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Unissued Philatelic Essays of Basutoland 1933, and the Lesotho Crocodile Stamp Issues

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Basutoland, a British Crown colony from 1884 to 1966, received its independence and is now the Kingdom of Lesotho, a landlocked nation in southern Africa. The earliest postage stamps used in the colony were those from the Cape of Good Hope (since 1876), and subsequently, those of South Africa (from 1910 to 1933). A philatelic history of the region is in Proud (1996).

On 1 December 1933, Basutoland issued its first stamps, a pictorial set of 10 definitives under the King George V definitives, of face values ½ penny (= d), 1 d, 2 d, 3 d, 4 d, 6 d, 1 shilling (= s), 2 s 6 d, 5 s, and 10 s (Stanley Gibbons, SG catalog numbers 1–10). Figure 1 shows stamps from the series, that incorporates a profile of the then ruling monarch (George V, 1865–1936) and a lateral view of the Nile Crocodile (*Crocodylus niloticus*), against a backdrop of mountains.



Figure 1. Basutoland's first pictorial definitives from 1933, comprising 10 values from the King George V set (SG 1–10).

Four essays (Figure 2) were apparently not accepted and replaced, and show proposed face values of 2 d and 10 s. These were attached to a card, measuring 120 mm × 39 mm, and each of

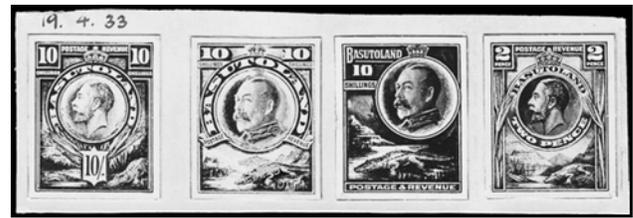


Figure 2. Four unissued essays from Basutoland's 1933 pictorial definitives.

the proofs affixed is 26 mm × 32 mm. All include the crocodile and incorporate either a profile or a fronto-lateral view of the monarch. These essays are in the daily record book (dated "19.4.33") of the official postal agency of the time, Bradbury Wilkinson Ltd, England-based engravers and printer of banknotes, postage stamps, and share certificates, established in the 1850s (see Dyer, 2015). It is unclear why the designs were not approved, apart from the significantly finer details of the crocodilians depicted in the final versions.

In 1938, a replacement set of 11 values was issued, featuring a new monarch (George VI, 1895–1952), bearing identical face values, except for an additional 1½ pence stamp (SG 18–28; Figure 3). It is important to note that mountainous Lesotho is home to no living crocodilian species, although a protosuchian crocodyliform, †*Orthosuchus stormbergi* Nash, 1968, was found in the Early Jurassic rocks of the country. Nonetheless, a crocodile on a Basotho shield and flanked by two horses appears in the country's coat of arms (adopted on 4 October 1968), following the country's independence, and retained in the arms of Basutoland. Lesotho's largest ethnic group, the Sotho or Basotho, are descendants of the Sotho-Tswana expansion southward from the Great Lakes region of East Africa in the 5th century C.E. and presumably carried the cultural significance of the crocodile with them into the high elevation and crocodile-free inland of southern Africa. With the establishment of



Figure 3. Basutoland's reissued pictorial definitives from 1938, comprising 11 values from the King George VI set (SG 18–28).

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