

The Metric System for Money

Decimal Conversion Issues

Donald W. Hillger

While the United States is still in the process of voluntary conversion to the metric system of measurement, it was the first nation to utilize a decimal currency system. In the rest of the world the metric system has either been used for a century or more, or was adopted more recently, leaving the U.S. virtually alone in an otherwise metric world. The conversion to the metric system by many nations in the 1970s was preceded by a conversion of their currency systems to a decimal base, to come in line with the dominant decimal nature of world commerce and trade.

All former British Commonwealth Nations that once had nondecimal currencies (usually systems of pounds, shillings, and pence (one pound = 20 shillings = 240 pence, and one shilling = 12 pence) have switched to decimal. The switch accompanied independence for some nations. The new decimal currencies took various forms depending on the adopting country. Some countries decimalized the pound (one pound = 100 new pence), while others changed to dollar-based system (one dollar = 100 cents) similar to that pioneered by the U.S. in 1786. Now all nations have decimal currencies.

Information on dates that countries switched to decimal currencies was gleaned from *Scott Standard Postage Stamps Catalogs*. The introductory information for each country lists the currency systems used on stamps, including changes in currency and when those changes occurred. While a few countries changed to decimal currencies in the 1950s, most of the changes occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s.



Malawi Also Used Coins To Emphasize Their Decimal Conversion in 1971
Malawi (Scott 161)

This article will feature the stamps that were issued in conjunction with decimal conversion. For some countries new decimal currency issues simply followed the old nondecimal issues with no specific mention or indication on the stamps of the change to decimal. These "Decimal Currency" issues, or decimal definitives, are **not** the topic of this article. Also not considered here are conversions from one decimal coinage system to another, only from nondecimal to decimal currency.

Of interest are two types of decimal conversion stamps. One type includes issues that specifically publicized the conversion of a country's currency to decimal. The other type of decimal conversion stamps includes issues with new decimal values overprinted. On many of these stamps the old nondecimal values are struck out or obliterated. These types of issues are far more numerous than the former ones. For a limited number of these stamps specific mention of the decimal conversion was also overprinted on the stamps along with the date.



Ghana's Decimal Conversion Took Place On July 19, 1965, Picturing Coins
Ghana (Scott 213)



Malta's 1972 Decimal Conversion Used Eight Stamps Each With Appropriate Coin
Malta (Scott 445)



Some Countries Only Obliterated
Old Value with a Solid Dot
Turks and Caicos (Scott 193)

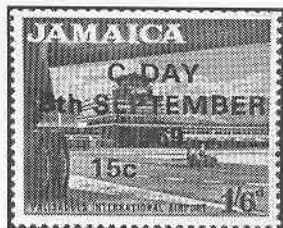
Nations that issued stamps specifically to publicize their conversion to decimal currency include Ghana, Malawi, and Malta. Each of these countries issued stamps that featured the new decimal coins associated with the change. Ghana converted from the British coinage system to a system of 100 pesewas = one cedi in 1965. At that time they issued a set of four stamps [Scott catalog numbers used for all issues: 212-215], showing both the obverse and reverse of the 5, 10, 25, and 50 pesewas coins. The face value of each of the stamps is the same as the coins featured on the stamp. Also on each stamp is the date of decimal conversion, 19 July 1965.

In 1971 Malawi converted from the British coinage system to a system of 100 tambalas = one kwacha. To publicize their new decimal coinage they issued a set of four stamps [161-164] and a souvenir sheet [164a] containing the same four stamps. Each stamp features three coins of value one, two and five tambalas. The 1-2-5 denominations are the preferred sequence for a decimal coinage system, as seen in the 10, 20 and 50-cent coins used in many countries. U.S. paper money of \$10, \$20, and \$50 also follows the 1-2-5 sequence, unlike U.S. coins where the 25-cent piece breaks that scheme.

In 1972 Malta converted from the British currency system to a decimalized pound system consisting of 100 cents. However the cent was further divided into 10 mills, so the Maltese pound is essentially divided into 1,000 parts. The new decimal currency consists of nine coins, eight of which are featured on the stamps [439-446], less the 25-cent



Other Countries Obliterated Old
Value With Two or Three Bars
Tristan da Cunha (Scott 141)

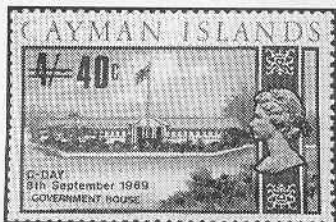


Jamaica Identified Stamps With
Overprint C-Day 8th September 1969
Jamaica (Scott 286)

piece. The face values of the stamps are the same as the coins featured on the stamps, including a 3-mil piece that is not typical of decimal coinage systems.

Next to be discussed are a large number of sets of stamps where the new decimal values are overprinted on the old nondecimal-valued stamps. In all cases new values are surcharged or overprinted, but the old values remain on the stamps of many countries. The twelve countries choosing not to obliterate the old values include: Aden [36-46], Bahrain [104-117], Basutoland [61-71] (now Lesotho), Bechuanaland Protectorate [169-179] (now Botswana), Cook Islands [179-194], Kathiri State of Seiyun [20-27] and Quaiti State of Shihr [20-27] (both associated with Aden), Pakistan [123-128], Sierra Leone [many issues starting with 271], Somaliland Protectorate [116-126] (now part of Somalia), Swaziland [67-79], and Tonga [many issues starting with 158].

From many other countries the old values are obscured or obliterated by various means including: one, two or three bars, solid dots, rectangles, or other forms. The fifteen countries choosing this method include: Bahamas [230-244], Bermuda [238-254], British Antarctic Territory [25-38], Falkland Islands [197-209], Gilbert and Ellice Islands [110-124], Malta [447-447] (in addition to the stamps showing the coins already mentioned), New Zealand [OY37-OY2], Niue [106-115], Norfolk Island [71-82], Pitcairn Islands [72-84], Solomon Islands [149-166], South



Cayman Islands Also Overprinted
Stamps C-Day 8th September 1969
Cayman Islands (Scott 239)



Ghana also Overprinted Issues With New Values and *Ghana's New Currency* Ghana (Scott 226)

Georgia [17-30], Tokelau [9-11], Tristan Da Cunha [141-152], and Turks and Caicos Islands [181-195].

In addition to these countries, three other nations overprinted additional information on their decimal conversion issues. Ghana besides the stamps showing the coins already mentioned, issued a set of thirteen overprinted stamps [216-226, C6-C7] without obliterating the old nondecimal values. However, in addition to the new values, "Ghana new Currency/19th July 1965" was overprinted on each stamp. Similarly, two other countries, Cayman Islands and Jamaica, provided overprinted decimal conversion information, "C-DAY/8th September 1969." That is, in addition to obliterating the old nondecimal values on all of the fifteen stamps issued by the Cayman Islands [227-241] and most of the thirteen stamps issued by Jamaica [279-291]. New values are overprinted on the stamps issued by both countries in their conversion from the British coinage system to a system of dollars and cents. The use of C-Day on the stamps of these two countries is interesting since the term D-Day was used in the UK for their decimalization day.

Finally, the last items to be noted are a set of four stamps issued by Bermuda in 1995 [693-696] for the 25th anniversary of the decimalization that took place in 1970. That con-



Bermuda's 25th Anniversary of Conversion Depicts Decimal Coins Bermuda (Scott 693)

version was also from the British coinage system to one of dollars and cents, similar to that for many other Caribbean nations. Each stamp issued by Bermuda shows a decimal definitive stamp from 1970 as well as a similarly-valued decimal coin issued at the time.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the U.S. converted its stock exchanges to decimal trading in 2001, only two years ago, being the last remaining major nondecimal holdouts in the world of commerce. Now, that may be a precursor to the further conversion of the U.S. to the metric system of measurement, as took place in the rest of the world following their adoption of decimal currency.

If readers know of other stamps within the topic of this article that may have been missed the author would appreciate hearing. ●

Donald W. Hillger, Ph.D., is a research meteorologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and holds a cooperative position at Colorado State University. His other topical interests include weather stamps, unmanned satellites on stamps and launch covers, and metric and standards stamps. Send correspondence to: 309 North Shores Circle, Windsor, CO 80550-2614; or e-mail: hillger@cira.colostate.edu

onlineBusiness.com

ineBusiness.com

BuildABetterOnlineBusiness.com

BuildABetterOnlineBusiness.com

lineBusiness.com

Go!