Everything that happens leaves traces of itself and these traces document past events and happenings. In future year's historians will note the emergence of the internet when they read such words as download, Google and Facebook in our magazines and newspapers. Students of human evolution see the origin of mankind in dried bones and ancient footprints in the plains of East Africa and philatelists can read the history of a society in the design of stamps affixed to envelopes and post cards. But the connection between the images appearing on postage stamps and the great events of the day is not always clear because the connection is channeled through postal authorities who make the actual decisions on how a stamp must look and the artists who create the designs. Postal authorities and artists may if they wish hasten or delay the expression of major events and for short periods of time they can even reverse the trend recorded on the stamps.

The devolvement of the British Empire into the British Commonwealth is recorded in the designs of stamps issued in British Crown Colonies and their dependencies. But the record is clouded because the stamps were produced for two contending sets of officials with different agendas. The first set of officials were colonial administrators and legislatures who pushed for colonial rights. Their preference was for stamps that expressed the colonies identity and furthered activities such as generating income from the stamp trade or promoting the colonies tourist trade. In the nineteenth century these official preferred stamp designs that portrayed colonial emblems such as the seal used to authorize documents or the badge appearing on flags carried by the colonies merchant marine. Later they opted for pictorial designs they portrayed landscapes building or other desirable features of their country. If these officials had been free to express their wishes then the design of their stamps would have presented a pristine record of the dissolution of the British Empire.

But they were not free to express their preferences as they had to follow the policies set by Colonial Office Officials in London. These officials pressed for British and their own interests and established policies they believed would satisfy British Public opinion and that of their colleagues and superiors. Their preference was for stamps that expressed allegiance to the Empire particularly those that portrayed the reigning monarch. The effect of these policies was to distort the picture of the changing empire provided by the stamps.

This paper will examine the images found on stamps issued in British West Indian colonies during the years from 1860 to 1960. The presentation is divided into three parts beginning with some background on the colonies and their postage stamps. Next it describes the method used in the study which is referred to as a content analysis in the Social Sciences. Finally it presents the
results of the analysis that shows how the stamps recorded the decline of the empire and how that record was distorted by Colonial Office policies.

BACKGROUND

(Slide 2, colony list and map)

There were 19 British Colonies located in or around the Caribbean Sea that issued postage stamps for most or all the years between 1860 and 1960. These colonies are listed at the top of Slide 1. It should be noted, however, that Saint Christopher and Nevis merged in 1883 and Trinidad and Tobago merged in 1899.

Prior to 1860 most postal services in these colonies were provided by the General Post Office in London. Around this time the General Post Office divested itself of these postal services and turned them over to colonies to run under the general supervision of the Colonial Office in London. In most matters the local officials were given considerable autonomy in the running of their colonies post office but not in the design and production of stamps.

(Slide 3, colonial postal systems and procurement)

By the late 1860's the Colonial Office had formulated the following policy for the procurement of stamps. First any order for stamps would originate in the colony but would be sent to the Colonial Office in London. If the order was for a new issue the colonial officials might or might not include a suggested design. The Colonial Office would review the request and if approved would forward it to the Crown Agents also located in London. The Crown Agents would then place the order with a security printer in London. In the early years this printer was Perkins Bacon Ltd by the end of the 1860's the printer was Thomas De La Rue and Company. If the order required a stamp with new design the printer would provide the design in the form of essays. These essays might or might not incorporate a theme suggested by the colony. The essay would then be sent for approval by Colonial Office and in some cases Colonial officials.

(Slide 4, influences)

This mode of production created three sources of influence on the design of the stamp, the wishes of the colony, the policy of the colonial office and the interests of the printer. As discussed above many colonies opted for designs showing a colonial emblem or pictorial design while the Colonial Office always favored using a portrait of the monarch. When no theme for the design was specified or when there was a conflict between the Colonial and Colonial Office officials the printer would usually provide an essay with the portrait of the monarch. They did this in part as they considered the Colonial Office their primary customer and in part because it simplified their own operation. Therefore the printer supported the Colonial Office policies.

Economic considerations also supported the Colonial Office position. A major factor in the cost of a stamp was the production of the dies and plates used in the printing. It was possible to use a Master Head die in creating stamps with the monarch's portrait thus greatly reducing the cost of the die and multi-colony designs also could use the monarch's portrait thus lowering the cost of
the plates. These options were not available in producing dies and plates for Colonial Emblems or pictorial designs. Thus many colonial officials that might have liked to see a colonial emblem on their stamps opted for using the monarch's portrait because of the substantial savings associated with it. Colonial officials who opted for a design other than the monarch must have been strongly motivated to do so for they were swimming upstream against the current created by Colonial Office Policies, the printers' preferences and the added cost of the dies and plates.

The method of procurement described above was in effect from the late 1860's to the early 1930's. Other modes of procurement were used prior to 1860 and in the 1930's and as we shall see the mode of procurement had a major influence on the design of the stamps it produced.

METHOD

To see how this clash between London and Local officials affected the design of the colonial stamps, a two step procedure called content analysis was used. The first step was a review of the design of all stamps issued in the 19 colonies for years between 1860 and 1960 as described in the Stanley Gibbons Catalogue. On 8% of the stamps listed in the catalogue the design was not obtained in a manner similar to that described above. These stamps which included locally produced provisionals and the omnibus issues of 1935-60 were omitted from the study.

Ten categories

The initial survey lead to a ten category system for classifying the central image or images in the stamp’s design. The classification begins by dividing the designs into those with a single central image and those with two or more images.

(Slide 5 the single image designs)

The single images can then divided into six types as follows: (1) the ruling monarch, (2) Britannia, (3) a pictorial image that had both colonial and imperial significance (4) an official colonial emblem, (5) a colonial pictorial that had no imperial significance, and (6) Anything else. Examples of these six categories are given in Slide 5.

Note these categories fall on a continuum that varies from the monarch, which expresses the greatest allegiance to the empire at one end of the continuum, to the colonial pictorial image, which best expresses an independent colonial identity at the other end. A change in design from a category at one location on this continuum to another location signifies a change in orientation towards empire and colony. For example a change from a stamp design which portrays a colonial emblem to one which portrays the monarch indicates an increase allegiance to the empire while the opposite change means an increase in colonial identity.

(Slide 6, the dual image designs)

Given the six types of images described above there are theoretically fifteen possible types of designs with two different types of images. But observation suggested that only three of these multiple image stamp designs occurred with significant frequency. This gave four categories of
multiple image designs. Those which display: (7) the monarch and another imperial symbol, (8) the monarch and an official colonial emblem, (9) the monarch and a colonial pictorial image, or (10) any other multiple image. Examples of these four categories are given on Slide 6.

Classification

(Slide 7, 1860 classification)

The next step was to classify the design on the stamps designated for circulation in these 19 colonies on Dec 31st of each year between 1860 and 1960 using the ten categories described above. For example the Catalogue shows there were eight BWI colonies circulating stamps on December 31, 1860 and these colonies circulated 30 individual stamps. The designs on these 30 stamps were then classified using the ten categories described above. Slide 7 lists these eight colonies and 30 stamps along with the category assigned to each stamp.

An analysis similar to that described above for 1860 was made for each of the years between 1860 and 1960. Three problems were encountered in conducting the classification which introduced some inaccuracy in the results presented but not enough to affect the major findings to be reported. I would be pleased to discuss these problems and the procedures used to deal with them if they are of interest.

ANALYSIS
(Slide8 100 year summary)

A summary of the analyses for the 100 years is given on Slide 8. It shows a very conservative approach to stamp design in which traditional images and those showing allegiance to the empire predominated. The single most frequently used image was the Monarch which appeared on almost three fourths of the stamps issued, about 40% as a single image and about 36% as part of a dual image design. In contrast to this a pictorial design appeared on about 30% of the stamps and was most often accompanied by the image of the monarch.

But the summary displayed on Slide 8 masks the fact that the conservative approach to stamp design greatly declined over time in a series of ups and downs that responded to changes in Colonial office policy and the introduction of pictorial designs in the 1890s. These changes in design can be seen on Slide 9, which charts the percent of stamps portraying the single monarch image in the period from 1860 to 1960.

Slide 9 – change in use of Monarch and the five periods

The chart displayed on Slide 9 shows an initial rise and then general decline in the use of the Monarch's portrait. As such it reflects the rise and general dissolution of the Empire. However the decline is interrupted by a significant increase in the use of the Monarch's portrait in the years between 1908 and 1919. This increase was mandated by the Colonial Office and distorts the trend displayed on the stamps.
The ups and downs in use of the Monarch’s portrait seen Slide 9 divided the 100 years covered into five distinct periods indicated on the Chart. A closer examination of these five periods gives a clearer picture of how vacillations in Colonial Office policies influenced the design of the British West indicant Stamps.

**Period I**

(Slide 10 – Period I)

Slide 10 charts the change in use of the single Monarch and single Colonial Emblem during the period from 1860 to 1891. In the early years each of these images was used on about one third of the stamps but gradually the use of the monarch’s image increased until in the early 1890’s it was used on about 80% of the stamps while the colonial emblem declined to a low point of about 12% usage.

The changing fate of the two images can largely be explained by a change in Colonial Office policy with regard to the procurement of postage stamps. In the early 1860’s, when the colonial postage systems were first established, the colony was free to procure its stamps through its Agent in London or to seek help from the Colonial Office. About an equal number of colonies choose each alternative.

If the colony sent the request to their Agent in London and if their request included a suggestion for the design then the final stamp would end up using the suggested design. All BWI issues circulated in this period portraying a Colonial Emblem, with one major exception, were initially procured in this manner. If, however, the Colony sent its request to the Colonial Office then the final design always ended up with either a portrait of Queen Victoria or Britannia, even if the colony had suggested a different design.

By the late 1860’s the Colonial Office had changed its policies and the procurement procedure described earlier went into effect for all colonial requests for stamps. From that point on all new BWI issues printed until 1892 carried a portrait of Queen Victoria, except for the British Guiana Issue of 1876-82. The Colonial Office had strongly suggested to that colony that they use Queen Victoria’s portrait on this issue but the colony insisted on the using an image of their colonial seal.

**Period II**

By the early 1890’s two great changes were about to take place which greatly effected the colonial office’s policies concerning the design of stamps. The first of these changes was the parliamentary victories of the Liberal party in the late 1880’s and throughout most next thirty years. This party had a more accommodating view of relations with the colonies. This was particularly evident in its unsuccessful attempt to get home rule for Ireland and in its selection of Colonial Secretaries. From the 1890’s to 1910 these secretaries, Joseph Chamberlain in particular, had a more constructive view of the empire. One in which the colonies became more active participants in common imperial activities including trade and governance. As a result
they were more open to colonial initiatives for self development, which included the use of colonial emblems on their stamps.

The second development was the growing acceptance throughout the world of newer pictorial designs. These were particularly attractive to colonial officials as they offered additional revenue from the collector market and they could also be used to support colonial endeavors such as promoting tourism. The new designs were, however, an anathema to the permanent staff of the Colonial Office; in part because they were associated with colonial independence and in part because they triggered the Officials; upper middle class British distain for commercial activities.

(Slide 11 - period II)

Slide 11 shows the impact of these two changes on the design of BWI stamps in the years between 1891 and 1908. With a more favorable view of colonial initiative by the Colonial Secretaries the percent of stamps with colonial emblems increased at the expense of the Monarchs image, despite the added cost of producing these stamps. The former increased almost fourfold, from about 12% to about 50% while the latter declined from about 80% to 40%. Most of the increase in use of the Colonial Emblem occurred in the years between 1895 and 1903 when Chamberlain was the Colonial Secretary.

The chart also shows the introduction and rapid increase in the use of the Colonial pictorial design in the period between 1891 and 1901, the Chamberlain years. As mentioned earlier the use of these designs was very attractive to colonial officials but particularly objectionable to the career Colonial Office Officials. The latter were forced to allow the use of pictorials as short term commemorative given a suitable occasion to celebrate. The colonies showed considerable ingenuity in dredging up such occasions but the use of a single pictorial design was never widely adopted in the colonies.

Period III

The ascent of King George V to the throne in 1910 was to have repercussions that distorted the record of the empire’s decline and introduce a new approach to the design of colonial stamps. In 1911, when the stamps for the new reign were in their planning stage, the Colonial Office, perhaps with instruction from on high, decided to abandon its more tolerant view towards the use of colonial emblems on stamps. On 20 April 1911, Lord Crew, then Colonial Secretary, sent a circular to the colonies stating: (1) that all the new issues of colonial stamps must carry the official portrait of the King; but (2) they may also carry a second image.

(Slide 12 – Period 3)

This decree was to have two immediate effects on the design of colonial stamp as can be seen in Slide 12. First as might be expected it lead to a revival in the use of the Monarch’s image which climbed from about 40% to about 58% as the first wave of George V stamps appeared in the years between 1911 and 1913, thus distorting the philatelic record of the declining empire. The second effect was the creation of a new dual design which featured both the King and the Colonial Emblem, thus accommodating the Colonial Secretaries dictum and the colonies desire
for self expression. I also introduced a new approach that would completely alter the design of colonial stamps. The use of this dual design increased from 0% to about 15% with the appearance of the new George V issues. The net effect of these two developments was a decline in the use of a single colonial emblem which dropped about 45% to 18% in this same three year period.

There was little change in stamp design in next few years as the Empire along with the rest world suffered through the First World War. The major development in these years was the issuing of surcharged war stamps that were not included in the present study.

**Period IV**

(Slide 13– Period IV)

The world war was to have a profound effect on the empire for it made evident what had been slowly occurring for a long period of time. Great Britain had lost the economic and political dominance it had enjoyed in the 19th century and needed the assistance of its empire if it was to thrive in the new 20th century environment. This realization was incorporated slowly into the governing structure by the growth of the commonwealth, which gradually changed the position of the BWI colonies from possessions to partners in a common endeavor.

The first expression of this growing partnership in the design of BWI stamps can be seen in the Chart on Slide 13. During the immediate post World War I period there was a marked growth in the use of the new dual designs that expressed a shared imperial and colonial identify and a decline in the use of the older traditional designs that expressed the controversy. The Monarch + Colonial Emblem design increased from about 8% to 26% in the years between 1919 and 1923 while the use of the single monarch’s image declined from 62% to 44% and use of the single colonial emblem image declined from 18% to 7%.

The middle and late 1920’s was a period of little change in the design of the BWI stamps but major changes were occurring in the administration of colonial affairs. In 1925 the Commonwealth Office split off from the Colonial office leaving the later with jurisdiction over the smaller colonies. In 1929 the Colonial Development Advisory Committee was set up to disperse one million pounds a year on colonial economic development. In 1931 the change came to the Colonial Office itself.

**Period V**

For over 100 years the colonial Office had been organized along geographic lines and given the mission of simply administering the colonies under its jurisdiction. In 1931 new functional units were set up with the mission of furthering colonial development. Gerald L.M. Clausen, later Sir Gerald, was appointed to head the new functional unit that was assigned jurisdiction over postal affairs. Unlike most of his colleagues, Clausen, was commercially minded and imbued with an entrepreneurial spirit. His approach was to find projects that linked Britain and Colonies in a web of common activity, thus furthering the development of the colony but also linking this development to their mother country.
He supported many changes in the mode of procuring and designing colonial stamps. The long established procedure of placing the order for a stamp with one printer, De La Rue, who provided the design and set the price, was replaced by a new procedure. In the new procurement procedure, the request for a new stamp was sent to several printers who then submitted competitive bids which included their proposed design and price. The net effect was to lower the cost of the stamps and generate a very rich set of designs from which the Colonial Office and Colony could select. He also supported the colonies interest in obtaining funds from sales to collectors. He did this in several ways. First he insisted that colonial stamps be recess rather than surface printed. Second he accepted requests for pictorial stamps but encouraged the use of the dual monarch + colonial pictorial design thus expressing a joint colonial and imperial identity. Finally he allowed the pictorial issues and the dual monarch + colonial pictorial designs to be used on definitive as well as short term commemorative issues.

(Slide 14 – Period V)

The net effect of these policies was two fold. First the changes issued in a period of unprecedented excellence in the quality of Colonial stamps, which did quite well in the market place despite the great depression. The second effect was to change the basic design of stamps circulating in the colonies. The chart in Slide 14 shows use of the Monarch + Pictorial image increased from about 5% to about 78% in the years from 1931 to 1960. So after a struggle of 100 years the Colonial office and colonial officials had finally arrived at a consensus on a design that satisfied both of their interests. However, nothing lasts forever. As the colonies moved closer to independence during the 1960’s and control of the Colonial Office over Colonial affairs waned , new era of stamp design emerged, but as Rudyard Kipling might say ‘that my friends is another story”.

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