



One of 53
26 April 1902

The Spaven Flaw

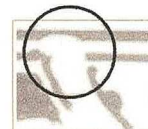
British Colonial Postage and Revenue Key Plate Issues 1902-11



1 Sept. 1902

The Spaven flaw occurred on the King Edward V11 Imperium Key Plate No.1, printed by Thomas De La Rue & Co. of London and dispatched to 16 colonies.

In 1995 British philatelist Mike Spaven was the first to identify the plate position as left pane, stamp no. 3. Research shows the Spaven flaw stamp named after him has a wider range of features than first reported.



Mike Spaven's 1995 drawing of the flaw, right of the crown.

PLAN:

Colonies featuring the Spaven flaw are on Page 2, followed by chapters of the three key events in the life of the stamp:

1. Early Spaven Flaw – the flaw develops 3-6
2. Middle Period – the developed flaw 7-12
3. Late Spaven Flaw – the repairs 13-16

IMPORTANCE: The KEVII Key Plates had been largely ignored by British philately until a detailed study revealed among other things, the history and development of the Spaven flaw. It is the only listed flaw on the key plates. The complexity of having 11 separate features is explored for the first time.

RESEARCH: Unrecorded features found during research give an understanding of how the flaw occurred, why it changed and why many features are continuous.

The exhibitor co-authored the book *King Edward V11 Imperium Key Plates* in 2020. The exhibit uses book and new research to develop the story of the Spaven flaw. In 2020 Stanley Gibbons listed part of the features as *Damaged Frame and Crown*.

Bibliography:

1. Fernbank P (FRPSL), Blinco J & J. *King Edward V11 Imperium Key Plates*. British West Indies Study Circle, London. 2020.
2. Spaven M. *Leeward Islands*. BWISC, London. Bulletin Dec. 1995.
3. Hals N, Collas P. *The New Hebrides*. Postal History & Stamps. Collectors Club Handbook 20.

PURPOSE: To explain the life of the Spaven flaw by exhibiting an analysis of the features with easily understood time lines and major events.

TREATMENT: Chapters and pages are in near chronological order to show the progression of the features and give instances of how stamp dates may be determined. Milestone dates are noted.

RARITY: Mint stamps are scarce. The rarest items, including blocks and covers, are framed in blue. Quantities given are those printed.

Sequencing stamps to printing dates:

Made possible by publication of relevant De La Rue records and a large pictorial archive assembled with this exhibitor's collection, donations from other collectors and online sales.

As the flaw occurred on the Key Plate, all colonies using Plate 1 each had the flaw in their printings. Plate 1 total orders for all the individual 16 colonies add up to only 171 dates in the span of the 10 years of use. With few exceptions the orders were spread at random throughout, making it easier to sequence dates of printing using:

Milestone dates: Specimens and stamps from any of the 16 colonies that can have only one printing date possible. Changes in production increase the number of available dates.

Isolated dates: Printing dates associated with a Milestone date. Association is made by determining the watermark (2), paper surfacing (2), colour scheme (3), and their combinations including which period the flaw is from – early and late periods are easily understood in the exhibit. Everything else is in the middle period. Where further distinction is required, details of the flaw minutiae are used. Examples are provided in the exhibit.

Taking into account all of the above, date sequencing that aids in determining the pictorial progression of the features becomes a technical exercise with a high degree of accuracy.

The 16 colonies that featured the Spaven flaw.



Gold Coast
1902-11



British Honduras
1902-11



St Vincent
1902-11



St Lucia
1902-11



One of 100
Northern Nigeria
1902-11



Leeward Islands
1903-11



Straits Settlements
1902-11



Grenada
1902-06



Sierra Leone
1903-11



Fiji
1903-11



Mauritius
1909-10



One of 67
Virgin Islands
1904



St. Helena
1908-11



Cayman Islands
1907-09



One of 76
Gilbert & Ellice
1911



New Hebrides
1908-10

1. Early Spaven Flaw – the flaw develops

Early signs

This period is characterised by the rapidly developing features of the flaw.

Research identifies the damage causing the flaw features is a result of the printing press progressively damaging an area of faulty plate making. Between March and April 1902 flaw features emerge and develop.

Northern Nigeria. First Issue. 26 April 1902

Crudely recut frame lines at 1 indicate the printer's intervention.

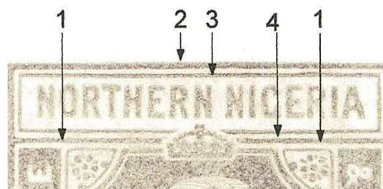
The earliest recorded Spaven flaw



One of 100



One of 53



1. Thin frame lines on either side of the crown
- 2 & 3. The frames are bent and distorted.
4. The main feature of the Spaven, the frame scoop, is just visible.

Leeward Islands 5 July 1902



One of 53

Importance: The flaw date confirms the Leeward Island first printing was from Plate 1 and not Plate 2 as previously recorded.



One of 6



5 July, 1902 Milestone date

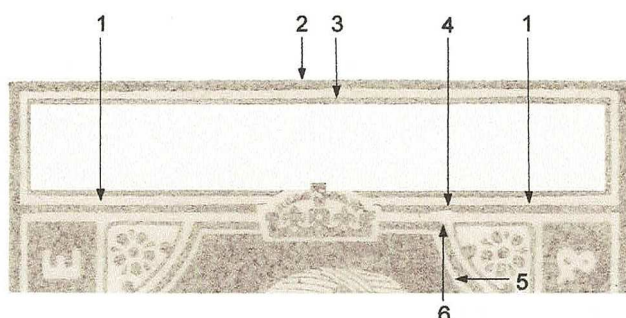
By July 1902 further features had appeared and the frame scoop was larger



Research: The De La Rue archives confirm requisitions from multiple colonies were processed on 5 July 1902.



July 1902 Spaven flaw



Numbers indicate the flaw features in order of appearance.

1. Thin frame lines either side of crown.
2. Top frame bows upward.
3. Name frame uneven and distorted.
4. Scoop in frame enlarging.
5. Colourless curve wider.
6. Corner rounded.

1. Early Spaven Flaw – the flaw develops

Additional Features

Through October and November 1902 more features are evident. Existing features are larger.

Importance: Specimen dates define the appearance of the features and aid in identifying non-specimen examples of the same period.



Fiji
10 Oct. 1902
Milestone date

Sierra Leone
14 Oct. 1902
Milestone date



One of 6

Research: In the De La Rue records late October 1902 there was another cluster with orders from multiple colonies.



1 Sept. 1902



One of 100



One of 6



24 Nov. 1902

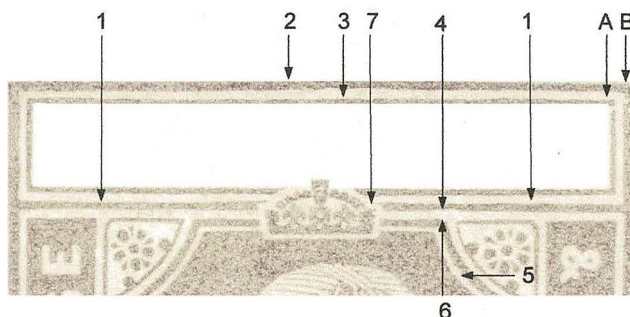


One of 30



One of 80

Late 1902 Spaven flaw



1. Thin frame lines either side of crown.
 2. Top frame bows upward.
 3. Name frame uneven and distorted.
 4. Scoop in frame enlarging.
 5. Colourless curve wider.
 6. Corner begins to break.
 7. Crown break begins.
- A & B show signs of breaks.

Flaws A & B are independant damage on Plate 1. stamps and are used here as a tool to aid dating.

1. Early Spaven Flaw – the flaw develops

All features visible

During the first quarter of 1903 all the major features became evident.

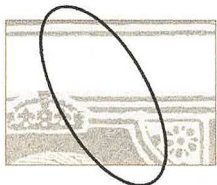
They were not fully developed and damage to the features continued to occur.



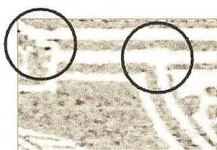
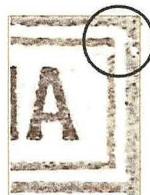
Northern Nigeria
15 Jan. 1903

One of 98

Research: The 10s was printed on two occasions, in April 1902 and this printing.



The area of damage is now evident and features are visible.



3-17 Feb. 1903

Limitations: Straits Settlements first printing using Plate No. 1 was on 3 Feb. 1903 and the next 17 Feb.

It is not possible to separate the stamp dates when this close together.



11 Feb. 1903

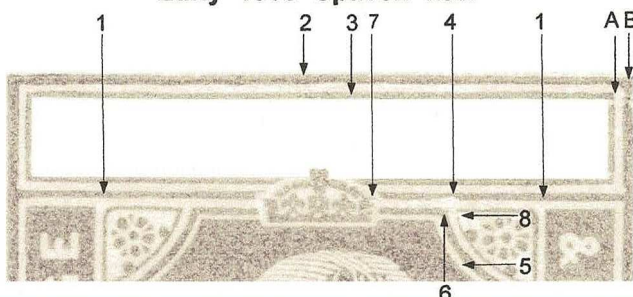


12 Mar. 1903
Milestone date



31 Mar. 1903

Early 1903 Spaven flaw



1. Thin frame lines either side of the crown.
2. Top frame is bowed, beginning above the crown.
3. Name frame uneven and distorted.
4. Scoop in frame noticeably larger.
5. Colourless curve noticeable wider and uneven.
6. Corner damage more extensive.
7. Crown split grows more extensive.
8. Rosette frame broken.
- A. Name frame break small, but obvious.
- B. Outer frame break develops rapidly.

1. Early Spaven Flaw – The flaw develops

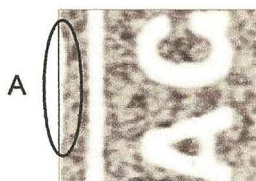
Why the flaw developed

This chapter has demonstrated the Spaven features developed during printing over a period of time and indicates there was an underlying condition which facilitated the occurrence of that damage.

The underlying condition is not self evident. However, it can be interpreted as as cause and effect from the evidence on the printed stamps.

The evidence shows that compression ("squeeze") of the disposable leads upon which the copper electroplate was grown, played a role.

Overtightening of the quoins holding the leads in place is a primary cause of compression and can result in distortion. Alternatively, a quoin can be pushed upwards and hammering it back in place can result in a dent or 'external distortion flaw' on the outside frame of stamp no. 1. (A)



External distortion
flaw dent on
stamp no. 1

Examples of both are seen on Plate No. 1. With stamp No. 3 distorted vertically and laterally, the printing press compounded the damage by its forceful pressing action on the vertical distortion as each sheet was printed, ultimately resulting in the fully developed Spaven flaw.

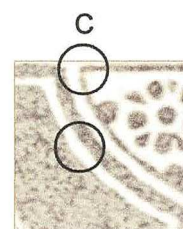


Stamp no. 3

Signs of squeeze on the Spaven flaw are where the bowed plate pushed the top frame lines upwards. (B)



Squeeze pushed the colourless curve up, making it wider than normal, and also breaks the rosette frame corner. (C)



16 Dec. 1902

2. Middle Period - the developed flaw

Single Crown CA paper

This period is characterised by relative stability in the flaw features in a time of rapid changes in stamp production. These major events provide the dating evidence.

By the latter part of 1903 the features had fully developed.



One of 12

New Hebrides
1908-10
on Fiji
25 Aug. 1903



One of 19
(Green and pale green)

Forged overprint: Spaven features
are from a date not used in
New Hebrides.

One recorded
Fiji 10 Oct. 1902

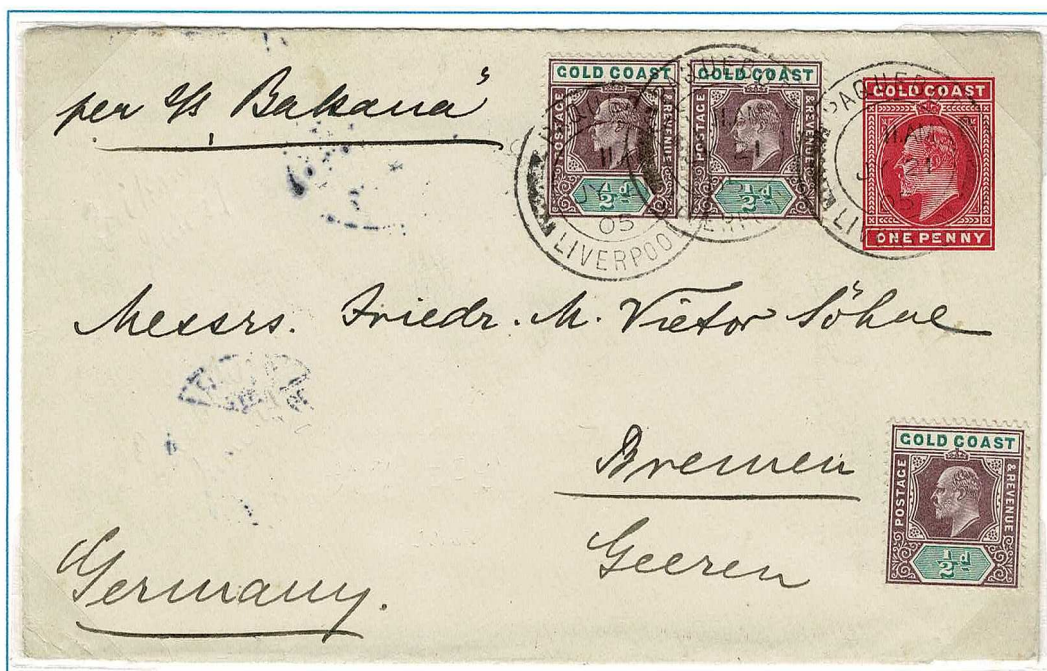


One of 50
Early issue



NEW DISCOVERY

Importance: The recorded philatelic history
of New Hebrides had not recognised the
overprints were on Fiji stamps dated 25
August 1903 until confirmed by this study.



Gold Coast 1d internal
stationery cover uprated
for international use,
postmarked 5 July 1905.

As tax was not applied
or paid, the indication is
the unfranked Spaven
stamp is part of the
original cover.

Late use of CA paper

Spaven:
31 Mar. 1903

2. Middle Period - the developed flaw

Late Single Crown paper

The general use of Single Crown watermark paper came to an end in early 1904.

Only a limited number of colonies had a full range of values with the *developed* flaw.

Fiji
25 Aug. 1903



Research: This was the last
Fiji printing of the 2d, 3d
and 5d in the Edwardian era.



20 July 1903
Milestone date



25 Sept. 1903



29 Jan. 1904. *Milestone date.*

Spaven: 30 Dec. 1903. Postmarked 5 Sept. 1905.
British Honduras was one of two colonies to use
coloured paper to signify UPU rates. 2c postage
equivalent to 1d Empire rate. Unusual destination.

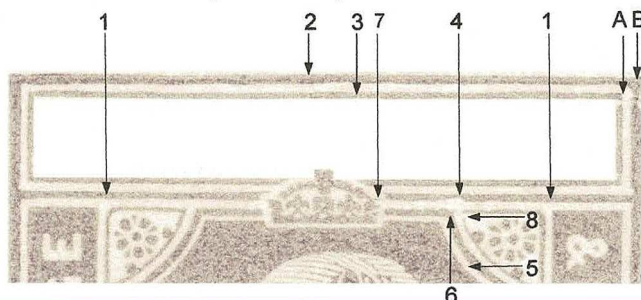
Late use of Single Crown paper



12 Aug. 1904

SCA coloured paper
use continued until
stock was exhausted.

Early 1904 Spaven flaw



1. Thin frame lines either side of the crown.
2. Top frame is bowed, beginning above the crown.
3. Name frame uneven and distorted.
4. Scoop in frame large and deeper.
5. Colourless curve wider and uneven.
6. Corner damage complete.
7. Crown split grows more expansive.
8. Rosette frame broken.
- A. Name frame break larger and more visible.
- B. Outer frame break often more obvious.

2. Middle Period - the developed flaw

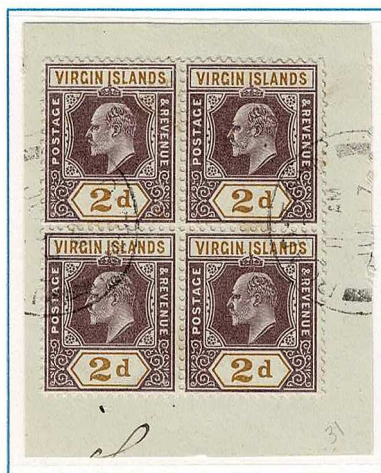
Multiple Crown CA paper

In 1904 De La Rue introduced MCA paper. Most colonies had stock of stamps on hand and so uptake of the new paper was slow and irregular.

Few completed the transition to the new paper before the next change by the printer – chalk surfaced paper. One that did was Virgin Islands.



Virgin Islands
22 April 1904
Milestone date



Virgin Island Spaven (top left) post-
marked Road Town, 17 July 1906.



This was the sole printing under the name Virgin Islands.
Later orders were requisitioned by the Leeward Islands.

One of 67



May-June 1904



1 June 1904
Milestone date



April-Nov 1904



22 June 1904
Milestone date



23 Sept. 1904
Milestone date



6 Feb. 1905. Only printing of the
Northern Nigeria 2 1/2d in the old
colours. *Milestone date.*

2. Middle Period - the developed flaw

Chalk surfaced paper

In March 1905 chalk surfaced paper was introduced by De La Rue. A further feature, shown below, also appeared on the stamp.

Four colonies achieved a full set of stamps before another production change in 1906.



7 June 1905



11 Oct. 1905
Milestone date



17 Nov. 1905



12 Oct. 1906



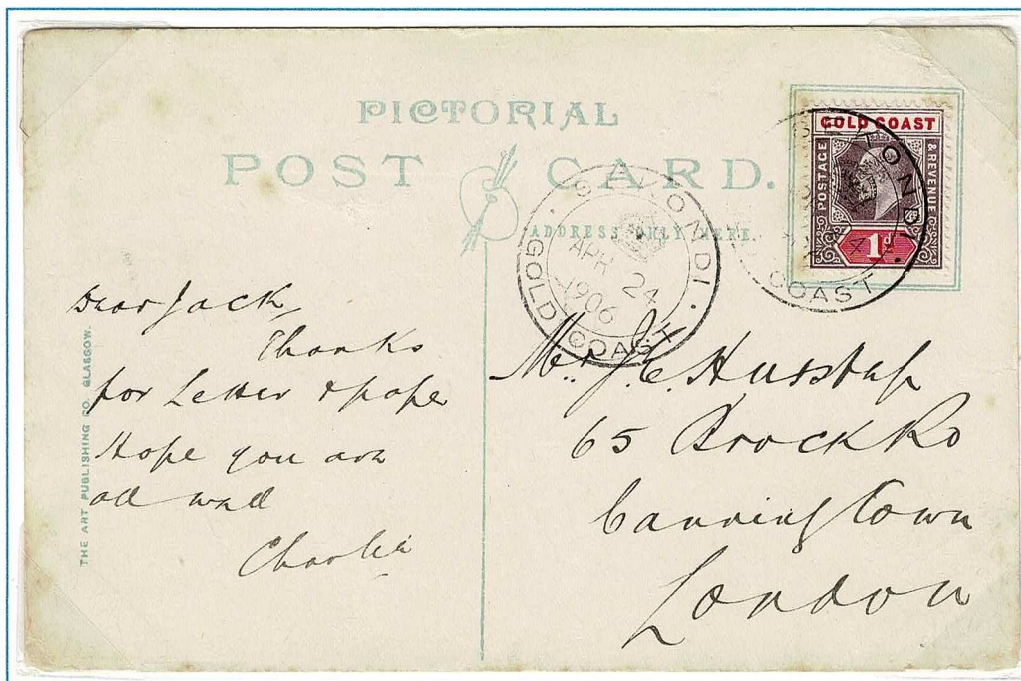
Mar.-Dec. 1907



9 April 1906



July-Dec. 1905



Spaven stamp on Gold Coast cover postmarked Sekondi 25 April 1906. Correct 1d postage to any Empire destination. **Spaven: 14 Sept. 1905. Milestone date.**



One of 7
21 Oct. 1906
Milestone date

Research: British Honduras returned the entire 1906 supply to De La Rue for replacement. As the UPU had distributed Specimens they are the *only survivors* from this printing.

The dot: Feature C

In 1905 a dot appears on the lower main frame.

It can be obscured by ink, but does signify a post 1904 printing if present.



2. Middle Period - the developed flaw

UPU colours

In 1906 colonies began preparation for the UPU colour scheme.

Implementation was over an extended period based on depletion of existing stocks, creating a further series of Milestone dates that define the state of the flaw features.

Fiji was the first to adopt UPU colours.



11 April 1906
Milestone date



11 April 1906
Milestone date



5-11 July 1907
(printed over two days)



One of 100
17 Sept. 1907

Gold Coast postcard dated 13 Feb 1908 with manuscript at bottom acknowledging receipt 1 Mar. 1908. Correct postage.

Spaven: (left) 22 Feb. 1907. *Milestone date*. Sole printing of the Gold Coast 1/2d in UPU colours at that time. The next printing was in March 1908.



9 March 1907. *Milestone date*.

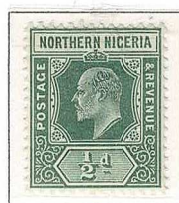


8 Oct. 1907
Milestone date.



25 June 1907

Spaven features confirm an unrecorded change from chalk surface to plain paper.



Northern Nigeria and British Honduras had printings dated 5 Oct. 1908. *Milestone date*.



2. Middle period - the developed flaw

Universal Colour Scheme

In 1908-09 the Crown Agents introduced a new Universal Colour Scheme to prevent forgery of high-value stamps. The 1906 UPU colours were included.

This was the last major production change. Unlike other earlier changes it was ultimately adopted by all colonies. The last printing of old colours was October 1908.

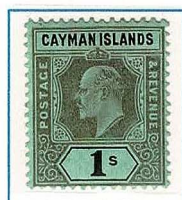


One of 26
7 April 1908
Milestone date

Stocks of green SCA paper held by De La Rue were especially chalk surfaced for use only on these three issues.



17 Feb. 1908
Milestone date



One of 25.

Some colonies had the same values printed close together, but with different ink and paper colours.

Old colours



23 April 1908

New colours



One of 52



One of 26

5 Oct. 1908. Milestone date.

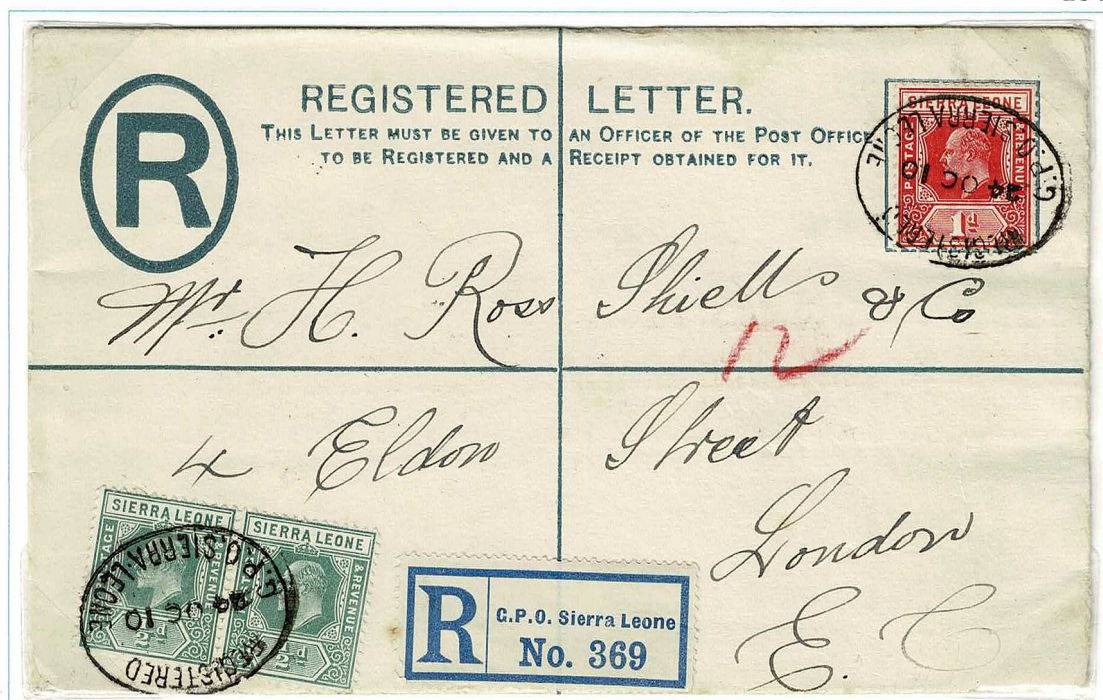
Most colonies changed as existing stocks were exhausted.



7 April 1908



25 April 1908. Milestone date.



Registered stationery cover Sierra Leone to London 24 Oct. 1910. Embossed 2d verso and uprated 2d. Spaven: Bottom left, 8 Oct. 1908. Milestone date.



One of 4
27 Oct. 1908
Milestone date



One of 4
5 Feb. 1909
Milestone date

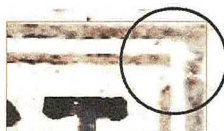
3. Late Spaven Flaw – the repairs

Major repairs

In 1909 De La Rue performed repairs to disguise major parts of the flawed features.

The top frames (2 & 3) were straightened, lines (1) thinned to hide the scoop and the top right frames (A & B) restored.

Earliest recorded example of repairs
28 Sept. 1909



Prior to repair
Gold Coast

The last recorded date before the repair is 23 June 1909.



23 June 1909



After repair
Mauritius

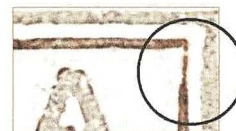
Research: Milestone dates.
The two stamps and the part sheet (left) are sole printings of each value.



28 Sept. 1909

Name frame repair deteriorated quickly

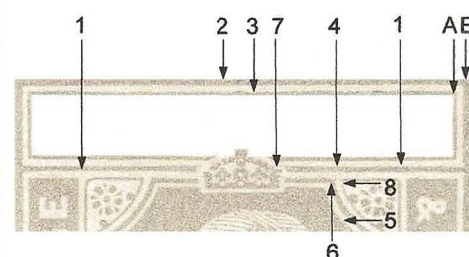
Sierra Leone
11 Feb. 1910



Feature: In early 1910 the repair to name frame (A) had begun to wear into a distinctive narrow top.



1909: The Repaired Spaven



Repairs are listed in red.

1. The frame lines either side of the crown now much thinner.
2. Outer frame line has been straightened.
3. Name frame line distortion gone.
4. Scoop gone or less obvious.
5. Colourless curve still enlarged.
6. Corner damage remains.
7. Crown split still extensive.
8. Rosette frame remains broken.
- A. Name frame has thin line repair.
- B. Outer frame break repaired.
- C. Dot on the lower main frame.

3. Late Spaven Flaw – the repairs

Name frame features

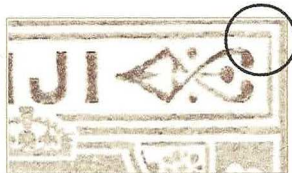
The name frame was repaired again in 1910 and is an aid to dating.



2 Mar. 1910

Determining dates
using the
name frame.

Thin frame line present
in March 1910.



Thin frame



One of four
15 July 1910
Milestone date



9 June 1910
Milestone date

Research: The Milestone
printings from 9 June
show the frame newly
repaired.



One of 84
9 June 1910
Milestone date



One of 52
27 July 1910
Milestone date



9 June 1910

The 2½d has the frame
repaired, giving it the
Milestone date.



Newly repaired frame



14 Dec. 1910



15 July 1910

The striking similarity
to the Fiji Milestone
date of 9 July indicates
the close relationship.



21 Sept. 1910

Spaven dated
14 Dec. 1910.

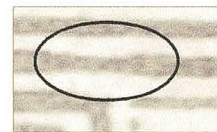
Postmarked
Accra 18
Sept. 1911.



3. Late Spaven Flaw – the repairs

The scoop changes

The barely visible major feature - repaired scoop right of the crown, changed in the first half of 1910 and took on a double scoop appearance not seen earlier.



28 April 1910. Milestone date.



New Hebrides
27 July 1910
Milestone date

Northern Nigeria
28 April 1910
Milestone date



Sole printing and last use
of Plate 1 for this colony.

3. Late Spaven Flaw – the repairs

Final days and the last Spaven

During 1911 the heavily-worn Plate 1 was used for small printings, with the last being for St Helena in October.



One of 4

Research: There were two printings of the 5/- St Lucia. The Specimen stamp on 16 Mar. 1911. *Milestone date.*

The 5/- second printing on July 5 (below) is distinctly different, as are the 6d and 1d.



One of 25



One of 25



Sierra Leone. 17 Mar. 1911

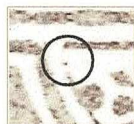


St Helena
6 Sept. 1911

Feature: The requisition for the St. Helena 6d states singly fugitive (plain paper).



Milestone date



Distinctive feature: A 'full stop' in the rosette frame.

The last Spaven
St Helena
11 Oct. 1911

After 10 years the final printing of Plate 1 brought an end to the Spaven Flaw.



The 6d order was for double fugitive ink (chalky paper), separating it from 6 Sept.



Research: The De La Rue archives confirm 11 Oct. 1911 date as the last printing using Plate 1.

By the end of printing in 1911 the Spaven stamp retained many of its identifiable characteristics.

