

The Post-Independence Industrial Development of Botswana as Illustrated through Meter Marks: Educational Institutions, Miscellaneous Organizations and Amendments

by Gordon Smith

Introduction

This article is the last in a series of articles which appeared in issues 100, 103, 109, 110, and 112 of this journal that discuss the meter marks used by the financial sector, large companies, support companies, parastatals, and sub-national and international government entities in the early days of Botswana independence. This article illustrates some of the meter marks used by institutions of higher education and miscellaneous other organizations during this period and also provides some updates to the earlier articles.

The University of Botswana and Swaziland, Gaborone

This university, originally called the University of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland (UBLS), was founded in 1964 as the outcome of an agreement reached in 1962 between the High Commission Territories and the Oblate of Mary Immaculate of Pius XII Catholic University, Roma, Lesotho. It was established to provide tertiary education for black Africans outside of the apartheid regime of South Africa. In 1966, Bechuanaland and Basutoland gained independence becoming Botswana and Lesotho respectively. UBLS was equally fund-

ed by the Governments of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, but had comparatively little physical presence in Botswana and Swaziland in the first phase of its existence during 1964 to 1970. In late 1970 / early 1971, funds were obtained from the United States, British, Canadian, Danish and Dutch governments as well as from the governments of the UBLS countries, the Anglo American Corporation and other bodies to establish campuses in the three member countries.⁽ⁱ⁾

In 1975, Lesotho withdrew from the partnership. The university continued as the University of Botswana and Swaziland with the intention to eventually establish separate national universities. Botswana, as one of the poorest nations in the world with an extremely high rate of illiteracy, began a fundraising campaign called *motho le motho kgomo* or One Man, One Beast to support the university. This campaign, which asked every farmer in the country to donate one cow or other contributions including cash, grain, eggs, etc. to support the development of a university campus in Botswana,⁽ⁱⁱ⁾ raised over one million rand or US\$5.13 million today.⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ This was an amazing statement about the value that the populace placed on education in a country that in 1966 had about 40 university graduates



Figure 1. University of Botswana and Swaziland, Gaborone, licence number R10, dated 16 August 1978. Created by a Roneo NeoPost "205" franking machine. Either the rating or the date in the meter mark is incorrect. The rate for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country was 0.04 Rand (or 4 cents) until 5 November 1978 and 5 thebe thereafter



Figure 2. University of Botswana, Gaborone, licence number R104, dated 30 August 1989. Created by a Hasler "Mailmaster" franking machine. Rated at 8 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country

and about 100 secondary school graduates in a population of 595,000. In the early 1980's, Botswana and Swaziland agreed to establish separate universities, and the University of Botswana was established on 1st July 1982 by an Act of Parliament.

Figure 1 shows a cover from 1978 showing the inscription "UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA AND SWAZILAND" with a meter, licence number R10, from Gaborone, Botswana. Records obtained from BotswanaPost indicate that this meter was originally assigned to the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Figure 2 shows a cover from 1989 inscribed "University of Botswana" using the same mailing address, with a meter, licence number R104. Records from BotswanaPost indicate that this licence was obtained by the University of Botswana on September 4, 1987.

R109, Kgolagano College, Gaborone

Kgolagano College (see Figure 3) was established in 1975 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Botswana Diocese of the Anglican Church, the Church of God in Christ, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa, and the

United Congregational Church in Southern Africa, to provide the Botswana Theological Training Programme. In 1987, the Programme became the Kgolagano College of Theological Education by Extension. Today, the College is a society registered to offer academic training in theology and is run by a Board of Trustees that includes the Botswana Council of Churches and the Botswana Bible Society.^(iv) Records from BotswanaPost indicate that the College was issued licence number R109 on September 25, 1989.

Botswana Cooperative Union

The Botswana Cooperative Union (BCU) was formed in 1966 to aid the mass of the rural population who were outside the "cattle economy" to obtain income from the marketing of small stock and to act as a cooperative wholesale supplier of consumer goods, agricultural inputs and farm implement to its member societies^(v) (see Figure 4). Until 1972, the BCU, through its warehouses at Gaborone, Palapye and Francistown and Maun, acted as the wholesale supplier to the consumer shops and to a limited extent, it supplied agricultural inputs to the marketing societies.^(vi) In 1973, the BCU became the

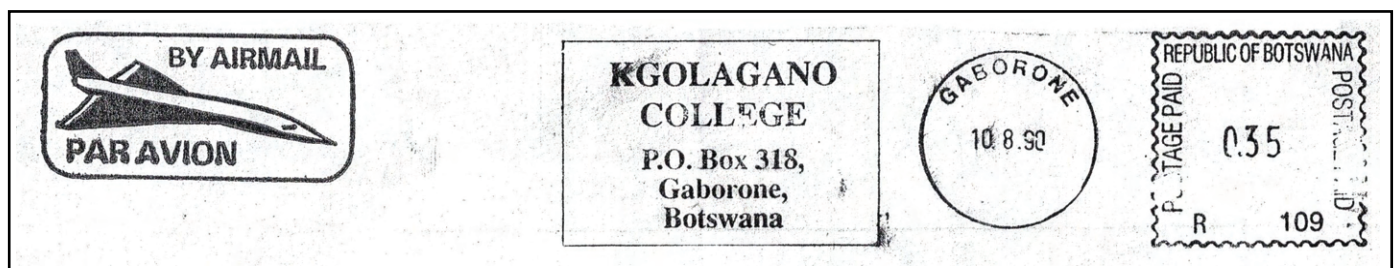


Figure 3: Kgolagano College, Gaborone, licence number R109, dated August 10, 1990. Created by a Postalia multi-value franking machine. Rated at 35 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country



Figure 4. Botswana Cooperative Union, Gaborone, licence number R82, dated July 26, 1991. Created by a Hasler “Mailmaster” multi-value franking machine. Rated at 8 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country

cattle agent for the consumer societies at the Botswana Meat Commission abattoir, through its Lobatse offices,^(vii) and had transport, promotion, and insurance divisions in its headquarters.^(viii) The BCU depended heavily on donor funding to survive with the European Union financing the construction of its warehousing facilities throughout the country.^(ix) Due to financial mismanagement and corruption, the BCU collapsed in the mid-1990’s.^(x)

Records from BotswanaPost indicate that the Botswana Cooperative Union was issued licence number R82 on December 5, 1985.

Botswana Mining Workers Union, Selebi-Phikwe

The Botswana Mining Workers' Union is the oldest union in Botswana.^(xi) It was formed in late 1960’s in Francistown and was formerly registered on May 17, 1970, following the enactment of the Trade Union’s Act of 1969. The union was formed after the opening of the diamond mines at Orapa were opened (see Debswana marks in previous article found in Forerunners 103). Representing the interest of the mine workers and those in quarries, the union had its first headquarters in Francistown. The union held its first congress in Francistown in February 1971 with delegates from Orapa, Phikwe and Shashe to elect its first National Executive Committee. After this historic conference, the union headquarters moved to Orapa. Because Orapa was a closed town, the union headquarters were subsequently moved to Selebi Phikwe where they remain to date.^(xii)

The Selebi-Phikwe Miners strike of 1975 was broken by the paramilitary Police Mobile Unit. The mining company, Bamangwato Concessions Limited (see Forerunners #103, page 48 and the end of this article) was allowed to dismiss all workers and rehire only those who would “cooperate”.^(xiii) Thirty-four workers were convicted and sentenced to jail. More recently, the Union has had some success bargaining with Debswana, the major mining company in the country, although strikers continue to lose their jobs.^(xiv)

Records from BotswanaPost indicate that the Botswana Mining Workers Union was issued licence number R178 on February 1, 1995.

Holiday Inn / Gaborone Sun

Holiday Inn opened a US\$3.2-million (US\$25.1 million today) Hotel and Casino as a flagship luxury venue in the capital, Gaborone, in 1972 (see Figure 6). While it was American-owned, the Botswana Government received 20 per cent of the profits.^(xv)

The facility was rebranded to the Gaborone Sun Hotel in 1984 after being acquired by the Sun International Group, a South African company founded in the late 1960’s by Sol Kerzner, a major player in the Southern African hospitality and casino gaming industry. Records from BotswanaPost indicate that the Gaborone Sun was issued licence number R147 on May 21, 1992 (see Figure 7).

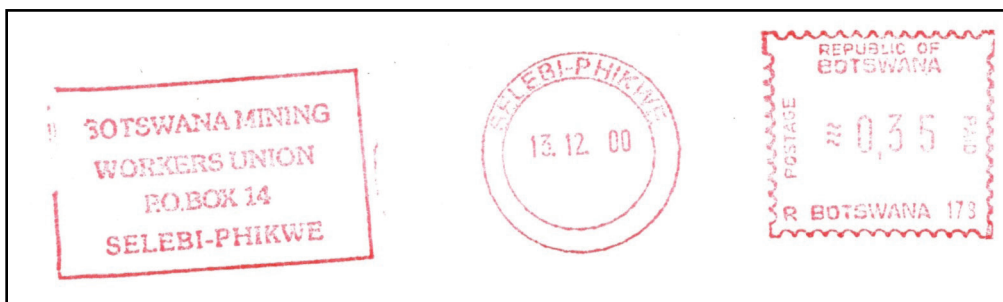


Figure 5. Botswana Mining Workers Union, Selebi-Phikwe, licence number R178, dated December 12, 2000. Created by a Neopost “Electronic” multi-value franking machine. Rated at 35 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country



Figure 6. Late 1970's Postcard from Holiday Inn, Botswana



Figure 7: Gaborone Sun Hotel and Casino, Gaborone, licence number R147, dated May 3, 1995 on piece. Created by a Hasler "Mailmaster" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 20 thebe for a surface mail letter above 50g up to 100g posted within the country, printed papers to southern Africa above 20g up to 50g, or printed papers to other countries up to 20g.

The facility has undergone several major refurbishments to evolve and remain with the times, including the development of executive and luxury suites.^(xvi) In the late 1980's and early 1990's, Gaborone was developing so quickly that expatriate workers were having extreme difficulties in finding accommodation and many families lived in the hotel for their entire 2-year contract. These situations were so common and lucrative that the hotel built a special wing for long term stays.

Sheraton Hotel

The Sheraton Hotel was built in 1987 roughly three kilometres from the city centre of Gaborone and ten kilometres south of the Sir Seretse Khama International Airport (see Figure 8). An upmarket, Las Vegas style casino was added to the hotel in 1995 when the hotel was acquired and re-launched as

the Grand Palm Hotel Casino and Convention Resort (see Figure 9). The hotel has since been renamed the Peermont Wal-mont and an additional hotel called the Peermont Metcourt Inn with 149 rooms was built as part of the complex in the late 2000s.

MultiChoice

MultiChoice Botswana was a satellite TV service (see Figure 10). It was established in Botswana in 1992 as a joint venture with RSM (Pty) Ltd., a Botswana based accounting firm holding shares on behalf of the South African media company that offered a similar service in that country. MultiChoice Botswana launched the M-Net pay TV service in 1993 and in 1994, began offering a multichannel subscription service providing 16 hours per day of viewing. During the early 1990s, the firm



Figure 8. Sheraton Hotel, Gaborone, licence number R123, dated November 1, 1991, on piece. Created by a Neopost "2205" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 8 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country. A similar example is show in Forerunners #109 on page 42, which as noted showed a return address from Gallery Ann, but used a licence number associated with the Sheraton Hotel



Figure 9. Grand Palm Hotel Casino Resort, Gaborone, licence number R229, dated January 28, 2000. Created by a Neopost "Electronic" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 35 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country



Figure 10. Multichoice Botswana (Pty) Ltd., Gaborone, licence number R158. Cover dated July 10, 1995. Created by a Neopost "Electronic" multi-value franking machine. Rate of 15 thebe is incorrect as new rates enacted on 1 July 1995 do not contain such a rate. The mailer was likely using the old rate for a surface mail letter above 20g up to 50g posted within the country

had a monopoly on commercial broadcasting in the country. Prior to this, Radio Botswana, a government run organization, had a monopoly on all broadcasting in the country. In 1996, Multichoice expanded it's offering to 24 channels, and added additional channels in 1998. In 1999, it partnered with the BBC to offer 24-hour viewing.

Amendments related to previous articles

The following marks were found after the previous articles were written.

The mark shown in Figure 11 with the licence number R49 is related to Bamangwato Concessions (Pty) Ltd. (BCL). This company was described in Forerunners #103 on page 48 which showed a mark from 20 years earlier with licence number R13. The mark shown here refers to the Botswana RST Group which

is the Roan Selection Trust. BCL was formed as a public / private partnership between the morafe (or tribe) in the area and the mining company, the Roan Selection Trust.

Figure 12 shows a South African cover from Minchin & Kelly. An earlier article in Forerunners #109 describes the formation of this firm in South Africa and the establishment of its office in Gaborone.

Figure 13 shows a cover front from Minet Insurance. An example, from a different franking machine and with a different licence number, used one-year later is shown in Forerunners #100 on page 49 with a description of Minet Insurance's establishment in Botswana.

Figure 14 shows a cover front from the Standard Bank in Gaborone. Forerunners #100 on page 47 shows two examples from different branches of the bank and discusses the opening of Standard Bank operations in Botswana.

Thanks for your interest in this series. If you have any comments, questions, or information that you would like to share or know more about, please feel free to reach out to me at gs@postalhistory.ca.

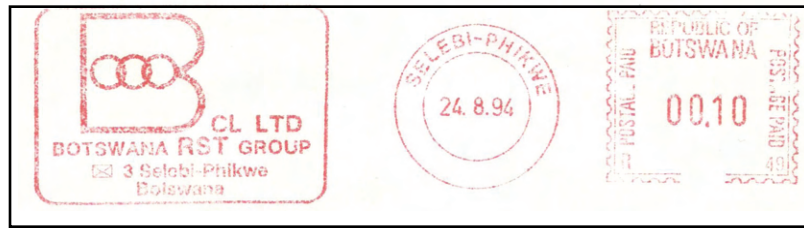


Figure 11. BCL Ltd., Selebi-Phikwe, licence number R49. Piece dated August 24, 1994. Created by a Hasler "Mailmaster" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 10 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country



Figure 12. Minchen & Kelly, Mafeking, South Africa, licence number JH821, from Mafeking, South Africa to Gaborone, Botswana, dated November 30, 1979. Created by a Roneo Neopost Type VII franking machine. Rated at 5 South African cents, which interestingly is the "internal" rate for a standardized sealed letter no larger than 24" by 12", despite the letter being posted to an international destination

Figure 13. Minet Insurance, Gaborone, licence number R53. Cover dated December 11, 1981. Created by a Neopost "2205" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 6 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country



Figure 14. Standard Bank, Gaborone, licence number R30. Cover front dated June 5, 1981. Created by a Pitney Bowes-GB "6300" multi-value franking machine. Rated at 6 thebe for a surface mail letter up to 20g posted within the country.

Endnotes

- i History of UB, accessed from <https://www.ub.bw/discover/history> on Jan. 15, 2026
- ii Accessed from <https://www.ub.bw/administration-and-support/vice-chancellor/university-botswana-foundation/history-philanthropy-surrounding-university-botswana>
- iii Ketji, Keith. (2022, Oct. 13) University celebrates 40 years. Daily News. Accessed from <https://dailynews.gov.bw/news-detail/69645> on Mar. 27, 2026.
- iv Kgolagano College, accessed from https://www.globalministries.org/partner/kgolagano_college/ on 6 Feb. 2026.
- v Stevens, Richard P. (1975). Botswana Cooperative Union (BCU). Historical Dictionary of the Republic of Botswana. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Metuchen, N.J.
- vi <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/024/1970/001/article-A004-en.xml>
- vii Stevens (1975).
- viii Morgan, Richard G. (1982) The evolution of agricultural co-operatives and Government policy in Botswana. Botswana Notes and Records. Vol. 14, pp. 35-45 accessed from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40979665> on 16 Mar. 2026.
- ix Seleke, Thabo Lucas and Lekorwe, Mogopodi. (2010). Cooperatives and development: a case of citizen economic empowerment in Botswana. CoopAFRICA Working Paper No. 8. p. 11, accessed from <https://www.ilo.org/media/331231/download> on Feb. 6, 2026.
- x Oladele, O.I. and Monkhei, M. (2009). Structural changes in livestock marketing cooperatives in Botswana: A two decades analysis. Livestock Research for Rural Development. Vol. 21, Issue 6 2009. Accessed from <https://www.lrrd.org/lrrd21/6/olad21082.htm> on Mar. 26, 2026.
- xi Welcome to Botswana Mine Workers Union, accessed from <https://bmwu.org.bw/> on Mar. 17, 2026.
- xii About, accessed from <https://bmwu.org.bw/about/> on Mar. 17, 2026.
- xiii Ramsay, Jeff, Morton, Barry and Morton, Fred. (1996). Trade Unions. Historical Dictionary of Botswana, Third Edition. The Scarecrow Press, Inc., Lanham, Md.
- xiv Ibid.
- xv Booming Botswana Widens Economy. (1973, Feb. 4). The New York Times. Accessed from <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/02/04/archives/booming-botswana-widens-economy-lesotho-plans-development.html> on Jan. 15, 2026.
- xvi AI response from Google, based on search of Gaborone Sun Hotel history, on Mar. 17, 2026.

Illustrations are not to scale.



ISSN 1076-2612

*******FORERUNNERS**

JOURNAL OF THE PHILATELIC SOCIETY FOR GREATER SOUTHERN AFRICA

Affiliated with the American Philatelic Society and the Philatelic Federation of South Africa

Volume XXXIX, Number 1, Whole Number 114

January-April 2026



Wagons approaching the Harrismith Interment Camp During Anglo-Boer War:
Postcard of French Origin

Highlights

Transvaal Bisected
Botswana Meter Marks
Rail Letter Outside SA
Private African Wrappers

Article of Distinction Award