

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

by Gordon Smith

With the economic transformation of Botswana following independence in 1966, demand for services such as modern housing, electrification, urban water supply, and travel increased. As Botswana rushed to establish the structures of a modern democratic country, it established quasi-independent organizations to provide specific types of services to residents. This article will illustrate some of the meter marks used by parastatals, the term used in Botswana and many African nations to denote these types of state-owned enterprises that are established through statute. In Botswana, like many other emerging markets, parastatals are prevalent in utilities, transportation, and banking. In 2000, Botswana established a Privatization Policy to begin to liberalize some of these sectors.

dependence in 1966. The Pula and its sub-unit, the thebe, were launched as the national currency in 1976. On April 1, 1977, the Government of Botswana transferred its banking accounts from Standard Bank of Botswana, now Standard Chartered Bank Botswana (for a description of this bank, see the first article in this series in issue 100) to the newly formed Bank of Botswana (see Figure 2). The Bank of Botswana is a central bank that was established by the government to provide financial and banking services for the government and commercial banking system, to implement the government's monetary policy, and to issue currency.

The Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC) (see Figure 3) was established through an Act of Parliament in December 1993 as a parastatal with a board comprising of repre-

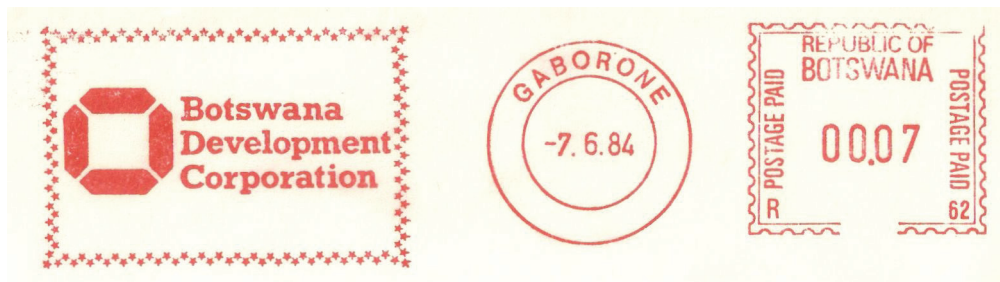


Figure 1: Botswana Development Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R62, dated 7 June 1984.
Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid 7 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams

Monetary Policy and Development

In 1970, as the fortunes of the country improved with the discovery of diamonds, the government established the Botswana Development Corporation (see Figure 1) to support projects to diversify the economy. The Corporation was a limited liability company with the Government of Botswana as the sole shareholder. Today, the Corporation continues to exist and promotes and facilitates the development of industrial, commercial, and agricultural enterprises through the provision of loans and equity investments in commercially viable projects in all sectors of the economy except large-scale mining. As the country's main government agency supporting development, the Botswana Development Corporation remains one of the biggest investors in Botswana growing assets held from 20,000 South African Rand at commencement in 1971 to over 3.6 billion Pula today.

In 1974, despite advice against such a move by many parties including the International Monetary Fund, Botswana withdrew from the Rand Monetary Area under which the South African rand had been the legal currency in Botswana since in-

dependents from government, employers' and workers' organisations and a few other stakeholders.

The statutory mandate of the Botswana National Productivity Centre is to enhance awareness of the importance of improving productivity through advocacy and to enable individuals and organisations through training and consulting to be more productive and competitive. This involves assisting organisations to adopt best management practices through productivity enhancing tools and techniques. To achieve this, the Centre seeks to:

- facilitate the reform of the Public Service in Botswana to where it is rated the best in Africa.
- facilitate the improvement of the quality of Botswana's workforce to where it is ranked the best in the Southern African Development Community region.
- provide productivity statistics and information.
- facilitate a culture of excellence within the private sector with a particular focus on Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises to enable targeted local businesses to achieve a regionally competitive rating on the business excellence model.



Figure 2: Bank of Botswana, Gaborone, Licence R39, dated 16 February 1988. Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This cover, addressed to Europe, appears to be incorrectly rated. A surface letter up to 20 grams would pay 25 thebe, printed papers above 50 grams to 100 grams would pay 35 thebe, and airmail to Europe would pay 30 thebe per 10 grams. This cover at 40 thebe pays the rate for airmail up to 10 grams to countries outside Africa, the Near East, Europe, and the Indian Region

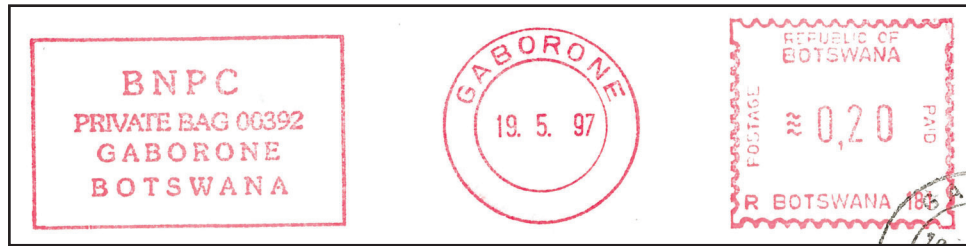


Figure 3: Botswana National Productivity Centre (BNPC), Gaborone, Licence R181, dated 19 May 1997. Created by a Neopost Electronic franking machine. This mark paid 20 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams.

The relocation of the seat of government from Mafeking in South Africa to the new capital city of Gaborone in Botswana created a high demand of housing for bureaucrats in the city. This demand for housing was exacerbated by an influx of construction workers and international aid workers. From 1966 to 1971, the growth rate of Gaborone soared to 24% per annum, the highest in Africa. The original plan created by SwedePlan, a Swedish aid organization providing land planning services, only provided housing for government staff, and failed to accommodate the construction laborers flowing in to build the new city, their families and the host of cleaning staff, housemaids, and shop clerks associated with government expansion.

The Botswana Housing Corporation (see Figure 4) was established in 1971 as a parastatal under the Ministry of Public Works with the mandate to provide housing for people of all income groups across the country. However, it was soon recognised that an such an organization, geared towards building modern urban structures, could not meet the full range of housing needs of the urban population, particularly accommoda-

tion which was affordable by the lowest income groups without substantial subsidy, which the government could not afford. Given that Batswana have always built adequate housing for themselves in the rural areas, self-help soon came to be seen as an obvious cost-effective way of providing housing for urban dwellers, particularly the poor. This led to the establishment of the Self Help Housing Agency (SHHA) in 1978 which supported people to build their own homes using more traditional building techniques. The Botswana Housing Corporation concentrated on building flats of apartments and urban housing for government workers, teachers, and other medium to high income wage earners in urban centres. By 1985, it had rental housing stock of about 6,800 units, all in urban areas, including 622 in Francistown and had sold about 775 units.

Utilities

The Botswana Power Corporation is a state-owned company providing electrical power generation, transmission and distribution in Botswana. It was established in 1970 and remains

the only electricity supplier in the country. To supply the needs of the capital city, Gaborone, the Corporation originally ran a small, utility-scale oil-fired power station in the city, which was commissioned in 1970. In 1974, a 65 MW coal-fired operation was built in Selebi-Pikwe to service the mining industry. Construction of a large coal-fired thermal plant at Morupule, about twelve kilometres west of Palapye, was initiated in 1982 and completed in 1989. The power station was developed in this location so it could be directly supplied with coal from adjacent Morupule Colliery. With the start-up of this new large-scale plant, the plants in Gaborone and Selebi-Pikwe were decommissioned in 1989.

Over the years, the Botswana Power Corporation has extended the national electrical grid to supply all the major communities throughout the country. Figure 5 shows a meter mark from 1980 for this organization. Figure 6 is a later mark using the same licence number with a different machine. Note that this later iteration no longer provides a telegram and telex address and while it has the same mailing address, has a different phone number consisting of seven digits.

At independence in 1966, the telephone and telegraph services in Botswana were operated by the government Department of Posts and Telegraphs. However, in response to growing demands and the market approach being taken by the government, three entities were spun out of this department as parastatals. The Botswana Telecommunications Corporation (see below) and Botswana Savings Bank (see Figure 7) were incorporated into parastatals in 1980 and 1982 respectively and the mail services itself became BotswanaPost in 1989. For more information on the Savings Bank, see the first article in this series on the financial sector found in Forerunners issue 100.

As the national mail carrier, the Botswana Post Office and its subsequent parastatal, Botswana Postal Services trading as BotswanaPost, could send its own correspondence for free and would have no need for a franking machine for use on items it was sending out on its own behalf (see Figure 8). However, as the parastatal sought to develop more streams of income by providing additional services for clients, it established a bulk mailing service for organizations that didn't wish to handle large volume mailings internally. The mark illustrated in Fig-

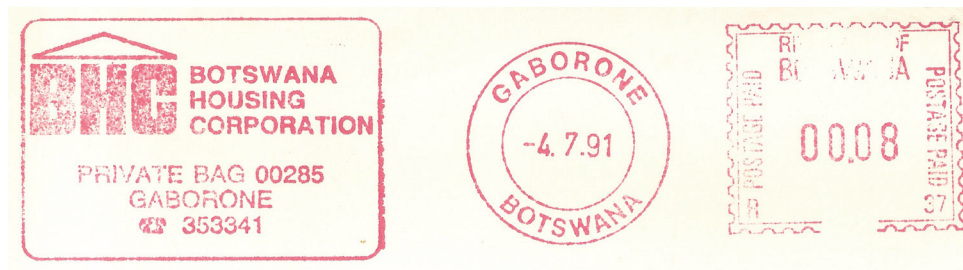


Figure 4: Botswana Housing Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R37, dated 4 July 1991, created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid 8 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams



Figure 5: Botswana Power Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R69, dated 30 October 1989, created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid 8 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams



Figure 6: Botswana Power Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R8, dated 30 October 2000, created by Neopost Electronic franking machine. The mark paid 50 thebe, the domestic standard surface letter rate for an envelope no larger than 120 mm x 235 mm x 20 mm



Figure 7: Botswana Savings Bank, Gaborone, Licence BP06521, dated 7 April 2008, created by Pitney Bowes GB A/B900 franking machine. This mark paid for a domestic standard surface letter 120 mm x 235 mm x 20 mm or smaller

ure 9 is just one example of at least nine meter machines that the corporation set up in the mid-2000's to pay the postage on large mailings that private corporations would drop off for BotswanaPost to mark as paid, sort, and deliver.

Teletswana was the trading name of the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation. The organization was also informally known as Botswana Telecomms. As implied by its name, the parastatal was established to develop, operate and manage Botswana's national and international telecommunications services. Figure 10 shows an early meter mark for this organization.

In Figure 11, the townmark in the centre and the logo mark on the left are identical to those in Figure 10, which would indicate that the same machine has been used with a new indicium (the stamp like mark on the right hand side) inserted. Brisk economic growth and modernization of the country required the rapid expansion of the communications network and the expansion of the operations of the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation. The handstamp on the piece shown in Figure 10 indicates that telephone numbers would be changing to 6 digits in December 1986 allowing the number of available phone lines to grow from a potential 99,999 to 999,999. The change to 7 digits allowing an increase to 9,999,999 potential lines occurred in 2001 only 15 years later.

Figure 12 shows a slightly later meter mark made by a new machine and featuring a new stylized logo for the corporation. This logo continued in use up until at least the mid 2000's.

The Botswana Telecommunications Corporation was the only telecommunications provider in Botswana until 1996 when an amendment to the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation Act removed the monopoly of Corporation. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 established the Botswana Telecommunications Authority (see Figure 13) that established

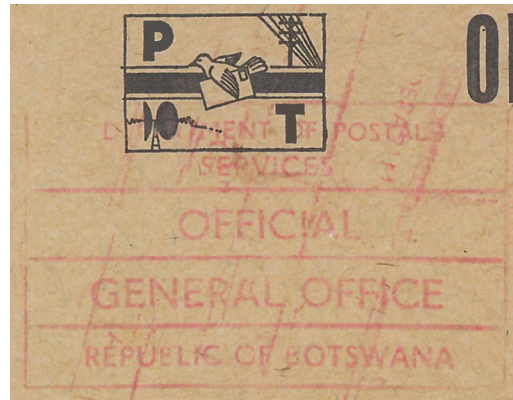


Figure 8: Official Free mark for the Department of Postal Services. For more information on these marks, see <https://postalhistory.ca/botswana-official-free-marks/>

regulations allowing for private indirect competition for the Corporation and resulted in the formation of two cellular phone companies, MASCOM (see Figure 14) and Orange Botswana (see Figure 15).

In 1998, as the government sought to privatize more operations, the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation lost its authority to allocate commercial radio and TV licences to an Independent Broadcasting Commission and the Office of the President (see Figure 16).

The Water Utilities Corporation (see Figures 17 to 20) was established in 1970 by an Act of Parliament with a mandate to manage a single project for the supply and distribution of water in what was then called the Shashe Complex, approximately 400 kilometers northeast of the capital city, Gaborone.



Figure 9: BotswanaPost, Gaborone Sorting Centre, Licence BP06507, dated 4 December 2006, created by Pitney Bowes GB A/B900 franking machine. This mark paid for a domestic standard surface letter 120 mm x 235 mm x 20 mm or smaller



Figure 10: Teletswana or the Botswana Telecommunications Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R52, dated 26 January 1982, created by a Neopost 505 franking machine. Given the address and the size of the cover, it is likely that the 10 thebe rate paid for domestic printed papers above 50 grams up to 100 grams

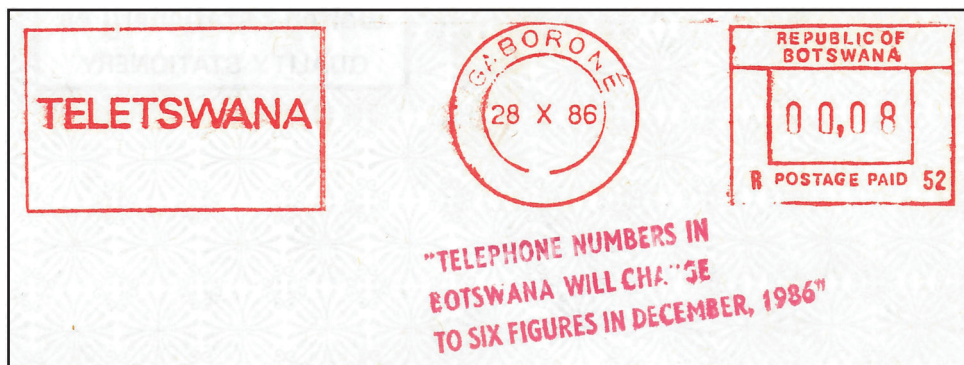


Figure 11: Teletswana, Gaborone, Licence R52, dated 28 October 1986. This mark paid 8 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams

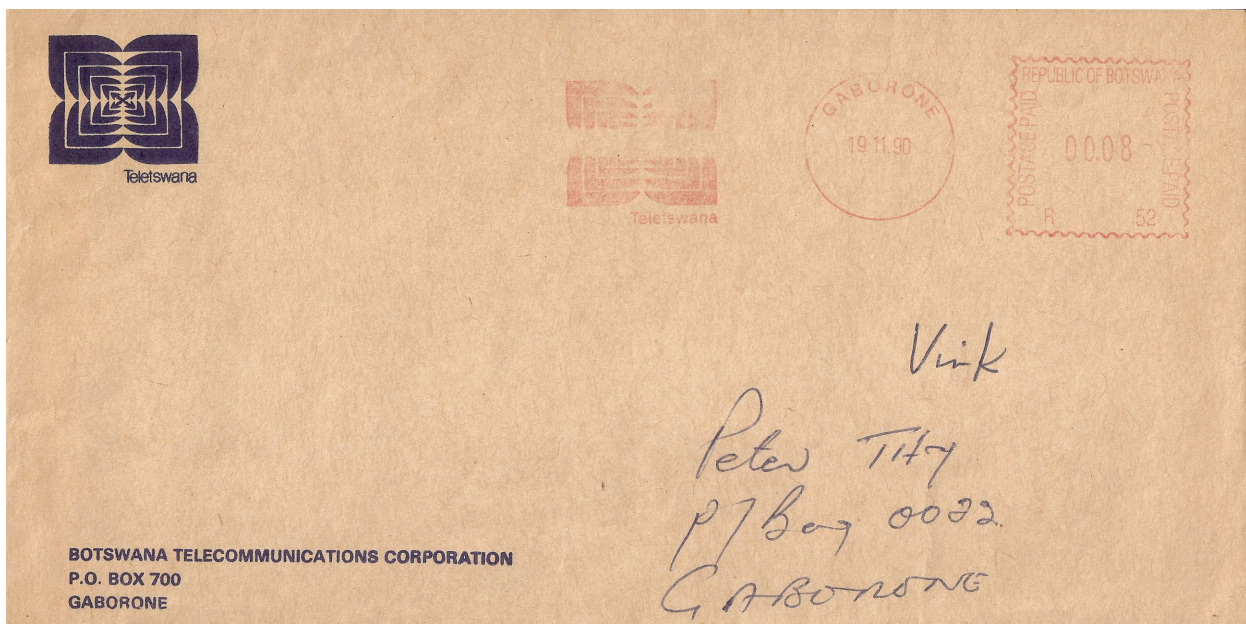


Figure 12: Teletswana, Gaborone, Licence R52, dated 19 November 1990, created by a Francotyp-Postalia MS5 franking machine. This mark paid 8 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams



Figure 13: Botswana Telecommunications Authority, Gaborone, Licence R210, dated 18 December 2002, created by a Francotyp-Postalia MS5 franking machine. This mark paid for a domestic standard surface letter up to 120 mm x 235 mm x 20 mm

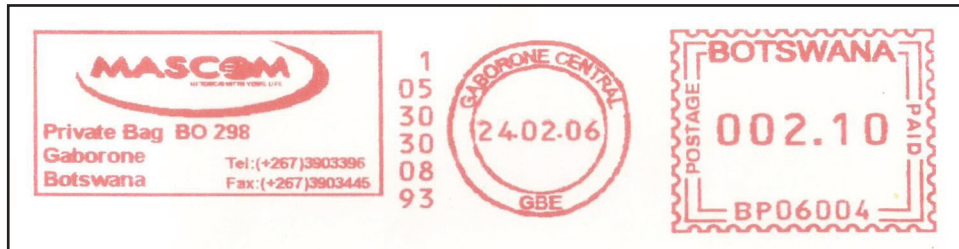


Figure 14: MASCOM, Gaborone Central, Licence BP06004, dated 24 February 2006, created by a Pitney Bowes DM300 digital franking machine. This mark paid for a domestic large surface letter 229 mm x 324 mm x 20 mm or smaller

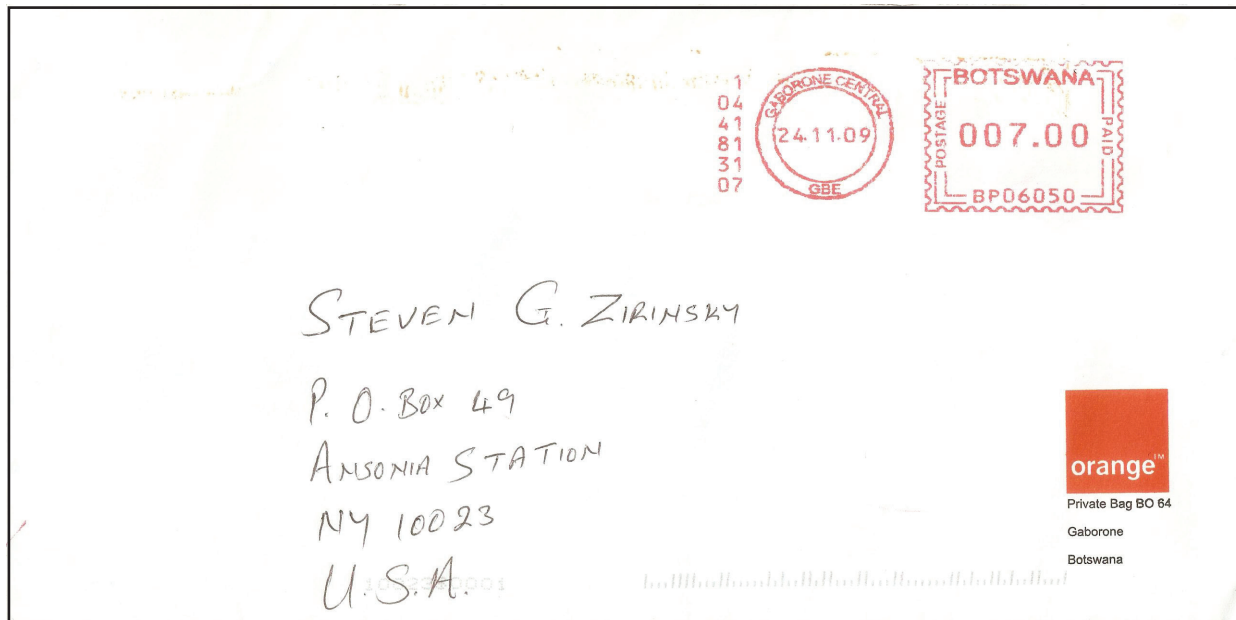


Figure 15: Orange Botswana, Gaborone Central, Licence BP06050, dated 24 November 2009, created by a Pitney Bowes DM300 digital franking machine. This mark does not appear to pay any known rate for the period. Since the rate for a standard airmail letter (120 mm x 235 mm x 20 mm) to the United States was 4.90 Pula and no postage due was assessed, it appears that this letter was overpaid by 2.10 Pula

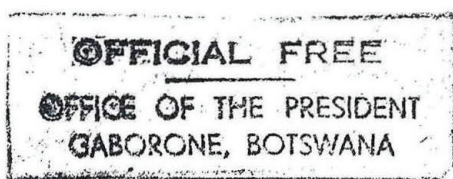


Figure 16: Official Free handstamp from the Office of the President. This handstamp allowed the Office to send items through the postal system for free. For more information on these marks, see <https://postalhistory.ca/botswana-official-free-marks/>^[1]

This project involved the construction of a large dam at Shashe Siding to supply the development of copper mining at Matsitama and possibly Sedibe, industrial development at Francistown and Shashi Siding, the irrigation of a large areas of arid land, and the possible future production of salt and soda ash at Sua. For more information on mining activities in this area, see the section about Banangwato Concessions (Pty) Limited and Soda Ash (Pty) Ltd. in the second article in this series about large companies found in Issue 103. The Water Utilities Corporation, as a parastatal, supplies bulk treated water to the government's Department of Water Affairs that arranges the distribution of this water.

Since its inception, the Water Utilities Corporation's mandate expanded to supplying potable water to all urban centres and villages in the country, as well as managing wastewater. The Water Utilities Corporation owns nine dams as well as a 365 km long pipeline, water treatment plants and associated pump stations. The Corporation presently supplies over 80 million cubic metres of potable water annually to its customer base. The Corporation is economically self-sufficient, raising

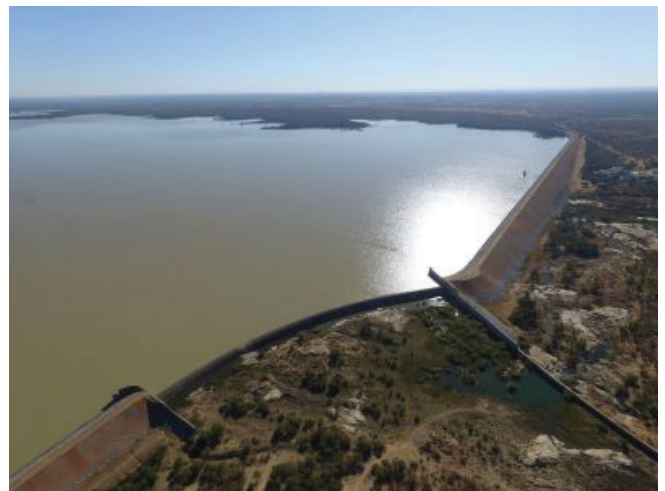


Figure 17: Aerial photo of the Shashe Dam^[2]

enough revenue from billing and subsidies to cover operational costs, investments and debt servicing.

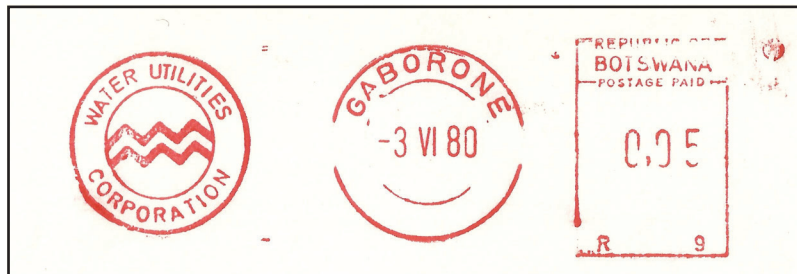


Figure 18: Water Utilities Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R9, dated 3 June 1980. Created by a Roneo NeoPost 205 franking machine. This mark paid 5 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams

Figure 19: Water Utilities Corporation, Gaborone, Licence R86, dated 10 May 1993. Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid 10 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams

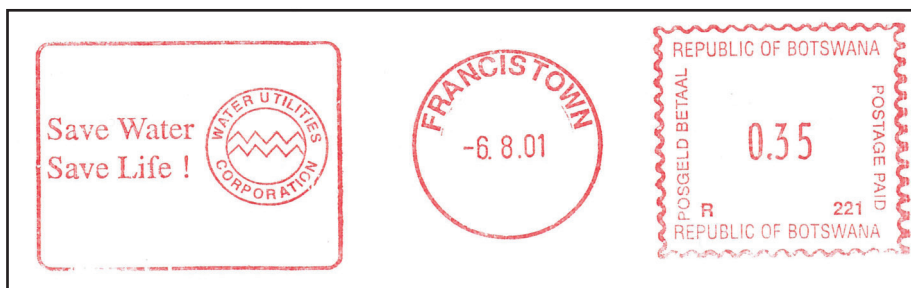
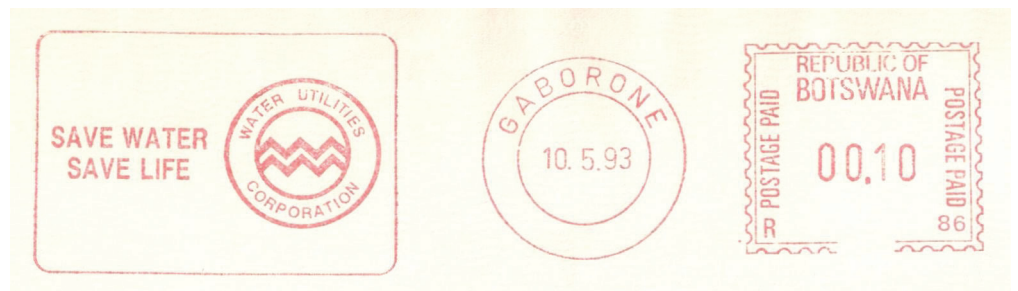


Figure 20: Water Utilities Corporation, Francistown, Licence R221, dated 6 August 2001. Created by a Francotyp Postalia MS5 franking machine. This mark paid 35 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams

Transportation

The Bechuanaland Railway Company Limited was incorporated in 1893 to connect the Cape Province with Rhodesia (see Figure 21). A year later, the first portion of the line from Vryburg to Mafikeng opened. The remainder of the line from

Mafikeng to Bulawayo, a 780 km route, of which 640 km lies within the territory of present-day Botswana, opened in 1897. The rapidity with which this portion of the line was constructed after the Ndebele uprising in 1896 reflected its military and political significance for the British South Africa Company. A



Figure 21: Miniature Sheet commemorating the centenary of Botswana Railways, issued 24 May 1993. Designed by Peter Lodoen

total of 650 kilometers of the rail line were constructed in 400 days, a remarkable feat of construction. The line was constructed so quickly that the track was run across the bed of larger rivers such as the Shashe and the Tati with bridges constructed at a later stage.

To finance the construction of the railway, the British Imperial Government guaranteed £30,000 for ten years, two thirds of which came from the Imperial Government and one third from the British South Africa Company and the Tati Company. In addition, the Bechuanaland Government was to induce the

tribal chiefs within its territory to transfer land for the railways. In return, the Bechuanaland Government was to receive free carriage of official mail, a one third rebate on the transport of government freight and passenger fares of public servants, and 12 per cent of the net profit on the railway, during the period of subsidy.^[3]

The line to Bulawayo was operated by the Cape Government Railways, which was subsequently amalgamated into the South African Railways in 1910 and this operational arrangement continued until 1959. At the end of 1959, the South African Railways purchased the section of the line from Vryburg to Ramatlabama from Rhodesia Railways and continued operation of the line north to Mahalapye, which became the handover station for traffic and train crew changeover point between South African Railways and Rhodesia Railways (see Figure 22).

The arrangement between South African Railways and Rhodesia Railways continued until 26th September 1966, four days before Botswana became an independent country. At this point, Rhodesia Railways took over the responsibility for the operation of the line from Mahalapye to Mafikeng and thus became responsible for the operation of the entire line throughout Botswana.

As Botswana continued to modernize its economy, it remained involved in the upgrading of transportation systems including the rail line. In 1974, branch lines to Morupule Colliery (see discussion of Botswana Power Corporation above) and to Selebi Phikwe (see discussion of Bamangwato Concessions (Pty) Limited in Issue 103), both financed by the Government of Botswana, were opened to traffic. Also in 1974, the first President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama, announced the country's intention of taking over the railway company and a training centre was set up in Francistown. In 1980, locomotive and wagon workshops were built in Mahalapye.

Following the establishment of Botswana Railways (see Figure 23) by an Act of Parliament in 1986, on January 1st,



Figure 22: Miniature Sheet showing the route of Botswana Railways, issued 19 June 1992. Designed by Peter Lodoen

1987, the government of Botswana took over the operation of the railway line, which runs from Mafikeng in South Africa through Botswana to Plumtree in Zimbabwe (just over the border from Ramokgwebana, Botswana) from the National Railways of Zimbabwe.

In 1992, the branch line from Francistown to Sua Pan was added (see branch line to Sowa shown in Figure 22 and discussion of Soda Ash (Pty) Ltd. in Issue 103). In 1994, Botswana Railways relocated its headquarters from the capital city, Gaborone to Mahalapye (see Figure 24 illustrating a townmark with this new location).

Today, the main line remains open, although its importance as a through route has declined with the opening of a more direct route between South Africa and Zimbabwe through Beitbridge in 1999. While passenger service was discontinued in

2009, it was re-introduced in 2016 providing service between Lobatse, Gaborone and Francistown with a connecting service operating between Francistown and Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. The rail line is also used by luxury cruise trains.

Two private companies tried to provide scheduled air service in the country. The first, Botswana National Airways Corporation was founded with a government grant and operated from 1966 to 1969, when the unprofitable operation was shut down. The second attempt by the Botswana Airways Corporation operated from 1970 to 1971. Despite the involvement of some private investors, this operation also failed. In 1972, the government established Air Botswana (Pty) Limited (see Figures 26 to 29) as a subsidiary of the Botswana Development Corporation (see Figure 1 above).



Figure 23: Botswana Railways, Gaborone, Licence R117, dated 18 May 1992. Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This registered letter pays 58 thebe. At the time, the rate for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams was 8 thebe and the registration fee was 40 thebe for a total of 48 thebe. Given that the franking machine used sliders to set the number for each digit in the value (see Figure 24), I would argue that the operator of the meter machine mis-set it by pushing the 10 thebe slide one digit too far. Also, this cover is addressed to Peter Lodoen, the designer of the stamps and miniature sheets illustrated in Figure 21 and 22. Could this perhaps have contained some correspondence related to the design of those stamps?

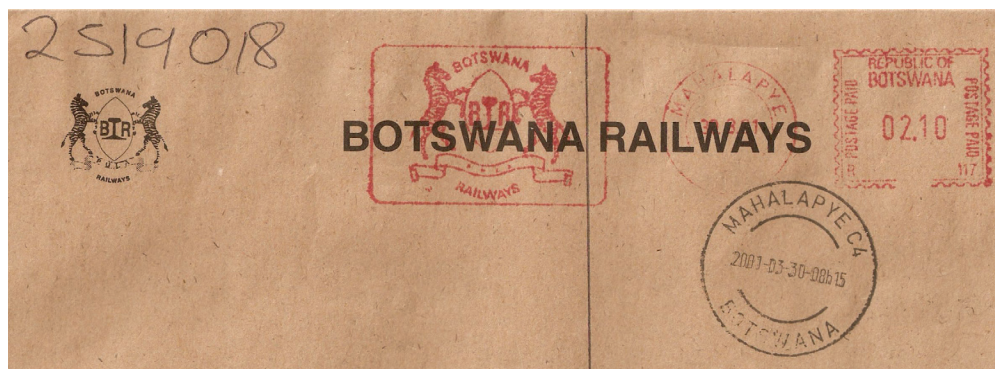


Figure 25: Botswana Railways, Licence R117, dated 30 March 2001, showing relocation of the Hasler Mailmaster franking machine of the same licence number to Mahalapye from Gaborone. Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid the proper rate of 35 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams with the registration fee of 1.75 Pula for a total of 2.10 Pula



Figure 24: Hasler Mailmaster franking machine showing the sliders used to set the value of the franking^[4]

At first, Air Botswana was essentially a ticketing and ground services company with scheduled air services being carried out on its behalf by a partner airline, Air Services Botswana, which was owned by South African and Swiss interests. This arrangement lasted until 1982 when the government

again took over responsibility for the provision of national air services and awarded British Airways a contract for the operation of the airline for a six-year period. In 1987, Air Botswana was designated the national flag carrier. In 1988 with the enactment of the Air Botswana Act, the airline became a parastatal corporation under the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications.

This article is the fourth in a series. The first article discussing the meter marks used by the financial sector in the early days of Botswana independence was published in issue #100 (May-August 2021) of Forerunners. The second article describing the meter marks used by the large companies establishing operations in the country was published in issue #103 (May-August 2022). The third article discussing the meter marks used by the smaller supply companies was published in issue #109 (May-August 2024). Two more articles discussing other government entities and miscellaneous organizations will follow. More information on the meter marks of Botswana can be found at <https://postalhistory.ca/botswana-meter-marks/>.



Figure 26: Air Botswana, Gaborone, Licence R88, dated 16 July 1986, prior to the airline becoming its own parastatal, rather than a subsidiary of the Botswana Development Corporation. The meter mark was created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid 7 thebe, using the rate for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams that was in force up to 1 April 1986. Despite underpaying the proper rate that was in force at the time by 1 thebe, no postage due was assessed



Figure 27: Air Botswana, Gaborone, Licence R126, dated 29 October 1990. Created by a Hasler Mailmaster franking machine. This mark paid the proper rate of 8 thebe for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams



Figure 28: Air Botswana, Gaborone, Licence R88, dated 21 May 1991. Likely created by the same Hasler Mailmaster franking machine as the mark in Figure 26, however with the addition of the Air Botswana logo on the left. While this mark was created after the differently licenced mark (R126) illustrated in Figure 27 which pays the correct rate, this mark like the one in Figure 26 underpays the rate for a domestic surface letter up to 20 grams by 1 thebe, which would seem to indicate that the rate in the indicium on licence 88 was not updated in over 5 years!



Figure 29: Air Botswana plane at Francistown Airport, 1981^[5]

End Note

1. Credit: Firth, Dennis. (June 2007). Official Free Markings Part 2 – Botswana (Installment 4). The Runner Post. The Journal of the Bechuanalands and Botswana Society. No. 69, p. 1682
2. Retrieved from <https://hatfieldgroup.com/projects/development-of-the-shashe-dam-tourism-plan/> on 23 Nov. 2024
3. P. Maylam. Rhodes. The Tswana and the British Colonialism: Collaboration and Conflict in Bechuanaland Protectorate 1885-

1899 (London: Greenwood Press 1980) pp 292-93; 95 quoted in https://journals.co.za/doi/pdf/10.10520/AJA052550590_743, accessed 24 July 2024

4. Retrieved from <https://www.ebay.de/itm/296184324794> on 23 Nov. 2024
5. Credit: Archives and Records management Centre Botswana, retrieved on 23 Nov. 2024 from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_Botswana_BNB_6382_1981_\(Botswana_History\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Air_Botswana_BNB_6382_1981_(Botswana_History).jpg)



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Early Cape Colony postcard from the British Online Archives

Highlights

- Botswana Meter Marks
- Malawi Small Post Offices
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