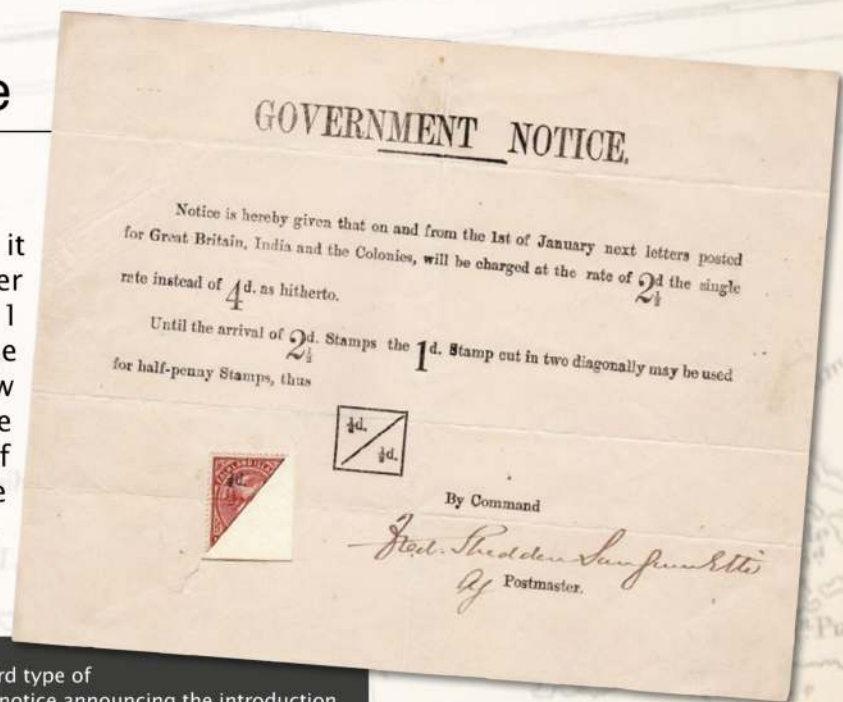


Fig 1 The third type of government notice announcing the introduction of the bisect and '½d.' surcharge (Reduced)

Issues involving bisects always stimulate proportionately more interest from philatelists and postal historians alike. This interest is, unfortunately, also shown by forgers and fakers the world over. The Falkland Islands provisional issue of 1891 is no exception.

The background to the Falkland Islands 1891 provisional issue started in mid-1890 when the UK Post Office made the decision to reduce the Empire rate of 4d. per ½oz. to 2½d. per ½oz., with effect from 1 January 1891. In July 1890, the then acting Postmaster, Frederick Sanguinetti, received a notification inviting the Falkland Islands (the Colony) to follow suit. Sanguinetti, who had only just taken over the role and had numerous other duties to perform, was not experienced in such matters. He duly reported to the Executive Committee that such a change would result in a loss of income (he had obviously not taken into account the philatelic demand for the 'new issue').

Indecision and lack of action

We can only surmise that much debate took place, which wasted valuable time. It was not until 11 September 1890 that the Executive Committee did vote to follow suit. Sanguinetti wrote back to the Colonial Office communicating this, but he neglected to order any new stamps, having not thought through the implications of the rate change; the Colony had no ½d. or 2½d. stamps.

It was not until mid-December that any order was made to the Crown Agents, by which time the change in the postal rate from 1 January 1891 was imminent. Bizarrely, the order included 2½d. stamps in orange and ½d. stamps in brick red, sized at three quarters of ordinary size, which was not in accordance with UPU regulations.

Emergency measures

Arrangements had to be made to facilitate the new rate. A notice appeared in the *Falkland Island Gazette* of 15 December



Fig 2 The '½d.' surcharge in its original (left) and worn states (right) (Enlarged)

1890 indicating the reduced rate, together with an explanation showing the bisecting of the 1d. stamps. We know that three government notices were issued, these are all recorded and all have established provenances. They all bear examples of the bisected 1d. brownish claret with a '½d.' surcharge. All are signed by Sanguinetti, but only the third notice has the surcharge actually impressed on the bisect diagram (*Fig 1*). Originally, the surcharge appeared as shown in the left-hand image in *Figure 2*; the worn state is shown on the right.

Creating the surcharge

The ½d. surcharge was effected locally using a composing stick. This was a small and cumbersome piece of kit by comparison with the size of the stamps being surcharged. Its use was surely an awkward and time-consuming operation. This appears to be the reason why, even on the first mail of 24 January 1891, not all the stamps were surcharged and not all stamps were properly separated.

Continued use of bisects

Because Sanguinetti had not ordered new stamps until December 1890, and these were not in accordance with UPU colours or types, it was always going to take some time before new issues in the form of ½d. and 2½d. arrived. These were eventually despatched in the summer of 1891, within UPU colour guides, namely green and blue respectively, and all the same size. The ship bringing these new supplies to Stanley was the *Kosmos Neko*, the ship foundered on its way south and the supplies had to be reordered. It was not until 10 September 1891 that new supplies of stamps were finally put on sale. At that time, obviously relieved at the new arrivals, the Postmaster fulfilled a large number of philatelic orders which were all cancelled with a c.d.s. as opposed to the 'corks' used for commercial mail (see later). It is interesting to note that originally Sanguinetti had pointed out a projected

deficiency of £83 a year because of the reduction in the postal rate. He had not taken into account the philatelic demand; in the first year the revenue had actually increased by £430 in 1891 and a further £120 in 1892.

A Government notice in the *Gazette* dated 10 September 1891 states, 'A supply of 2½d. and ½d. stamps having been received, no further issues of the provisional half penny stamp will be made'.

A further notice, which was published in the *Gazette* on 11 January 1892, reminding the public that as the new stamps had been received, 'the provisional half stamp is no longer in use and from this date letters received with the provisional half stamp affixed will be treated as insufficiently paid to the amount of ½d and the addressees will be liable for double the deficiency'.

Whilst technically invalid, the use of unsurcharged bisects continued from the outlying settlements until July 1892. This was because of the time taken for new supplies to reach the more remote farms, although very little commercial advantage seems to have been taken of this concession.

Nearly all mail seen with bisects after January 1892 is both invalid and philatelic; but posthumous examples are frequently seen both on and off cover.

It is important to understand something of the Falkland Islands mail arrangements before we go further into detail of the postal history of this issue. All these important facets need to be brought together to fully understand the correct usage and to prove the items are (as far as one can tell) genuine in all aspects.

Contract mail

The Kosmos Steamship Company of Hamburg had a mail contract with the Falkland Islands Government at this time, which resulted in monthly calls at Port Stanley for outward and homeward mail. Because these dates were known well in advance, mail was cancelled at the Post Office on the day or the day before the arrival of a steamer. Many letters were answered on the day and the return mail despatched immediately. Study over the years has shown a direct match between the cancellation dates and the steamer departures. Most of the steamer movements were for direct services to and from Europe, but it was also possible to receive indirect mails through Montevideo and Punta Arenas in Chile, which synchronised with other steamship services touching these ports. The most important of these was the Pacific Steam Navigation Company (PSNC), who by this time had a mail contract between Liverpool and Valparaiso with intermediate ports.

Use of different obliteratedors

The post office in Stanley had the use of both an oval steel 'killer' and counter datestamps. However, it was homemade cork cancellers which were used in the main to cancel the actual adhesives. Over the years, much investigation has been carried out on this topic. It is possible to



Fig 3 The 'first bisect' cork, used up to mid-September 1891 (left) and the 'large squares' cork used from October 1891 until February 1892 (right)



Fig 4 A piece from a registered letter sent on the first mailing of the provisional issue (24 January 1891). Like most examples, the bisect does not bear the '½d.' surcharge

determine the date of an item (within some limits) by reference to the type of cork used.

During the legal currency of the provisional issue, there are only two relevant types, the main one being known as the 'first bisect' cork, which is known used up to mid-September 1891. This was followed by the 'large squares' cork known used from October 1891 until February 1892 (Fig 3). Posthumous examples of bisects, those used and cancelled after 11 January 1892, usually display different cork markings making them easy to identify as being outside the correct period of legal usage.

The stamp printings

Only two main printings of the 1d. were ever formally surcharged with the ½d. overprint. The first to be overprinted was the 1d. brownish claret from the 1887 printing. Additional characteristics here are the watermarks, which were all sideways, and the fact that all four of the sheets margins were imperforate. On 21 April 1891, a further printing of the 1d. was released, this being in red brown. Again, all four sheet margins were imperforate, but the watermarked paper was upright. It is possible that examples exist of the 1d. pale claret with a surcharge (1885 printing), but this has not been properly proven on cover.

To summarise therefore, in order to satisfy the requirements that an item is 'right' it should be:

1. On one of the designated printings.
2. If surcharged, the overprint should accord with the original type set or its worn state.
3. If used, the bisect should be obliterated by the use of one of the two correct corks (only one mailing saw the use of a steel canceller).
4. Usually, but not of absolute necessity, have a datestamp corresponding with a known steamer departure.

Postal history

The first sailing from Port Stanley was on 24 January 1891 by the Kosmos *Kambyses*. The steamer was six days later than advertised. The mails reached London on 27 February and Germany on 1 March. Of the 17 items known, only two covers had surcharged bisects. For reasons already mentioned, the postal clerks were very busy on the day of a steamer departure (all covers had a c.d.s. for '24 JA 91') and did not have the time or, one might suggest, the inclination to surcharge further stamps for inclusion on the letters. This omission is consistent right across the bisect period, only 30 items being known with surcharges out of an overall total of 170 items known to have survived. A piece from an item sent on the first mailing is illustrated (Fig 4).

The second mailing of the year was by Kosmos *Denderah*, which arrived in Stanley on 10 February and departed on the 13th direct to England; arriving in London on 21 March 1891.



Fig 5 Cover with surcharged bisects, sent by West Falkland rancher Robert Blake to his business partner in London

Below: Fig 6 Registered cover which left Stanley on board the *Kosmos Isis* on 28 March 1891. The 4d. stamp and ½d. bisect, used to pay the 4½d. rate for registered mail, are cancelled with the 'first bisect' cork



It is interesting to note that at this time a number of the ships from the Royal Navy's South Atlantic Squadron were in port, including HMS *Cleopatra*, HMS *Beagle* and HMS *Basilisk*. Mail from naval personnel was included in this batch, as was an important item from Robert Blake, a pioneer rancher at Shallow Bay, West Falkland. The cover shown at Figure 5, which includes surcharged bisects, was sent by Blake to his business partner in London, Ernest Homested. It is a welcome characteristic of the study of the postal history of these islands that one can, with some detective work, find a full history of both the sender and receiver of some of the covers. In this case it has been possible to identify both.

Further mails

Thirteen more mailings were made during the official period of use in 1891.

19 February: Kosmos *Pentaur*

This was an indirect mailing. Letters were transhipped to PSNC *Liguria*, which reached London on 12 April. A small group of covers was cancelled by the steel killer, not the usual 'first bisect' cork canceller.

28 March: Kosmos *Isis*

The mail reached London on 2 May. Included in this mail (of which 14 items are known to have survived) are two registered items. The fee for registration at the time was 2d., making a total of 4½d. for an Empire registered letter, thus having to utilise a ½d. bisect. Figure 6 shows one of these registered covers, the stamps being cancelled with a 'first bisect' cork. Both the despatch and arrival dates are on the obverse, together with a manuscript '11' in blue showing the number of registered items despatched. Again, the bisect is unsurcharged.

14 April: Kosmos *Herodot*

The indirect mailing left on 15 April. Mail was transferred to PSNC *Sorata* at Punta Arenas and arrived in London on 23 May,



Fig 7 Cover from the 14 April 1891 mailing with two 1d. stamps and an unsurcharged ½d. bisect to pay the 2½d. per ½oz. Empire rate

having been landed at Lisbon. An example of one of the covers from the mailing is shown at *Figure 7*. It is addressed to the well-known newspaper agents, Messrs Kirkland Cope & Co of Northumberland Street. A number of surviving covers exist to this addressee.

20 May: Kosmos Pentaur

This was a direct service back to Europe, with mail arriving in London on 26 June.

26 June: Kosmos Ramses

An indirect service via Punta Arenas where the mail was transferred to PSNC *Liguria*, reaching London on 31 July.

11 July: Kosmos Herodot

This was an indirect mail via Montevideo, with mail arriving in London on 11 August.

3 August: Kosmos Karnac

This was another indirect mail with letters transferred to PSNC *Sorata* at Montevideo. The mail reached London via Lisbon on 14 September.

4 September: Kosmos Theben

The *Theben* arrived in Stanley on 4 September. This was the relief ship for the *Neko*, which had foundered on her way south, along with supplies of the new ½d. and 2½d. stamps. The mails were taken to Punta Arenas where they were transferred to PSNC *Potosi*, arriving in London on 9 October.

15 September: Kosmos Totmes

This was a direct mail and the London arrival was 19 October. This mailing carried the first examples of the new ½d. and 2½d. stamps, which were made available for use from 10 September. It was at this time that the Post Office gazetted the notice proclaiming that there were no more surcharged bisects to be produced, although their invalidation did not take place until January 1892 and many remained in stock for immediate use.

28 October: Kosmos Herodot

This was an indirect sailing via Punta Arenas, where the mail was transferred to PSNC *Britannia*. The London arrival, via Lisbon, was 30 November. Because the foreign rate remained at 4d. per oz, there was no requirement to use bisects on letters outside the Empire, but it was inevitable that some individuals in the islands had stocks of the provisional which needed to be used before they became invalid. Illustrated at *Figure 8* is a cover to the USA which uses two ½d. unsurcharged bisects within the total rate of 4d. for ½oz.

17 November: Kosmos Theben

This was an indirect mail via Montevideo where the mail was transferred to PSNC *Magdalena*, which reached London on 19 December.

21 November: HMS Magpie

This was effectively an extra mail. *Theben*

G.S.M. July 2017



Fig 8 Two ½d. unsurcharged bisects used to make up the 4d. foreign rate to the USA. This is a very rare and unusual usage of the provisional issue (Reduced)



Fig 9 An undated piece with an inverted forged broken 2 surcharge



Fig 10 An example of a forged surcharge on an incorrect stamp

had left and some mail was taken by this naval vessel and transferred to Lamport & Holt's *Leibnitz*, arriving in Southampton on 5 January 1892.

23 December: Kosmos Abydos

This was an indirect mail via Montevideo, where the mail was transferred to PSNC *Potosi*, arriving London 28 January 1892.

Posthumous examples

Further sailings obviously took place throughout 1892 but were outside the period of validity for the provisional issue. To fully understand and appreciate the issue, it is important to touch on further aspects of the aforementioned 'posthumous examples', be they items intended to deceive or be of philatelic origin for the collectors market.

First, let us consider the use of different surcharge types created to deceive collectors. A few known examples are shown in *Figure 9* and *Figure 10*. In the main, these are not likely to fool an expert; some are even overprinted on stamps which were not issued until later in 1892 or subsequent years.

A particularly good example of an item intended to deceive is seen on a piece using the correct red brown printing of 1891 (*Fig 11*). This is accompanied by an expertising certificate of 1971 describing the item as a correct use of a double surcharge. Unfortunately for the forger, much work was done by members of the Falkland Islands Study Group in the 1970s. This item displays part of a London Registered receiving mark which has been cut away leaving only the part date '17 SE 9'. It also shows a cancellation by a 'Pincers' cork, which was only in use on one mail in August 1894! This in turn fits with the removal of the last part of the date, which should read '17 SE 94'. Careful research and caution must be taken if one is acquiring one of these items. As this example shows, no one should rely on an old certificate, in practice, one that is over 15 years old.

The commonest form of used philatelic single stamps actually occurred on 11 September 1891 during the legal period (and, therefore, technically not posthumous). This was a day after the new ½d. and 2½d. stamps were put on sale. These were also cancelled with the standard c.d.s. for that date. It is worth showing an example (*Fig 12*).

There are a number of covers which were constructed during 1893 and 1894 which are not intended to deceive but should just be



Fig 11 Despite the use of the correct 1891 red brown printing of the 1d., the 'Pincers' cork cancel, which was only used in August 1894, two years after the surcharge was invalidated, identifies this as a forged double surcharged bisect



Fig 12 A surcharged bisect cancelled on 11 September 1891, the day after the new ½d. and 2½d. stamps were put on sale

regarded as what they are, blatantly philatelic examples in an invalid period.

To conclude, this is without doubt a very interesting issue for both the philatelist and the postal historian. Provided proper care is taken with regard to all the characteristics detailed, there are some very noteworthy items still in existence, but to labour the point again DO NOT rely on old certificates!

References

- All covers and pieces illustrated are the property of the author.
- Falkland Islands Gazette*, December 1890–February 1892.
- The Falkland Islands – the 1891 Provisionals*, Malcolm Barton.
- The Postal History of the Falkland Islands 1800–1945*, Michael J Y Roberts.
- The Falkland Islands and Dependencies Specialised Stamp Catalogue*, SF Heijtz.