

# THE ZULULAND £5: A CONTROVERSY RESOLVED

By Dr Philip Kinns

The Zululand 1894 £5 purple and black is notorious for being the target of forgers. However, has this, and De La Rue's reputation for exceptionally high production standards, led to genuine errors being dismissed as bogus? Dr Philip Kinns, Emeritus Director of Philately at Stanley Gibbons, presents new research on an unusual example of this rare high value, previously claimed to be a forgery, that justifies a full catalogue listing.

The Zululand 1894 £5 purple and black on red (SG 29) has always been a stamp of some renown, as much for its high face value and rarity as its relatively undistinguished appearance – being a regular, small-format De La Rue keyplate of the standard 'POSTAGE & REVENUE' design used by many colonies in the late 19th century. Until quite recent times it used to appear on the very last page of the *Commonwealth & British Empire 'Part I'* catalogue, and it has also enjoyed a degree of notoriety, thanks to the long-standing awareness that dangerous forgeries are reported to exist (see RL *Encyclopaedia* Vol II p.117, and the 'Part I' footnote after SG 29).

The details of its printing are well established. From the De La Rue records we know that the duty plate of 60 'leads' (struck from the original die) was manufactured on 9 May 1894, and that the die, plate and completed stamps were invoiced on 19 June 1894.

The issue date '18 Apr 1894' given in 'Part I' for all values of the set apart from the later 1896 2s.6d. value (26) is clearly not correct, and seems likely to be valid only for the 1d. value. J Easton in his *De La Rue History* records that the 1d. value was invoiced on 22 February 1894, followed by the ½d. and £5 on 20 June 1894, but the remaining values from 2½d to £1 were only invoiced on 5 December 1894, not even having been ordered until 4 September.

Just 1200 were supplied, printed on Watermark Crown CA paper and comb perf 14, as ten sheets of 120, each comprising two panes of 60 (6×10), side by side and separated by a central gutter. Also produced were a further 750 stamps (equivalent to 12½ panes) for distribution by the UPU to member countries with a 'SPECIMEN' overprint (29s). There was no second printing of this £5 value.

Given the exceptionally high production standards maintained by De La Rue as the premier security printers of the day, it is a reasonable expectation that every single example of the Zululand £5 would be identical in appearance, apart from possible slight variations in shade (the purple of the 'SPECIMEN' examples tends to be deeper than is usually encountered on the issued stamps).

Now for the problem. In fact, it has become apparent in recent years that examples are extant which do not conform to the expected norms, specifically those with a much 'thicker' impression of the black duty plate reading 'ZULULAND/£5' (Fig 1). What is the explanation?

## First impressions

When I and my Stanley Gibbons colleague, Chris Palmer, first encountered an unused, full gum example of this description, we were unaware that literature on the subject already existed, and so were able to form an innocent and unbiased opinion. As members of the BPA Expert Committee, we were used to the essential principles involved in the authentication of such a stamp, and our conclusion was that it appeared to be genuine in all respects, with the 'thick duty plate' effect seemingly the result of a virtually coincident double impression. But was this possible or conceivable, when only 20 panes had been printed?

## An act of fraud?

A few years later, the plot thickened considerably. It transpired that a detailed study by Peter Whitmore and Clive Sergay, entitled 'The ZULULAND £5 forgery', had been published in the *Cape & Natal Philatelic Journal* (vol. 14 no. 4 (Dec 2010), pp. 156–65), and reprinted in 2014 with better illustrations in *Fakes, Forgeries, Experts*, the journal of the AIEP (the International Association of Philatelic Experts).

The Sergay-Whitmore conclusion was that the 'thick duty plate' examples were forgeries, but forgeries of a very peculiar character. Not only had they located and analysed some dozen examples in a variety of condition – unused, used with postal-type c.d.s., and used with different types of fiscal cancel, both manuscript and dated handstamps (proving proper usage in Zululand between 1896 and 1898) – but they felt obliged to admit that all were printed from the *genuine* keyplate, with *genuine* paper and perforations.

Their theory was that the perpetrator of the 'forgery' had somehow obtained from De La Rue a sheet with blank duty tablets, to which the (forged) 'thick duty plate' version of 'ZULULAND/£5' had subsequently been applied. These confections had then (so their



Fig 1 A genuine, Specimen example of the Zululand 1894 £5 purple and black (SG29s) alongside an example featuring a 'thicker' impression of the black duty plate. This peculiarity has previously been claimed to be a forgery. However, new research has proved that it is a genuine double impression error

theory goes) somehow been infiltrated into the genuine stock of £5 stamps in the Treasury at the capital, Eshowe, with the implication that an equivalent quantity of originals had been stolen. By these means, the alleged forgeries will have been issued and properly used.

The extreme difficulties and improbabilities inherent in this theory do not need to be spelt out in detail. How could a sheet with blank duty tablets (presumably at that point imperforate and ungummed) have been removed from De La Rue? And why was this remarkable object then provided with such relatively rough impressions of the 'ZULULAND/£5' black duty, when this should have been simple to copy with accuracy? By definition, this alleged fraud would have to have been co-ordinated from Eshowe, with the connivance of the top officials who alone had access to the stamp stock, and possible 'suspects' have indeed been named, to the posthumous ruin of their reputations. In *Fakes, Forgeries, Experts* Sergay and Whitmore focus on John Windham, Registrar of Deeds from 1 December 1895, Major Harry Gardner, Treasurer and Distributor of Stamps from 22 December 1890, and Victor George Robinson, who was Gardner's clerk from 27 October 1893.

## The double impression explanation

There is a need to step back and consider whether another explanation for the 'thick duty plate' stamps is possible. It was mentioned above that the present author and Chris Palmer, after unprejudiced close examination of a single unused example, had formed the opinion that a double impression was involved, and it is important to note that Sergay and Whitmore were aware of a similar conclusion. This was reached by the respected dealer and Africa specialist David Brandon, who, on 5 January 2010, had issued his certificate No. 40145 for a used example, stating that, 'black (country name and value) doubly printed ... is genuine'.

But Sergay and Whitmore were convinced that the 'thick duty plate' could not have been printed by De La Rue, and so gave their conclusion (in bold type) that, 'With a single order and printing of the £5 value it must be ruled out that the "thick duty plate" examples are of legitimate standing'. In other words, they were not prepared to consider the possibility that De La Rue might have been responsible for a printing error, which was then missed by their checkers and included in the stock sent to Zululand.



Fig 2 The newly listed Leeward Islands 1902 2d. with the duty plate printed double by De La Rue

## Previous duty plate errors at De La Rue

Yet however much De La Rue might pride themselves on the quality of their security printing operation, we have several instances that undermine this picture of infallibility. They did slip up from time to time, and the resulting errors are, not surprisingly, prized by collectors.

India provides us with three spectacular 'doubly printed' errors from precisely this period of the 1890s, all of which were legitimately issued. These were the 1882-90 ½a. blue-green (85a) and 2a. blue (92a) (known to have been issued and used at Karachi in early 1898), and the 1898 ¼' on ½a. blue-green provisional (110b), surcharged at Calcutta. In each case De La Rue had printed a full sheet of 240 with a very obvious double impression.

From 1894 we have the Straits Settlements 3c. on 32c. carmine provisional (94a), where one pane from a sheet of 240 had the surcharge omitted in error. This was a special printing, not intended to be issued without the 'THREE CENTS' surcharge, but one sheet sent out to Singapore was found to have the surcharge omitted from the upper left pane of 60. Vertical interpane pairs exist with the error *se-tenant* with (lower stamp) normal, and one example was used on a cover. There is also the famous 1889-96 10c. Gibraltar 'Value omitted' error (23b). This resulted from the failure to print the duty plate on one pane of 60, in a side-by-side, two-pane sheet, which was a format identical to that employed for the Zululand £5.

We can also point to undoubted instances of doubly printed duty plates, although these tend to be less well known. These include the Barbados 1882-86 4d. grey (97a) (one used example recorded), the British Guiana 1882 2c. orange (171a) (a few used examples are recorded, including a horizontal pair, showing wide separation of the two impressions), the Malaya, Sungei Ujong 1891-94 2c. rose 'tiger' (50a) (one used example was discovered in 2016), and, from the King George VI period, the Bahamas 1938-52 2d. scarlet (152bb) (only known used, with wide separation of the two impressions) and 2½d violet (153ab) (only known unused, with the two impressions virtually coincident). All this last group will have occurred in circumstances similar to a putative 'double print' on the £5 Zululand, namely an erroneous second impression of the duty plate on one pane of a two-pane keyplate sheet.

Another 'double duty' error exists from Cyprus, involving SG 21, but in this case both keyplate and duty plate were only 60-set, and the two known examples have a manuscript 'Specimen' endorsement, of a style which suggests it was applied in Cyprus rather than by De La Rue (see the 'Part I' footnote after SG 22).

My SG colleague George James also reminds me of the existence of an extraordinary 'double duty, ONE INVERTED' error on the 1882-86 6d. purple-brown postal fiscal of Orange Free State (F2). One fiscally cancelled example has been found, which is mentioned in the 'Part I' footnote after SG F1/15.

The most recent discovery of such an error involves a King Edward VII keyplate issue, but in this case the error, with duty plate printed double, was overprinted 'SPECIMEN' and distributed by the UPU. Two examples of the Leeward Islands 1902 2d. (22) in this state have been found (both certified by BPA Expertising Ltd), and this extraordinary occurrence has been listed as SG 22sa in the 2020 edition of 'Part I' (Fig 2).

So, despite Sergay and Whitmore's evident refusal to contemplate such a possibility, De La Rue do actually have 'form' in this area. The system (in their terminology) of overprinting a 120-set keyplate with two impressions from a 60-set duty plate carried risks, which occasionally resulted in the omission or duplication of the second operation on one pane. Perhaps the machine operator had a coughing fit or was disturbed by a wasp, or there was a power cut...

## A genuine error

The above range of comparanda should be sufficient to demonstrate the likelihood of the Zululand £5 'thick duty plate' being a genuine double impression error perpetrated by De La Rue is real, and not lightly to be dismissed. The application of Ockham's razor (named after the medieval Franciscan friar William of Ockham (c.1285-1347)), that key principle of logic which states that where two different explanations are proposed for a phenomenon, the simpler (involving the least assumptions and speculation) is more likely to be the correct one, seems rather relevant to this case.

## The final piece of the puzzle

It is time to return to a closer examination of available examples of the £5 'thick duty plate'. The final phase of the saga unfolded in November 2015, when the



Fig 3 A Zululand 1894 £5 with 'Black printing double' and Eshowe postal c.d.s.

'Shaka' collection of Zululand (readily identifiable as Clive Sergay's collection, since it had been previously exhibited under his own name) was sold at auction by Spink in London. Lot 1797 comprised £5 'forgeries', including a 'thick duty plate' single with Eshowe postal c.d.s. dated 'MR 15 96' (Fig 3), and a block of four with manuscript fiscal cancels (Fig 4) (with each stamp bearing the initials 'JW' of John Windham, the Registrar of Deeds, and the date '23 2 97'), both items which had been illustrated and discussed in the article cited. The present author and Chris Palmer were especially keen to examine

(and, if possible purchase) this lot, in view of our earlier unwitting engagement with the controversy.

With the actual items in our hands, our previous tentative diagnosis was confirmed, namely that the 'thick duty plate' is indeed a genuine double impression, just as David Brandon had recognised and certified in 2010. Under magnification the top and bottom lines of each letter of 'ZULULAND' are clearly double, and what should be a triangular space in the centre of the 'A' is reduced to a tiny dot. The '£5' value tablet has a much heavier hexagonal frame than is found in normal examples, and the two horizontal strokes in the pound sign appear close together (and visibly doubled) rather than well separated.

The convoluted and always improbable Sergay-Whitmore theory of a forgery using an undenominated sheet spirited away from De La Rue must fail in the face of simple facts. One pane did receive a double impression of the black printing, and it formed part of the stock despatched to Zululand, where it was broken up and used in the normal way. Yes, it is absolutely amazing that with an order of just 1200 stamps (and 750 'SPECIMEN' examples) to fulfil, De La Rue should have managed to print one pane with such an error, but it happened, and philatelists need to accept the new landscape. The error has now been listed in the 2020 edition of 'Part I' as SG 29a. All examples of the error seen are centred to lower right, with the watermark somewhat misplaced to foot. These physical characteristics are consistent with origin from a single pane.

A welcome side effect of this necessary conclusion is that the loyal public servants of Zululand in the 1890s have been exonerated, and their reputations restored.

Fig 4 A block of four of the £5 with 'Black printing double' and manuscript fiscal cancels



## A clever forgery of the Zululand £5

It was mentioned at the beginning that both 'Part I' and the RL *Encyclopaedia* refer to the existence of dangerous forgeries of the Zululand £5, but no details ever seem to have been published. This situation can now be rectified.

The stamp illustrated below left (part of the same lot 1797 in the 2015 Spink 'Shaka' collection sale) is on genuine watermarked paper, perf 14, and has a genuine cancel, but it is clearly not a Zululand cancel. Rather it is actually a large part single circle c.d.s. of A(MO)Y, the Treaty Port in China, dated 'FE 20 95' (Webb type Dii, with code 'A') – right period, but wrong place!

What we must have here is a used example of the Hong Kong 1882-96 10c. purple/red (SG 38), from which the original design has been faded out and replaced by a clever copy of our Zululand £5. This is the same basic technique as was employed by Sperati, although the present forgery is demonstrably not one of his productions.

The result is superficially plausible, but close examination reveals significant differences from the real thing, affecting both the keyplate and the 'ZULULAND/£5' duty. An 'unused' example of the same forgery (illustrated) was seen and condemned by the BPA Expert Committee in 2007.

In the forgery 'ZULULAND' is only 15mm long, and the value

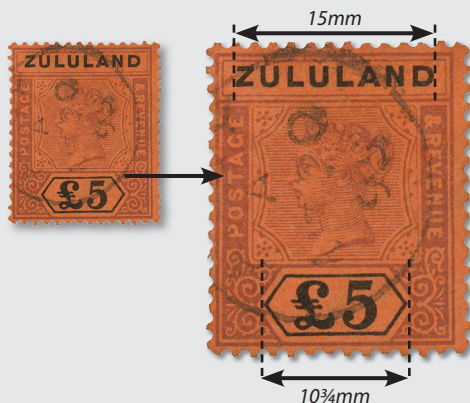


An unused example of the forgery condemned by BPA in 2007

tablet only 10¾mm wide, whereas the correct dimensions should be 15½mm and 11mm respectively (as seen on the genuine Specimen example shown below right). Otherwise the copy is exact, which would indicate use of photography.

The keyplate part of the forgery is also quite convincing, but the shading lines on the forehead, nose, upper lip and point of bust are weak to non-existent, rather than clear and complete, as on genuine examples.

This forgery has a curious history. Although it is accompanied by a David Brandon certificate (No.25721, dated 2 June 2000), which correctly states that it is a fake (without attempting to identify the cancel, but significantly not giving any SG number), its most recent owner had included it on his exhibition page with the following description: 'A genuine £5 stamp used for revenue purposes, cleaned with forged postmark added to defraud stamp collectors'. Further comment is unnecessary.



The Amoy forgery (left) – a Hong Kong 1882-96 10c. with the original design faded out and replaced by a clever copy of the Zululand £5. On the forgery, 'ZULULAND' is only 15mm long, and the value tablet only 10¾mm wide, whereas the dimensions on a genuine stamp should be 15½mm and 11mm respectively

