FRAMA LABELS
Issued 24th October 1985

The PTC Bulletin No 5 of 1985 gave details of the introduction of vending machine postage labels, which were introduced as an experiment. The introduction of these machines introduced a whole new method of paying for postage which involved obtaining pre-paid labels from machines situated in main post offices. This gave a new dimension for collecting Zimbabwean stamps and has led to numerous articles in various journals (see list of articles under Bibliography). The main article produced on these labels is that of George Stewart in the Rhodesian Study Circle Journal of December 1995, entitles "Zimbabwe Frama Labels". Much on the following analysis is based on this article.

Zimbabwe was the first country in Southern & Central Africa to purchase and use the vending machines. The labels were issued, or perhaps more correctly, the machines commenced operating from 8.30 a.m. on 24th October 1985. South Africa introduced the labels from 14 August 1986 and South West Africa (Namibia) from 30 March 1988.

The machines were second generation Postal Label Vending Machines manufactured by Frama AG of Laupersvile, Berne, Switzerland. Hence the nickname "Frama" or, in Europe, "ATM" for "Automatermarken" - "automatic stamps". The machines are coded as FE274 being:

F = Frama; E = Electronic; 2 = Two slots for coins; 7 = Maximum of seven types of coins that can be used; 4 = Four buttons

Three buttons were on the machines for fixed values with the fourth being a change button. The fixed values were 12 cents the inland letter rate; 18 cents aerogramme to Europe and letters in Africa; 26 cents airmail letters to Europe and the fourth button for change. The change was in the form of a label, or if after 18 seconds no button pressed or additional money fed in the balance was automatically issued as a label. Labels from the three designated buttons together are known as a "button set".

The Zimbabwe machines worked in the same fashion as all second generation four button machines. Values from 1 cent to $99.99 could be obtained.

Opposite is the maxi-card produced for this issue. It should be noted that the button set from this machine should have been 9c, 11c and 21c. But postage rates increased on 29th March 1985, almost seven months prior to the release of labels.

The Frama Machines were initially located in the Philatelic Bureau, in the post box area off Julius Nyerere Way, Harare and to the post office entrances at the main Bulawayo and Gweru post offices. The Philatelic Bureau machine was used principally for philatelic purposes, it was at one time thought...
that this had been moved to another location. But this was not the case, according to George Stewart the machine simply ceased working and the bureau had to obtain labels from other working machines if required.3

Two new machines were installed at the Union Avenue, Harare, post office (18th December 1985) and on the first floor concourse of the main Harare Post Office (21st May 1986).

**The Label**

The design of the label shows the central tower within the Great Enclosure at Great Zimbabwe, which the PTC states as “the largest single ancient structure in sub-Saharan Africa.”2

A phenomenon which bemused the postal authorities was prices being offered to technicians changing roles for copies of the 00.00 value test labels. When the roll was changed a button behind the door activated the machine to move the paper into position. The printing quality was also checked and the label produced had a nil value shown as 00.00. The instruction manual was amended and technicians were directed to destroy test labels. One collection is known with a test label comprising a torn label retrieved from a waste bin, carefully re-joined.3

**Papers**

It was reported by T Von Loeper form Germany that ten rolls of “Belgium related B paper” was sold with the machines (uncertain whether this was ten in total or ten rolls with each machine). The Belgian paper is easy to identify as it is whiter in colour and fluorescent under UV, whilst other papers used are non-fluorescent. Most of the labels issued from the Philatelic Bureau is on the Belgian fluorescent paper, in addition to non-fluorescent paper. First day covers examined from the three post offices are all non-fluorescent. Von Loeper stated that there were two additional types of paper to the Belgian one, but did not cite any authority.
With the Belgian paper, there was an end stripe or stripes, magenta in colour, that indicated the roll was just about exhausted. These end stripes have been seen in single lines, two parallel lines and, even, three lines. The end stripes can also be found on first day covers. Von Loper stated that there were 18 end stripe labels per roll on the Belgian paper, and there were 20 first day covers with the end stripes. The end stripes are often found in rolls of paper used in adding machine, till, telex and fax rolls, it is likely that end stripes can be found in labels for both types of paper.

**Varieties**

Initially all the Frama machines appeared to print exactly the same label without variation, unlike in South Africa and South West Africa (Namibia) where each machine had a different number. It is only through wear and tear, repairs and replacements that some variations began to appear that identified the different machines. These will be dealt with in greater detail below.

**Initial take up of the Frama labels**

George Stewart records that that on the first day, dealers, mainly from Germany descended on Harare. A report on their antics appeared in the ATM Forum (1/86), in which T von Leiper stated that 1500 registered letters bearing Frama labels were despatched, with a further 700 each from Bulawayo and Gweru. It is certainly true that many of the covers with Frama labels are found addressed to Germany (Algeria being another constant address destination).

George also asked local collectors how many unsolicited, non-philatelic covers, have they seen and retained. The answer was “none”. This is despite collectors saying that the machines were being used by the general public. It is indeed difficult to find such covers with Frama labels correctly used.

**Change in postal rates**

As has been seen there was an increase in postal rates prior to the issue of the Frama labels, the button set pictured on the maxi-card produced being at the previous rates. The next increase in postal rates occurred on 27th March 1987, however the Frama machines were not changed to reflect the new rates. The button set should have been 15c, 23c and 35c. There were further postal rate changes on 29th March 1991, 21st January 1992, 6th March 1992 and 4th April 1993, before the Frama machines were finally taken out of circulation.

**Rhino paper**

In March 1991 a bombshell fell on the Frama scene - the Rhino Paper. Cecil Russell discovered these and the following is his account of the events. It was on Sunday 3rd March 1991 when Cecil wanted to obtain a stamp from the Harare Julius Nyerere Way machine, that he found the Rhino paper. Having exhausted all his and the families change he was able to obtain some "Button sets" being the three fixed values still 12 cents, 18 cents and 26 cents. These he affixed to post cards and posted them from the main Harare Post Office on Monday 4th March 1991. This time, with plenty of change, he found the machine had no paper.
The following day he visited Union Avenue post office to have some labels cancelled and discovered that the machine there had been using the Rhino Paper. That machine was evidently not working as Cecil purchased three button sets from an individual there, placed these on post cards and posted them. (A total of 17 letters and postcards were recorded by Cecil)

Cecil continues as follows:

"As I have a standing order with the Philatelic Bureau, I approached them to obtain "First Day Covers". At the counter I was told the stamps I described did not exist. I requested to see the Manager. I showed Mr. Matsinde the stamps cancelled at the Harare post office. He kindly offered to investigate the matter".

He returned about a week later. Mr. Matsinde told him that the new paper had arrived and had been stored. The intention of the post office was to put this into use when the existing paper had been exhausted. Members of the unit replacing the paper in the machines put a roll of new paper in the Union Avenue Post Office machine during February and did the same in the machine in Julius Nyerere Way during March 1991. They did not have permission to use the Rhino paper and when this was discovered all the rolls of that paper were withdrawn from that source.

The comment from the Philatelic Bureau was that the Rhino Paper had not been "officially issued." After that episode the machines lapsed into their ever-increasing inefficiency.

Demise of the Frama Machines

According to George Stewart’s report and others in Magnify, the journal of the Royal Philatelic Society of Bulawayo, the machines appeared to have been abused and broke down on a regular basis. The use of the Bulawayo Post Office’s machine is well recorded, the use of the other machines were not so well recorded. In summary it would appear that the Bulawayo machine was replaced on 21 November 1985; vandalised in 1986 and returned to use on 25 July 1986; Out of action again and returned to use in September 1986; for most of 1987 the machine was frequently out of use and during which time a new ‘master cylinder’ was installed; 6 October 1987 machine sent to Harare for repairs and back in service in November; from December 1988 the machine was out of order and returned to Harare; it returned in February 1993 but the coin mechanism was wrong and not suitable for Zimbabwe coinage; machine returned to Bulawayo in 4th May 1993 and brought back into use; In August 1993 it is recorded as possibly the only machine in use; it ceased functioning shortly after that.
The Labels

Catalogue listings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SG</th>
<th>ZSC1</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12c</td>
<td>Fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Non-fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18c</td>
<td>Fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Non-fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26c</td>
<td>Fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Non-fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes from Zimbabwe Stamp Catalogue

i. Labels with magenta lines from the end of rolls command a premium
ii. Rolls with a Rhino pattern were installed for a short period at Harare and Union avenue Post Offices during January/March 1991. Labels from these rolls are rare.
iii. Labels can have values from 00.01 to 99.99
iv. Test labels reading 00.00 exist. These are scarce.

Stanley Gibbons Catalogue

Stanley Gibbons do not list the Frama labels within the other postage stamps, instead they show them after the postage stamps under the heading “Machine Labels”. For Zimbabwe, the catalogue states the following:

*From 24 October 1985 gummed labels varying in value from 1c. to $99.99 were available from four automatic machines located at the Philatelic Bureau and at post offices in Bulawayo, Gweru and Harare. Two further machines were installed at Harare offices in 1985-86, but by this time the Bureau machine had ceased to function. Paper showing an overall pattern of rhinoceroses appeared briefly in 1991, but it is reported that most machines were withdrawn by the end of March that year, although that at Bulawayo continued in use until at least May 1993.*
### Technical details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Label size:</td>
<td>All values 40 x 32 mm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Size:</td>
<td>Individual machine generated labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artist:</td>
<td>Chaz Maviyane-Davis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers:</td>
<td>Belgian fluorescent paper and non-fluorescent paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print colours:</td>
<td>Magenta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perforations:</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printer:</td>
<td>Frama machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printer’s Imprint:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cylinder numbers:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colour register:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Value:</td>
<td>None.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheet Number:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print numbers:</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue date:</td>
<td>24th October 1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Withdrawal from sale:</td>
<td>no official withdrawal from sale date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonetarisation:</td>
<td>nothing official.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recorded varieties

George Stewart in his RSC article recorded some varieties\(^3\), whilst Magnify illustrated the changes that occurred with Bulawayo machine.\(^1\) These varieties are recorded below, additional varieties are noted under “Unrecorded varieties”.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Image](image1.png) | Bulawayo machine, dot above 'W', recoded November 1985.  
(Courtesy Narendhra Morar) |
| ![Image](image2.png) | Bulawayo machine, after repairs without bottom frame line, recorded Feb-Dec 1987.  
Recorded from Late 1987.  
(Courtesy Narendhra Morar) |
| ![Image](image3.png) | Bulawayo machine, with repaired bottom frame line.  
Recorded from Late 1987.  
(Courtesy Narendhra Morar) |
| ![Image](image4.png) | Bulawayo machine, damage right frame line after return, recorded from May 1993. |
| ![Image](image5.png) | Harare Upper floor machine, with broken right frame line.  
March 1989. |
| ![Image](image6.png) | Gweru machine, with broken bottom of ‘1’ in value. |

**Unrecorded varieties**
The labels above show a progressive disappearance of the top third of the label. The top three labels show a break through “Post” that could indicate that this came from the Harare Upper Floor Frama machine. The lower labels also show the broken right frame line.

Break up of top of the label also appeared on some 00:00 labels. If this occurred, the postal operative should have made the necessary adjustments to or replaced the printing plate.

The labels above show a progressive deterioration of the printing plate at the left. The machine that these labels came from is unknown.

End of roll strips, shown at the start of the stripe. According to T Von Loeper the stripes started from 18 labels from the end of the roll.

There were both two and three stripes. The one on the left was used in a first day cover on the first day of release and would have come from the Julius Nyerere Way machine.

~ 8 ~
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A smudged label with part of the top of the image missing</th>
<th>Magenta ink splodges</th>
<th>More magenta ink splodges.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Additional ink left at bottom of label. The top also breaking up, as shown above</td>
<td>“Mini” labels where it would appear that the paper jammed and chewed up before cutting</td>
<td>Bulawayo Frama label with no bottom line, and two dots on either side of label. <em>(Courtesy Narendhra Morar)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interesting double print of a 00.00. The paper appears to have got itself crumpled up when the postal operative was reloading and testing the machine. This has left a long strip of paper attached to the label.
First Day Covers

The cover numbering comes from the catalogue produced by Geoff Brakspear.

A pictorial first day of issue canceller was produced for this issued and was used by the Philatelic Bureau. Other first day cover cancellers continued to be used at main post offices.

The Philatelic Bureau did not sell the maxi-cards with this first day of issue canceller

The first day cover sold by the Philatelic Bureau, with the above cancel, were only produced with a 26c label. First day covers can be found with First Day of Issue cancellations for the other three Frama machines on operation at the time the labels were released – namely Harare, Bulawayo and Gweru. These covers can come with a single label from the button set or with all three values. A cover has also been seen with the Kwe First Day of Issue cancellation, presumably the labels came from the Gweru machine.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ZW022.1 PTC</th>
<th>ZW022.1 PTC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Philatelic Bureau cover" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Post Office First Day of Issue canceller" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162 x 115 mm (Philatelic Bureau cover)</td>
<td>162 x 115 mm (Post Office First Day of Issue canceller)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ZW022.2

Pair of printed covers with one label for each of the values in the 1985 definitive issue *(Courtesy Narendhra Morar)*
Related Material

Cover signed by Chaz Maviyane-Davis (see bottom right corner) Thought that only two such covers exist.

Maxi-card with single label postmarked with First Day of Issue, Salisbury

Maxi-card with label on front postmarked First Day of Issue, Harare

Big Game Photography postcard of Conical Tower at Great Zimbabwe, with label on the reverse cancelled with First Day of Issue, Gweru, postmark

Frama labels being used on a variety of other postal stationery and documents on the first day of issue

(Courtesy of Narendhra Morar)
Postcard posted by Cecil Russell to himself using a Rhino Frama label. Posted Union Avenue on 2nd April 1992 on day after rise in postal rates.\(^3\)

(Source RSC Journal No 246, March 2013, page 19)

Cover posted on 10\(^{th}\) April 1992 by Hillary Allanson of Zimbabwe Stamp Co.

Bibliography:

5. “Frama Labels” Magnify Feb/March 1988, Vol 18 No 6 (185)