

The Royal Philatelic Collection: A Commonwealth Mixture – King George VI

Comments on a display from the Royal Philatelic Collection given by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen to the Royal Philatelic Society London on 16th September 2010

**By Michael Sefi, FRPSL
Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection**

Introduction

The 2010 display covered a selection from the King George VI Commonwealth material in the Collection. Altogether 24 Dominions, Colonies and Territories were covered out of more than 100 which issued stamps featuring The King. Space did not permit the inclusion of more countries.

Despite the relative shortness of the Reign and despite it including the period of the Second World War, the volume of material in the Collection is very extensive. There are several reasons for this, the main one of which is that, at some point quite early on in the Reign, the then Keeper of the Collection, Sir John Wilson, requested that Crown Agents should, if possible, send examples of every plate put to press for every country, and this was arranged. He also asked that where possible, printers which did not do so already should include plate numbers in their printings. With many countries' stamps being recess printed, and usage increasing, more plates had to be made and used than perhaps was anticipated.

Furthermore, with the increasing use of pictorial definitive issues, going away from the key/duty plates approach, together with currency changes, post-War a number of Colonies introduced new definitive series as well as signing up for several "omnibus" issues.

It has been suggested that Sir John was in the habit of returning duplicated plate examples even if from a new printing, when existing plates were brought back into use – which was often the case, especially with high value stamps. However, there is no documentary evidence that Sir John ever did so and the content of the Collection does have numerous examples of repeat printings from existing plates.

Another suggestion which has been made is that Sir John did not believe in mounting and writing up the stamps of a Reign until it was over. This is also likely to be untrue: he did after all cover most of the first issues of the Reign – those, of course, being just before the War. However he did not mount and write up any further material from the Reign and while Sir John Marriott did for a limited number of issues, the real exercise of mounting and writing up the King George VI material only started in 1995/96 under Charles Goodwyn with the assistance of Suresh Dhargalkar, and continues – it is still not complete. In recent years the mounting and writing up has been continued by my assistant Rod Vousden, a specialist in that material.

One of the difficulties encountered in writing up has been "the date problem". Sir John Wilson initially used a pencilled code for date of receipts, then actual dates and finally no dates at all. Furthermore, it has not always been possible to relate his dates to actual dates of printing, London release, or release in the country involved. Rod Vousden has been instrumental in tying up many of the printings to Requisition numbers – and we will have to go back to some of the earlier mounted material to add those – which are vital for research use.

As a generality, the date shown in brackets next to the Requisition number is the earliest known date of despatch by the Crown Agents, but this will not normally be the date of London release and certainly not the date of release in the country concerned. Where shown, the date shown under the blocks is, where known, the likely approximate date of receipt by the Collection.

I would like to be able to say that the Collection has an example of every plate put to press for every colony using Crown Agents. Unfortunately I cannot and possibly because of war time bombing of print works or problems in supplying examples, there are gaps from around the 1941/2 period. However, we think that from 1943 the Collection is complete. It is therefore an invaluable resource for researchers.

As well as sending stamps for The King's Collection (the "Blue Albums" – in fact these are conservation boxes), Crown Agents and some Dominions were also able to send some of the artwork, die proofs and colour proofs used for stamp issues.

For this display, apart from the first four frames, the focus was largely on the first issues of the Reign, much of it mounted and written up by Sir John Wilson, whose writing is sometimes difficult to see in the frames. The display was not a duplicate of the display given with Her Majesty's gracious permission earlier this year to the King George VI Collectors Society: that was mainly of artwork and proof material alone. In this display the aim was to include blocks of issued stamps as well, often the high values which can be very scarce in the market, especially of the first issues in 1937/8. Comparatively little material has been added to the Collection by purchase (mainly from De La Rue archive sales) but a few items could be identified in the frames.

The arrangement of the display was geographical, following the order set out by Sir John Wilson in *The Royal Philatelic Collection*, his history and catalogue of the “Red Albums”, i.e. material in the Collection to 1936.

The Display:

Frames 1 & 2: One of the first things to be done at the start of a new Reign is for each printer likely to be involved in printing stamps to engrave the Monarch’s head from drawings or photographs. Because of the different ways The King’s head was likely to be featured (sideways left, right, profile, three-quarters face etc) a number of different engravings had to be made and would be printed out, to be “dropped in” to artwork for new designs. The frames showed examples from De La Rue and Bradbury, Wilkinson but there appear to be virtually none from Waterlow in the Collection.

Frames 3 & 4: **Omnibus Issues:** Covered were artwork and/or proofs of the following issues:

1937 Coronation

1946/47 Victory

1947 Royal Visit

1948 Silver Wedding of Their Majesties

1948 Universal Postal Union – a complicated issue as two of each of the four designs were recess printed by two different printers but the country names added by letterpress.

1951 Inauguration of the University College of the West Indies

Europe:

Frames 5 & 6: **Cyprus:** Shown were the artwork for the 1938 issue by Waterlow and die and colour proofs and many examples of plate printings during the life of the issue. Recess printed, perf. 12½ on multiple script CA wmk paper, most of the designs were from the 1934 issue, modified by including King George VI’s head.

The Americas (including the Caribbean):

Frames 7 & 8: **Barbados:** Shown were an essay for the 1938 issue by De La Rue and die and colour proofs as well as blocks of the issue, with the addition of two new colours and one new value. Recess printed, perf 13½ x 13 on multiple script CA wmk paper. The issue featured part of the Arms of the Colony and did not include The King’s head; instead The King is featured being seated on a chariot drawn by horses.

Frames 9 & 10: **Bermuda:** Utilising two of the 1936 issue designs but with King George VI’s head dropped in, artwork and colour proofs by Bradbury, Wilkinson were shown, but not all the artwork is in the Collection. Bermuda also used the “Nyasa” key type for its high values and issued blocks of those in 1938, letterpress by De La Rue, perf 14 on multiple Crown CA wmk paper. Many printing flaws are identified on these stamps, but unless they appear on the corner blocks held they will not be in the Collection. However the £1 value block does have the “ER joined” on R1.2.

Frames 11 & 12: **British Guiana:** Featured was the 1938 issue; this used the earlier designs for King George V with the head of the new King dropped in for some values and changes of colours for some others, together with designs for the two new higher values. Artwork and colour proofs were shown. Recess printed by Waterlow, on multiple script CA wmk paper, perforation was initially 12½ and later changed to 14 x 13 or 13 x 14 depending on format. Frame 11 had an example of the very rare 4 cents imperforate horizontally in a vertical marginal pair and Frame 12 showed the higher values from the 24 cents.

Frames 13 & 14: **Canada:** Pulls of the Great and Wafer Seals of Canada for King George VI were included, together with a die proof and issued stamps for the Coronation issue. These were followed by the 1937/38 issue, Frame 13 with die proofs and Frame 14 with all the issued stamps. Recess printed and perforated 12 by the Canadian Bank Note Co in Ottawa.

Frame 15: **Falkland Islands:** Again featuring the 1938 issue, shown was the delightful artwork for the issue and colour proofs together with blocks of the 9d to £1 values. The 1/3d was a new value introduced in 1946. The issue was recess printed on multiple script CA wmk paper by Bradbury, Wilkinson and perforated 12.

Frame 16: **Falkland Islands Dependencies:** The first issue of stamps for the Dependencies was in 1946; shown were die proofs and colour trials and issued stamps from the 4d value upwards. The issue is noted for some original coarse printing of the map – and new, finer, litho printing of the map was introduced in 1948. The frame was recess printed and the map litho, by De La Rue, on multiple script CA sideways wmk paper and perforated 12.

Frames 17 & 18: **Grenada:** Frame 17 initially covered how the ¼d value came to be and reflects something of a controversy. King Edward VIII apparently wanted all colonial stamps to be in a universal simple design, but virtually all colonies rejected that approach and wished to continue with their mostly pictorial definitives. King George VI views on the matter are not known but suffice it to say the colonies had their way! Also shown were colour proofs for the 1938 issue and full coverage of holdings in the Collection of the 10/- stamp. Recess printed, Waterlow printed all values, other than the 10/- which was by De La Rue.

Multiple script CA wmk paper was used, upright or sideways depending on orientation and perforated variously. Frame 18 had the 1951 decimal currency issue, with artwork, colour proofs with De La Rue recess printings of the 25 cents upwards. The last row had two pages of essays of the New Constitution issue of 1951, including the unissued half cent value.

Frames 19 & 20: **St Lucia:** The 1938 issue was covered in some depth; the first page was to be noted as it had the artwork for King Edward VIII stamps. Frame 19 then continued with artwork and colour proofs for the new King's issue. Frame 20 had blocks of the issue; the pencil note on the first page is important: "*The reference given after the Requisition number is the earliest despatch date shown in the Crown Agents' records*". This is not the date of receipt at the Palace – see description of the problem earlier in these Notes. Waterlow, De La Rue and Bradbury, Wilkinson all had a hand in this issue, printing different values, but all recess and on multiple script CA wmk paper and with a variety of perforations. Because of the separate designers and printers, it can be said that the issue is something of a mish-mash, with different print fonts and style – it is certainly not homogenous.

Frames 21 & 22: **Turks & Caicos Islands:** Positioned north of Haiti/Dominican Republic, this groups of islands was a Dependency of Jamaica until 1962. Shown was the 1950 new definitive issue, with The King's head featured nearly full face. The frames had die proofs and colour proofs for the issue, together with blocks of all values. The issue was recess printed by Waterlow on multiple script CA wmk paper and was perforated 12½.

Africa:

Frames 23 & 24: **Gold Coast:** Shown was the 1948 issue. To some extent the issue suffers as the St Lucia issue of 1938 did, with several different designers. Shown was the artwork by Bradbury, Wilkinson together with a page of colour proofs. The two frames then showed blocks of the issued stamps, printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson on multiple script CA wmk paper and perforated 12 x 11½ or vice-versa depending on orientation..

Frames 25 & 26: **Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika:** The unified postal administration for these three countries was formed in 1933 and a combined issue of stamps took place in 1935. Those designs were used for the 1938 issue, substituting the new King's head in three-quarter's face for King George V's profile head. The issue is quite complex, with various flaws for some values, shade variations, and some scarce perforation variations due to wartime difficulties. In these two frames it was only possible to give basic coverage to the issue. Shown were die and colour proofs plus colour proofs of the 1951/52 colour changes and new values. The last two rows of Frame 26 covered most printings for the 30 cents and £1 values – the former recess, the latter letterpress. All values other than the £1 were recess and all were printed by De La Rue on multiple script CA wmk paper and were perforated variously as mentioned. The issue continued the previous practice from the Protectorate era (1903) of *not* specifying required usage – e.g. Postage & Revenue or Postage only etc.

Frames 27 & 28: **Mauritius:** The 1938 issue utilised the earlier key plate design, substituting the new King's head for that of King George V. Shown in Frame 27 were colour proofs for the issue and issued stamps to 1 Rupee. Curiously the 3 cents is the only bi-coloured stamp – the others are mono-coloured albeit printed in a two pass process. Frame 28 showed the high value printings from the issue in the first row. The issue was printed by letterpress by De La Rue, on multiple script CA wmk paper and was perforated 14. In 1948, in commemoration of the centenary of the first British colonial stamps, an issue appeared (arguably six months late!) and artwork, colour proofs and blocks from the issue were included, recess printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson on multiple script CA wmk paper and perforated 11½ x 11.

Frames 29 & 30: **Nyasaland Protectorate:** The 1938 issue had two designs – the lower values to 1/- showing the "sunburst" symbol for the territory and for the 2/- to £1 values the standard "Nyasa" keyplate design. Shown in Frame 27 were artwork for the low values design and colour proofs for the higher values, followed by blocks of values from 3d upwards. The lower values were printed in recess by Waterlow, perforated 12½, the high values in letterpress by De La Rue, perforated 14. Frame 30 showed the 1945 pictorial issue, with artwork and colour proofs and blocks of issued stamps from 2/6d to 20/-. There was a problem with the 1d value, featuring an askari of the King's African Rifles, which was replaced in 1947.

Frames 31 & 32: **Seychelles:** The 1938 issue was photogravure printed by Harrisons and with some colour changes and noticeably different shades was at press until 1949. Shown were essays and issued stamps. The last two rows of Frame 31 showed colour proofs of the 1952 issue, with new designs and showing The King's head nearly full face, also photogravure by Harrisons. Both issues used multiple script CA wmk paper perforated 14½ x 13½ or vice versa depending on orientation.

Frames 33 & 34: **Southern Rhodesia:** The 1937 issue was a standard design and die proofs and colour trials were shown together with blocks of the issued stamps. They were recess printed by Waterlow and perforated 14. Frame 34 had the 1940 Golden Jubilee of the British South Africa Company issue in the first two rows, with artwork, colour proofs and blocks of the issued stamps which were recess printed and

perforated as before. The last row of the Frame had artwork and the issued stamp for the Southern Rhodesia Diamond Jubilee issue in 1952, printed and perforated as before.

Asia:

Frames 35 & 36: **Hong Kong:** The 1938 issue was of a similar design to earlier issues, but including the new King's head, and with different corner motifs – the top corners showing a crown. Shown in Frame 35 were the artwork, die proofs and colour trials for the issue. The first row of Frame 36 showed the coverage in the Collection of the ten dollar value. The issue was printed by letterpress by De La Rue on multiple script CA wmk paper and was normally perforated 14, but there were variations following the bombing of De La Rue's works and out-sourced printing of some values to other printers. The next two rows in the Frame had the "Victory" issue of 1946. Hong Kong requested permission to have its own design, based on a phoenix rising from the flames and this was agreed. The initial artwork for the issue was done by Mr W E Jones in 1944 while an internee in Stanley Camp – and if discovered by the Japanese could have led to his summary execution. These two drawings were presented after the War by the Government of Hong Kong, but other examples have appeared on the market.

Frame 37: **India:** The first two rows covered the 1937 issue from 9 pies to 25 Rupees in blocks. Printed by letterpress in India on star wmk paper and perforated 13½ x 14 or vice versa depending on orientation. The last row in the frame had blocks of the 1948 First Anniversary of Indian Independence issue, featuring Mahatma Gandhi, printed by Courvoisier and perforated 11½; overprinted "service" locally, the 10 Rupees is now very rare. Also included was a commemorative folder with the stamps overprinted "specimen".

Frame 38: **India: Chamba State:** One of the Convention States, Chamba's 1938 issue was of Indian stamps overprinted "Chamba State" and shown were blocks of all values from 2As6Ps to 25 Rupees. In 1942 the overprint was changed to just "Chamba" and blocks of all values were included. Finally, the Frame had the 1938/40 and 1942 "service" overprints for the State, but rather oddly missing from the Collection is a block of the 1938 9Ps value.

Frames 39 & 40: **Malaya – Straits Settlements:** The 1937 issue followed the previous standard design, with the substitution of King George VI's head. Frame 39 showed die and colour proofs for the stamps, which were initially printed in two passes; later some values were printed in a single operation. Letterpress printed by De La Rue on multiple script CA wmk paper and perforated 14 except the 15 cents stamp of 1941 which was 15 x 14. The first two rows of Frame 40 showed further colour proofs for the issue, including 1945 colour proofs which seem not to have been implemented. Issued blocks of stamps of the issue from 25 cents upwards were included, with a page of the 1941 Die II mono-coloured stamps, but missing the 4 cents value. The Frame concluded with the unissued Victory stamps; these were intended to be in the standard colonial "omnibus" design, but political considerations caused a decision to cancel the issue.

Frames 41 & 42: **Malaya – Singapore:** Following liberation, in 1948 a definitive series was issued for Singapore and colour proofs and blocks of issued stamps were shown in the two frames. The stamps were letterpress printed by De La Rue but noticeably, from 1949 at the Colony's request, the perforation changed from 14 to 17½ x 18.

Australasia and the Pacific:

Frames 43 & 44: **Australia:** Frame 43 showed the die proofs and issued stamps for the 150th Anniversary of New South Wales. Recess printed by the Note Printing Branch of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia under John Ash, perf. 13½ x 14 (and not 11¾ as suggested by Sir John Wilson, written up on the pages), wmk multiple Crown and CofA.. The frame continued with die proofs of the "mid-range" values of the definitive series, issued in 1948. Frame 44 covered the 1940 Australian Imperial Forces issue – die proofs and issued stamps, printed as before, but now under WCG McCracken; perf 14 x 13½. The die proofs for this issue are believed to be the only recorded examples. The final row of the frame had die proofs for the 1946 Victory Commemoration issue (one of five sets known).

Frames 45 & 46: **Fiji:** The first frame started with two pages of the King Edward VIII designs; these were adopted for King George VI, with head substitution, but with changed colours for some values. The 1938 definitive issue was long lived, with new dies for some values, and a changed design for the 2d in 1942. Shown were most of the die and colour proofs for the issue. These were followed by the full range that we have in the Collection of the printed blocks of values from 1/- upwards. Of these, the 1/5d & 1/6d values were printed by De La Rue, perf. 14 (1/6d later 13), and the others by Waterlow perf. 12½. All recess printed on multiple script CA wmk paper.

Frames 47 & 48: **Gilbert & Ellice Islands** (later split into Kiribati and Tuvalu): Shown initially for the 1939 issue was the artwork by the three printers involved; the original artwork was given by The King for an auction for the benefit of the Red Cross. Each printer later presented replacements for the Collection, although the ½d value seems to have been omitted. Also shown was a selection of die and colour proofs. Of interest were the photographs of earlier artwork; De La Rue seems to have proposed a different head presentation than was effected. The following frame showed blocks of the issued stamps from 2d upwards.

Printing by all three printers is shown; recess on multiple script CA wmk paper, differently perforated according to printer.

Frames 49 & 50: **New Zealand:** The first frame showed all the colour trials in the Collection for the 1940 Centenary issue, by Bradbury, Wilkinson. The second frame showed the 1946 Peace issue; initially the die proofs and colour trial work, followed by blocks of the issued stamps. On multiple NZ star wmk paper, the stamps were printed by three printers in the UK with the 1½d and 1/- photogravure by Harrisons, the rest recess by Bradbury, Wilkinson or Waterlow according to value.

Frames 51 & 52: **Pitcairn Islands:** Deep in the Western Pacific, initial home of the Bounty mutineers, the first stamps for the islands were issued in 1940 and shown were artwork, die and colour proofs for the issue. Also shown was the complete range of blocks from the issue in the Collection, though some printings are missing. Two printers were involved, Bradbury, Wilkinson and Waterlow. Recess printed on multiple script CA wmk paper, with varying perforations according to printer.

My thanks are due to Ian Greig and Rod Vousden for their help in putting up the display in the frames and standing “guard” and to Rod Vousden especially for his assistance in putting the display together and proof reading these Notes.

Michael Sefi, September 2010