

Post-Independence Industrial Development of Botswana Illustrated Through Meter Marks: Support Companies

by Gordon Smith

This article is a continuation of articles in issues 100 and 103 of this journal that discussed the meter marks used by the financial sector and large companies in the early days of Botswana's independence. This article will illustrate some marks used by smaller service businesses that were established to support the large private corporations that opened during this period.

As noted in the previous articles, Botswana's economy in the early days of its independence was booming as a result of diamond, copper and nickel mining. By the early 1970's, profits from the mining industry enabled Botswana to become free of budgetary dependence on Britain. The Government of Sir Seretse Khama used the revenues it received, as a direct shareholder in Debswana, to work towards developing a diversified economy. The government had a goal of self-reliance and looking at its internal economies, gave priority to assisting the development of industries that would enable the production of goods and services needed by the cattle and minerals industries, and the processing of the raw materials produced by its mining industry.

Lawyers

The firm using the meter mark shown in Figure 1 was established by Spencer Augustus Minchin in Mafikeng, South Africa, then the capital of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1890, the year in which the Protectorate's border was extended north of the Molopo River into what, in 1966, became the Republic of Botswana. It was the first law firm established in Mafikeng. Reginald Kelly joined the firm in 1919 resulting in the firm adopting the name "Minchin & Kelly". After the Bechuanaland Protectorate attained independence in 1966 becoming the Republic of Botswana, Minchin & Kelly opened up an office in the new capital city, Gaborone. Since its establishment, the firm has undertaken several notable initiatives in the country such as registering the first title deed, advising the Colonial Government, providing legal services to Tshekedi Khama, the regent to the Bamangwato tribe while his nephew, Seretse Khama (later president of Botswana) was growing up, participating in the law revision commission, and registering the first private township in Botswana.



Figure 1: Minchin & Kelly (Botswana), Gaborone, License R61, made by a Francotyp-Postalia "MS5" franking machine

Prior to independence, the decision was made to move the administrative centre of Botswana from Mafeking in South Africa to a location within the country. At independence, Gaborone was little more than a village. It was chosen as the site for the new capital due to its strategic location, the availability of a reliable water supply, its proximity to the railway line that connected South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) through the country, and the fact that it was not affiliated with any tribal group within the country. In the early 1970's, office space in the capital city of Gaborone was at a premium as large foreign companies entered the country to take advantage of the booming economy.^[1] As shown by all the meter marks in this article, many smaller suppliers set up or expanded their businesses in Gaborone to support the needs of these larger firms.

Interestingly, during the siege of Mafeking during the Boer War, Robert Baden-Powell commandeered the Minchin's offices, originally a strong, single-story building built in 1890, for his headquarters and directed operations from a lookout tower on the roof (see Figures 2 and 3). Today, the Minchin family is honoured for delaying the implementation of the Group Areas Act during the Apartheid era in South Africa and for its refusal to move from their home in the tribal area when the Act came into being.^[2]

Peter Collins established his law practice as a sole practitioner in Lobatse in 1977. In 1984, he merged with Kirby Helfer to establish Kirby Helfer Collins. This firm later became Helfer, Collins & Newman when David Newman joined the practice (see Figure 4). In 1991, the practice became Collins Newman & Co. (see Figure 5), where Peter Collins was senior partner until



Figure 2: Sketch of the original Minchin's Law Office Building^[3]



Figure 3: Recent photo of the former Minchin's Law Office Building^[4]



Figure 4: Helfer, Collins & Newman, Gaborone, License R89, made by a Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine



Figure 5: Collins & Newman, Gaborone, Licence R89, made by a Francotyp-Postalia "MS5" franking machine

his retirement in 1999 when he was appointed to the bench.^[5]

After briefly practicing law in London, David Newman accepted a position teaching law in Malawi and then at the University of Botswana in 1982. He then went into practice as an attorney and conveyancer, a branch of the legal profession focusing on property law. Subsequently, he became managing partner in Collins Newman & Co. After 20 years at the firm, he became a judge in the High Court of Botswana.^[6]

The firm, which continues to exist today, focuses on corporate and commercial law dealing with corporate finance, mining industries and financial exchanges. The firm has also served as legal advisor and counsel to the Government of Botswana.

Neill William Anthony Armstrong started in Botswana with the legal firm of Damant, Bostock & Co.^[7] The Botswana Government Gazette indicates that he was active in the country by at least 1978.^[8] The firm in Botswana later became named Damant, Bostock and Magang and was headed by Niell Armstrong.

David Magang whose name was in the firm's letterhead later became a consultant at Minchin & Kelly Botswana.^[9] In 1983, the firm became Armstrongs Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers (see Figure 6).

Office Supplies

The Botswana Book Centre's history can be traced back to the times of the Kuruman Press of the London Missionary Society in 1826. In 1958, the Book Room, as it was then called, was moved from Kuruman in South Africa to new premises in Lobatse where it operated as the Bechuanaland Book Centre. In 1966, the bookstore moved to the newly established capital at Gaborone where it joined some banks, the General Post Office and the Government Press as one of the first 'imposing' buildings in the Main Mall. The renamed Botswana Book Centre sold textbooks, fiction and nonfiction books, newspapers, magazines and office/school supplies.



Figure 6: Armstrongs Attorneys, Notaries & Conveyancers, Gaborone, Licence R205 (note the misnumbering in the meter mark indicia) made by a Francotyp-Postalia "MS4/MS5" franking machine

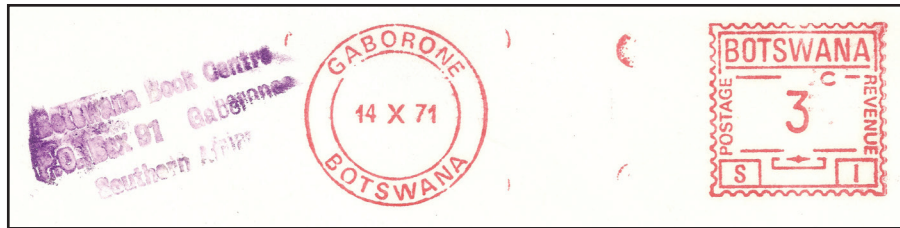


Figure 7: Botswana Book Centre, Gaborone, License S1, made by a Universal/Pitney Bowes "Simplex" franking machine

Figure 7 shows an early meter mark for the Book Centre. Note that while name of business has Botswana in it, the hand-stamp applied by the company says Southern Africa for country, not Botswana. The mark is also denominated in South Africa Rand (cents) which was the currency in use at the time. The license number prefix of an 'S' is also unusual, as after a short period of having different license prefixes, Botswana settled on a prefix of 'R' for all meter licenses regardless of the machine making the mark, unlike most other countries that used the prefix to denote the manufacturer of the machine.

The move of the Book Centre from Lobatse to the new capital city of Gaborone, saw the growth of the retail arm of the business. The growing population of the newly independent state was seeking more general and leisure reading books and the Book Centre began to stock these lines. In the late 1960's and through the 1970's, when there were few bookshops in Gaborone, the Botswana Book Centre became a favourite hangout for bookworms, where city residents and visitors to the capital would lay their hands on their favourite books, newspapers and magazines. The first president of the country, Sir Seretse Khama used to casually walk into the bookstore to buy 'cowboy' books. It became one of the most important landmarks in the city. Figure 8 provides a slightly later mark from this business.

Botswana Business Machine Services (Pty) Limited (see Figure 9) opened in 1970 selling office equipment, furniture,

stationery, air conditioning, carpeting, office partitioning, printers, copiers, engineering, surveying and support/maintenance. During the 1970's, Botswana Business Machine Services (BBMS) was the major player in the office equipment/furniture business in the country and opened branches in Francistown and Lobatse. The business became so successful that it operated its own trucks to collect and deliver equipment, stationery and furniture from South Africa on a bi-weekly basis. In 1980, the Botswana "B" was dropped from the company name and the company became Business Machine Services or BMS (see Figure 10). BMS has supplied products to customers from small home offices to medium size businesses, government, legal, medical and educational establishments.

Century Office Supplies (Pty) Ltd. (see Figure 10) was formed in 1980, offering office stationery and office equipment. The company continues to operate and supplies photocopiers (Sharp & Toshiba), office and scholastic furniture, medical furniture, filling and storage solutions, computers and networking solutions. The company also offers technical support for major brands like HP-Compaq, Toshiba, Cisco and many others. Century Office Supplies' Technical Support Department handles office-wide system implementations.

Rep Agencies (Propriety) Limited (see Figure 12) was registered as a general trading company in March 1982 with the legal support of Damant Bostock^[10] (see information above about the

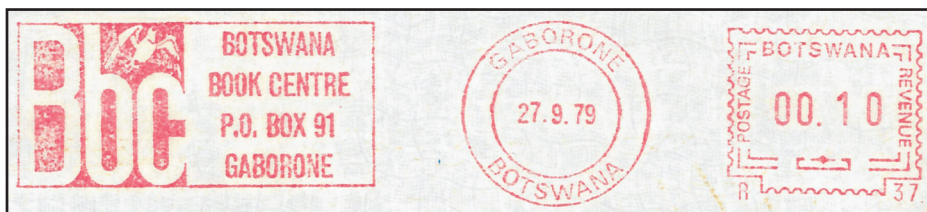


Figure 8: Botswana Book Centre, Gaborone, Licence R37, made by a Pitney Bowes-GB "6300" franking machine

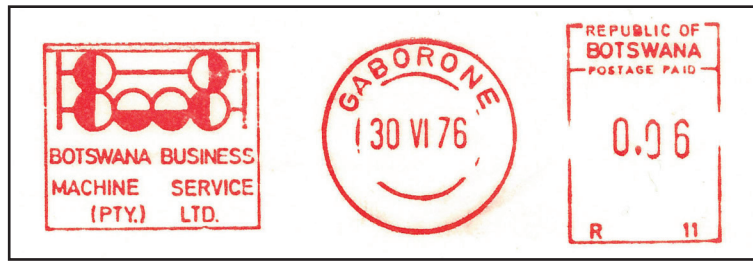


Figure 9: Botswana Business Machine Service Limited, Gaborone, Licence R11, made by a Roneo Neopost "205" franking machine

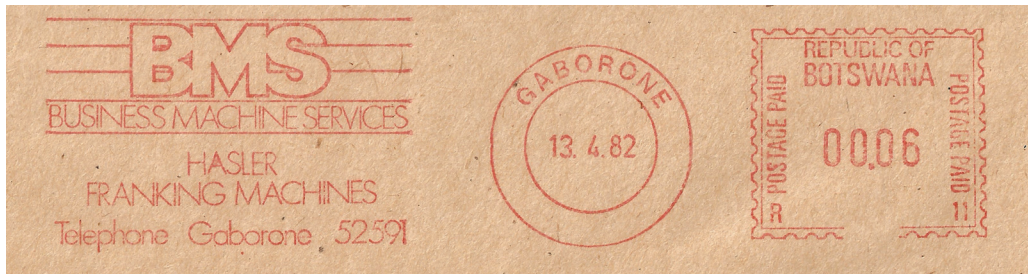


Figure 10: Business Machine Services Limited, Gaborone, Licence R11 made by a Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine

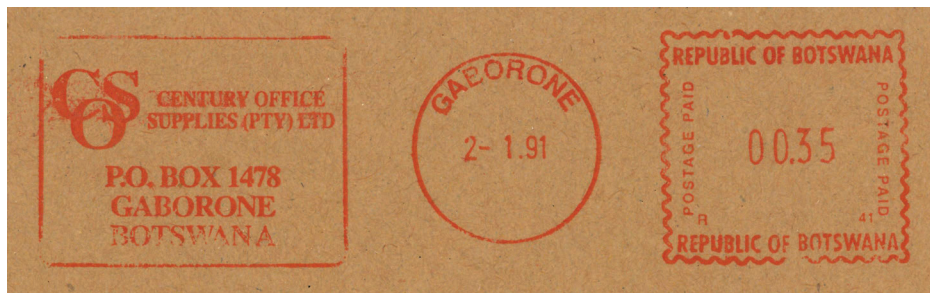


Figure 11: Century Office Supplies (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, Licence R41, made by a Francotyp-Postalia franking machine



Figure 12: Rep Agencies (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, Licence R96, made by a Neopost "Electronic" franking machine

establishment of Armstrongs). It is still in operation today and sells, stationery, paper, printer consumables, laptops, storage solutions, office furniture, audio visual products.

Accounting

In the 1990's, Coopers & Lybrand was one of the "Big 6" accounting firms, the largest of such multinational companies with offices throughout the world. The company had a large services and consulting group with an office in Botswana (see Fig-

ure 13). In 1998, Coopers & Lybrand merged with Price Waterhouse to form Price Waterhouse Coopers (now PwC) becoming the largest accountancy and consulting firm in the world. The firm is the largest provider of professional services on the African continent with close to 400 partners and over 9,000 people in 34 countries.

Deloitte Haskins + Sells was extant in Botswana by at least 1978.^[11] Deloitte was founded by William Welch Deloitte in London in 1845 and expanded into the United States in 1890.



Figure 13: Coopers & Lybrand, Gaborone, Licence R66, made by a Neopost "2205" franking machine

In 1896, Charles Waldo Haskins and Elijah Watt Sells formed Haskins & Sells in New York. It was later described as "the first major auditing firm to be established in the country by American rather than British accountants". In 1972, Deloitte (by then known as Deloitte, Plender, Griffiths & Co.) merged with Haskins & Sells to form Deloitte Haskins & Sells (see Figure 14).

Building Supplies

BMB, Builders Merchants (Botswana) (Pty) Ltd., was established in the mid-1970's. At that time, the Accelerated Rural

Development Program, a major government initiative to support improved conditions in more remote areas of the country, created an increased demand for construction materials. Construction prices jumped by 28 % between February and August 1974 and may have been instrumental in attracting Builders Merchants Botswana to set up in Gaborone as a competitor to two existing suppliers. BMB was a subsidiary of Martex Investments Botswana, as was the Botswana Earthmoving Machinery Company, that was shown in the previous article in Forerunners #103. Figures 15 and 16 show examples of different franking machines used by the company. As a major supplier to the construction industry, this company was likely a high-volume mailer sending out many bills monthly. This thought is supported by these covers being window envelopes, which would reduce the need for addressing each letter thus reducing handling time.

Security

Inco Holdings (Pty) Ltd. (see Figure 17) was a privately held commercial security firm founded in 1987. The firm became a publicly traded company in 1992. In 2003, the majority shareholding was sold to the London, UK based security firm, Securicor, which later merged with another firm to become GS4. The company is now one of Botswana's largest employers.

Travel

Avis Rent a Car (see Figure 18) expanded into Botswana from South Africa in the 1980's as a regional operation of Zeda Car Leasing (Pty) Ltd. Zeda was established in Blomfontein in 1967. Shortly, thereafter the company entered into a joint venture with the Avis Rent a Car System and by the mid-1980's, Zeda was the largest Avis licensee outside the USA. Avis Southern Africa was listed on the Johannesburg, Namibian and Botswana Stock Exchanges in 1997. Avis South Africa diversified

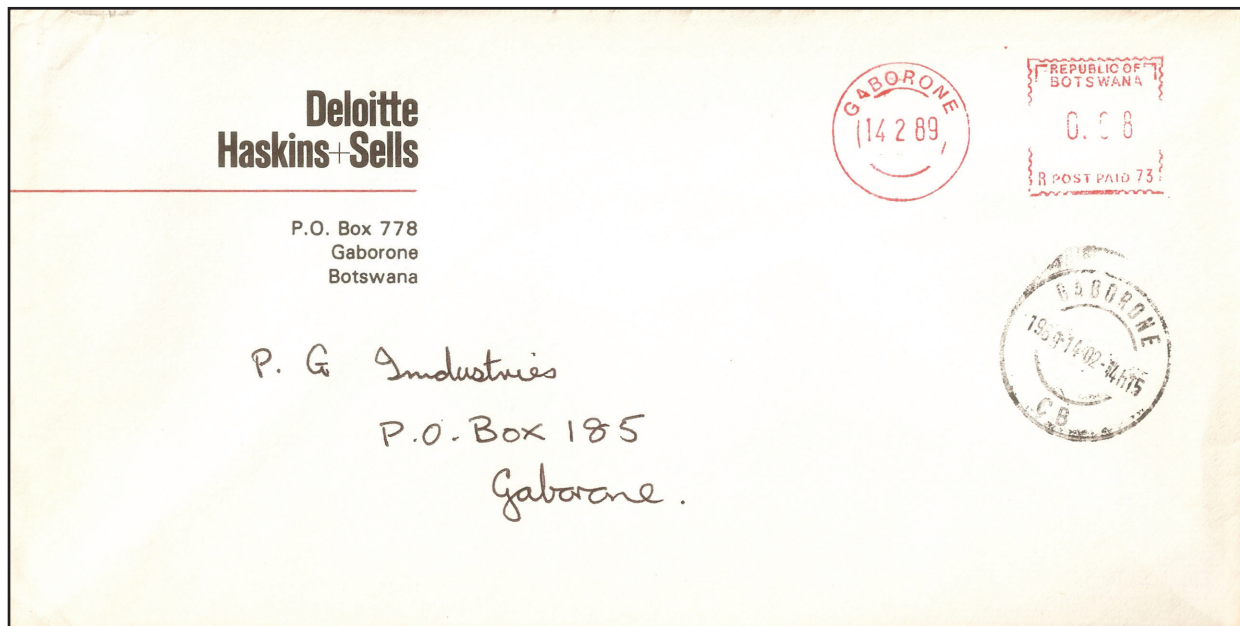


Figure 14: Deloitte Haskins + Sells, Licence R73, made by a Satas "Baby" franking machine



Figure 15: A 1979 cover from BMB, Builders Merchants (Botswana) (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, Licence R27, created by a Neopost "Frankmaster 305" franking machine



Figure 16: A 1984 cover from BMB, Builders Merchants (Botswana) (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, Licence R27, created by a Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine

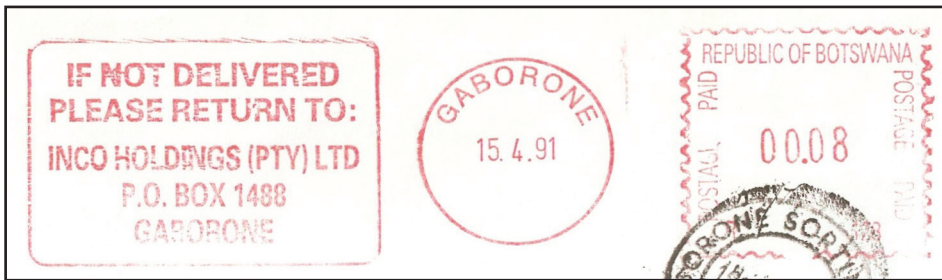


Figure 17: Inco Holdings (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, Licence R128, created by a Francotyp-Postalia "MS5" franking machine

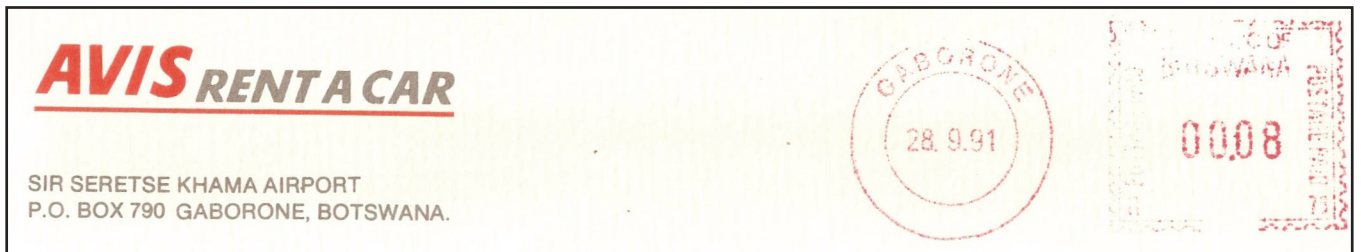


Figure 18: Avis Rent a Car, Gaborone, Licence R78, created by a Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine

into the full tourism market with the acquisition of RCI South Africa timeshare company and Oryx Tours Namibia to deliver a greater variety of services and products.^[12]

In the 1980's, business travel increased as a result of economic growth and the large number of expatriates working in the country. From the mid-1970's to 1980, tourist visits were expected to almost triple from 9,000 to 25,000 per year.^[13] In the pre-internet days, before self-booking became prevalent, these increases in international visitors meant that there was a demand for travel services.

Phuti Travel (see Figure 19) was established 1983. Early in 1990, Phuti Travel expanded by acquiring Pan African Travel

Bureau (Pty) Limited which was established in 1977 and had locations in Gaborone, Francistown, Selebi-Phikwe, Lobatse and Palapye.^[14] Interestingly, this was announced in the Government Gazette by Armstrongs Attorneys (see Figure 6).

Ann Done established Gallery Ann (see Figure 20), an art gallery in 1991, which became one of very few commercial art galleries in Gaborone. Ms. Done organized regular exhibitions of local painters and foreign artists living in Botswana. Her shop sold paintings and handicrafts such as pottery.^[15] Interestingly, the meter licence number that is used on Gallery Ann's mail, R123, was registered to the Sheraton Hotel and not to the gallery.

Figure 19: Phuti Travel, Gaborone, Licence R129, created by a Francotyp-Postalia "MS5" franking machine

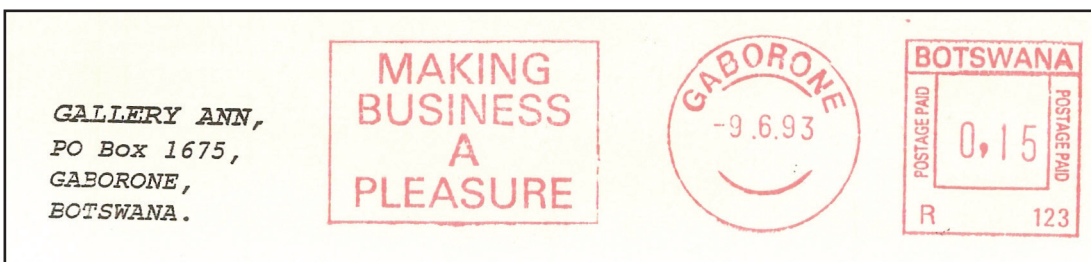


Figure 20: Gallery Ann, Gaborone, Licence R123, created by a Neopost "2205" franking machine Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine

End Notes

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Highlights

Botswana Metermarks
St. Helena and Saul Solomon
The Philatelic Rabbit Holes
Advertising Cape Postal Cards