

UPU Specimen Stamps and the Irregular Block *Mystery*

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West Africa Study Circle – May 31, 2025

UPU Specimen Stamps and the Irregular Block *Mystery*

Today's Agenda:

- To provide context let's first define specimen stamps
- The first specimen stamp
- Printing of specimens
- Ordering & Distribution by the UPU
- Simple multiples
- Strips
- What about that weird irregular block?

UPU Specimen Stamps and the Irregular Block *Mystery*

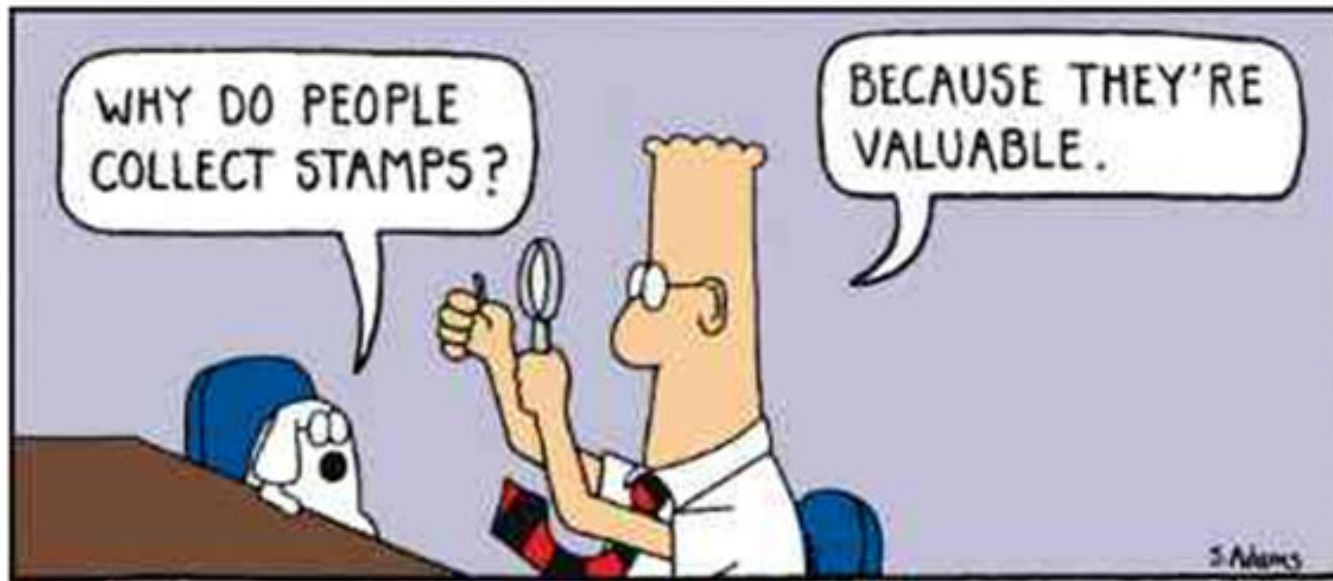
But First, its time for a...


POP QUIZ

- Why are we all here today?
- Because we are all philatelists, of course!
- But... why are we *philatelists*?
- For the answer, we turn to a noted *philatelic philosopher*...

DILBERT™

by SCOTT ADAMS





WHY ARE THEY
VALUABLE?

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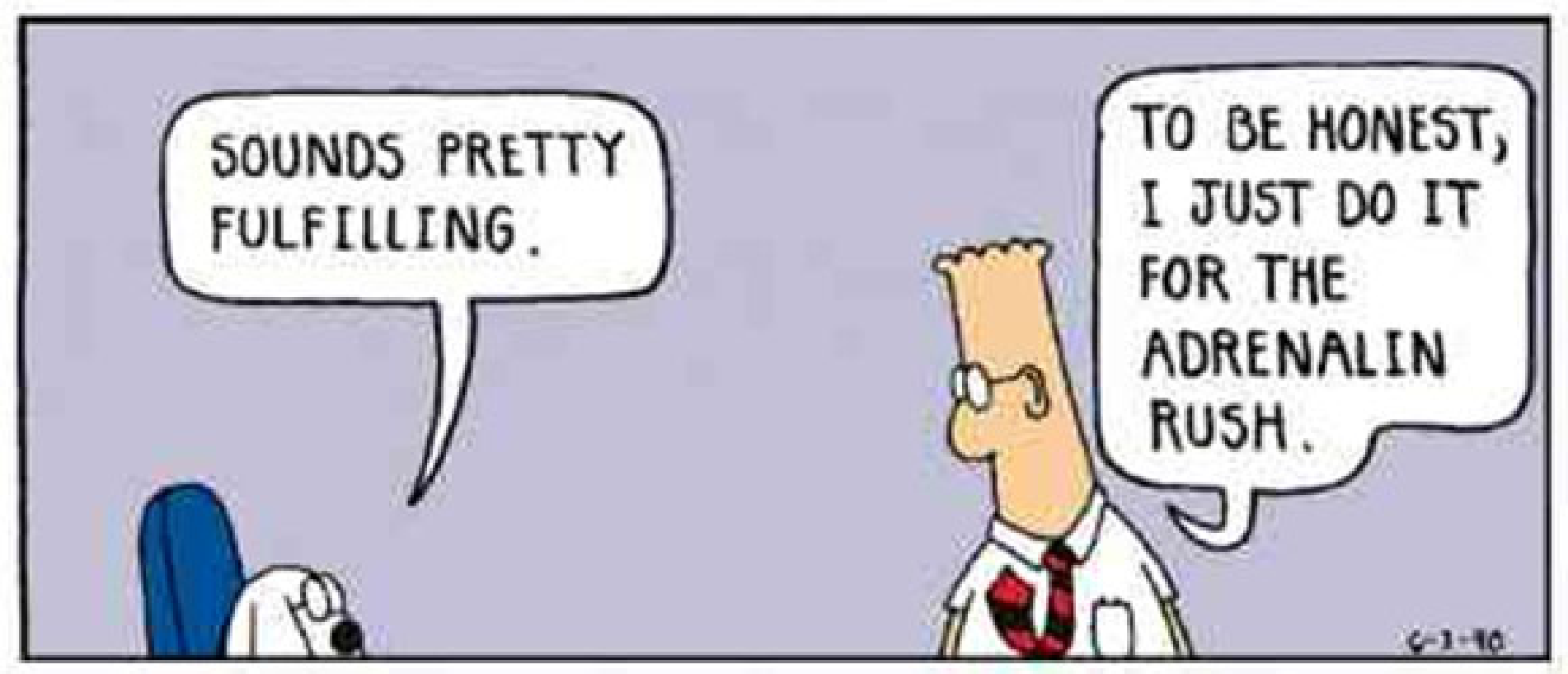


BECAUSE PEOPLE COLLECT
UP ALL THE GOOD ONES.

SO, YOU COLLECT STAMPS BECAUSE THEY'RE VALUABLE, AND THEY'RE VALUABLE BECAUSE YOU COLLECT THEM.

RIGHT.





SOUNDS PRETTY FULFILLING.

TO BE HONEST,
I JUST DO IT
FOR THE
ADRENALIN
RUSH.

©-1-10

UPU Specimen Stamps and the Irregular Block *Mystery*

What is a Specimen Stamp

According to Marcus Samuel (1976) in *Specimen Stamps of the Crown Colonies 1857-1948*:

“...a stamp or stamp proof that has been provided or preserved as a sample, for which no payment has been made to the revenue, and that has been defaced to prevent its postal (or fiscal) use.”

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Types of Specimen Stamps

According to James Bendon (2015) in *UPU Specimen Stamps 1878-1961*, there are 12 kinds of specimen stamps:

- **Postal Authority Specimens** – used to notify local postmasters of an issuance
- **Printers' Reference Specimens** – kept for printers' internal reference
- **Official Reference Specimens** – kept as a PO reference collection (also Crown Agents)
- **Presentation Specimens** – given to visiting dignitaries
- **Stamp Printing Specimens** – older issues distributed as samples by printers
- **Printers' Sample Proofs** – delivered by printers to prospective clients

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Types of Specimen Stamps

According to James Bendon (2015) in *UPU Specimen Stamps 1878-1961*, there are 12 kinds of specimen stamps:

- **PO Training Specimens** – used by postal clerks when in training
- **Exhibition Specimens** – used by printers at National & International printing exhibitions
- **Philatelic Specimens** – excess stamps sold below face to collectors by the Post Office
- **Display Specimens** – used in POs to display the available stamps
- **Press Specimens** – distributed by postal authorities to press & media
- **UPU Specimens** – either with or without “SPECIMEN” defacement

Postal Authority Specimens

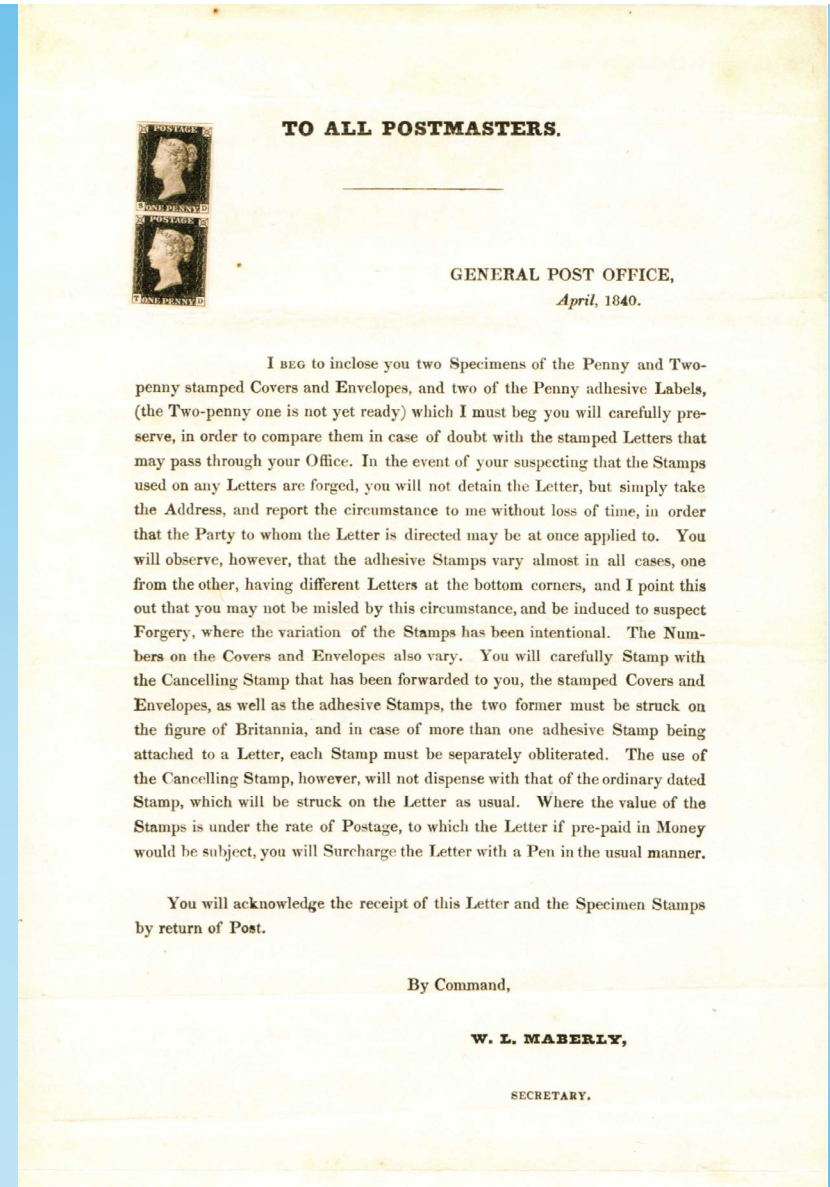
The First Postal Authority Specimen

One of 3 known →

Distributed to local post offices

April 1840.

Penny Black issued May 1st 1840



Postal Authority Specimens

Specimens were cut from
Full Sheets of 240 subjects:

- 12 stamps per row
- 20 rows

{Not in author's collection} →



Printer's Sample Proof

Samuel lists:

Printer's Sample Proof on

Unwatermarked Paper

c. 1922. Engraved imperforate

4s myrtle and orange — **DS1**



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Examples of UPU Specimens

(From the Author's Gambia Collection)

First Keyplate issue of 1898-1902 (SG39as)



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Examples of UPU Specimens

(From the Author's Gambia Collection)

First Keyplate issue of 1898-1902 (SG39^{as})



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Example of UPU Specimen - FORGERY

Cameo issue of 1880 (SG10)



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Examples of UPU Specimens

1921 King George keyplates Specimen Pairs (SG108s-116s Pairs M var)

The six values to 5d are all right marginal.

- The ½d and 1 both showing the 'club foot to M' variety on the left stamp.
- The 1½d to 5d each show the 'Broken M' variety (position 41) on the left stamp.



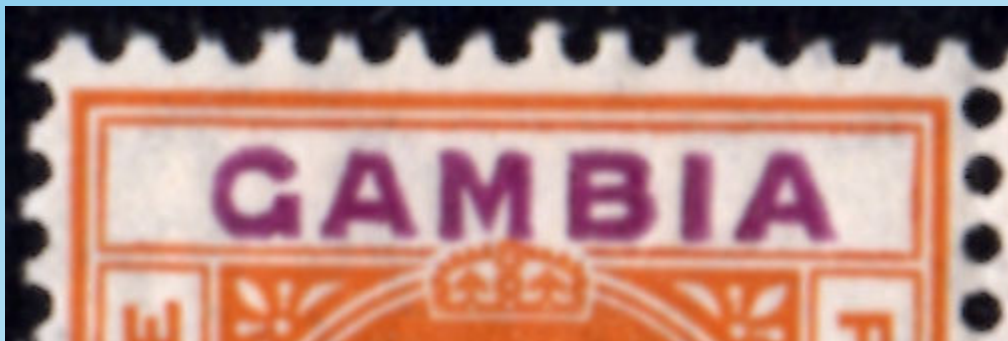
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What Multiples are Possible?

Quantities Required by UPU Varied Over Time

Keyplate Stamp Issue	Years of Issue	Qty Required by UPU	Qty Sent to Members	Panes Likely Produced	Residual Copies†
Victoria	1898-1902	730	5	13	50
Edward VII	1902	716*	5	12 or 13	4 or 64
Edward VII	1905	726*	5	13	54
Edward VII	1904-1906	721*	5	13	59
Edward VII	1909	409*	3	7 or 8	11 or 71
George V	1912	400*	3	7	20
George V	1921-1922	400* or 398	3	7	20

* - The UPU required 1 additional stamp for its own archives in these years

† - Printers shipped the exact number of stamps required by the UPU

**A Full Sheet =
120 Stamps
Two Panes Per Sheet**



A Full Pane - 60 Stamps

Six Stamps Per Row

Ten Rows

Specimens were torn, not cut,
from Full Panes by the UPU



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George V	1912	400	3	7	20
George V	1921-1922	400 or 398	3	7	20

A Full Pane – 60 Stamps

- When **3** stamps were required per member, **horizontal** strips were torn from the sheets received.
- Each sheet produced 20 horizontal strips of three
- Two strips per row times ten rows



A Full Pane – 60 Stamps

- When **5** stamps were required per member, **vertical** strips were torn from the sheets received.
- Each sheet produced 12 vertical strips of five



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Examples of UPU Specimens

1898-1902 Queen Victoria keyplates Specimen Vertical Strips (SG37s-44s)



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)



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UPU Specimen Stamps and the Irregular Block *Mystery*

What Multiples are Possible?

Quantities Required by UPU Varied Over Time

- 726 Stamps Required for 145 UPU members
- 12 Sheets or 720 Stamps yielded 144 vertical strips
- The printer sent 12 full sheets plus a 2x3 block of 6
- The UPU kept 1 stamp for its reference collection

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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

- **726** Stamps Required for 145 UPU members
- 12 Sheets or **720** Stamps yielded 144 vertical strips
- The printer sent 12 full sheets plus a **2x3 block of 6**
- The UPU kept 1 stamp for its reference collection
- A clerk at the printers decided how to tear off the required 6 stamps. He could have selected a strip just as easily



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

- **726** Stamps Required for 145 UPU members
- 12 Sheets or **720** Stamps yielded 144 vertical strips
- The printer sent 12 full sheets plus a **2x3 block of 6**
- The UPU kept 1 stamp for its reference collection
- These irregular blocks were shipped to an unidentified French West African colony



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

- When shown these, James Bendon told me he had never seen similar irregular blocks
- These are the only irregular blocks in his book



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

*Mystery
Solved!*



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

*But One
Mystery
Remains*



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What Can Explain These Irregular Blocks?

1907 Edward VII keyplates Specimen Irregular Blocks (SG53, 54, 56)

What is the explanation for the three punched holes in two of these blocks?



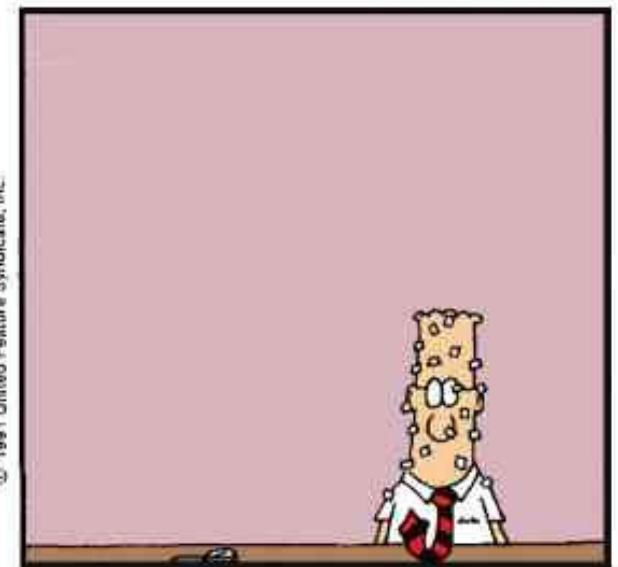
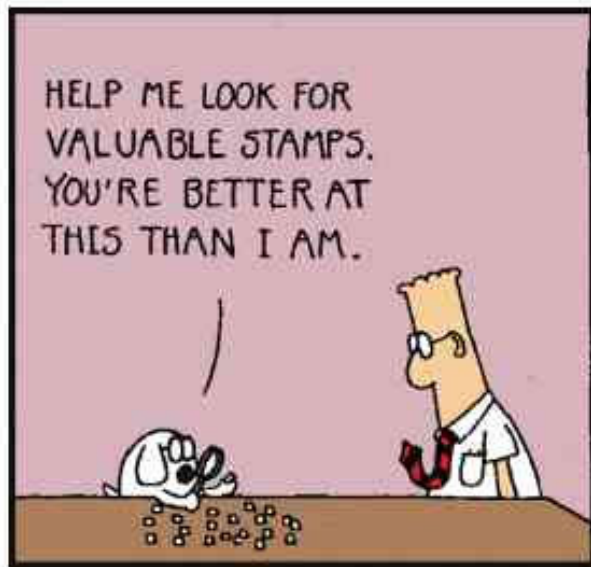
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- My paper "Aspects of Gambian UPU Specimen Multiples" appeared in the June 2019 issue of *Cameo*, the journal of the West African Study Circle.
- All of my articles and papers can be downloaded free from the website
[Independent.Academia.edu/](https://www.independent.academia.edu/)
- Request a PDF of this slide deck
Gary@PhilatelicResearch.org

Another Philatelic Lesson From Scott Adams

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by SCOTT ADAMS



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Thank You For Your Interest!

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