

KING GEORGE VI VARIETIES

Part 15—Brunei

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A book entitled *The Printings of King George VI Colonial Stamps* by Potter and Shelton has already been mentioned in this series. It crops up once again. In the section devoted to Brunei, Potter, when describing the 1947–52 definitive stamps wrote, 'there are also a number of retouches to be found on various values, particularly the 1c., 2c., 5c. and 10c., due of course, to the age of the plates, and as the sheets consist of only fifty stamps, they can be studied with reasonable economy.' Similar remarks occur in Volume III (The Empire in Asia) of Robson Lowe's *Encyclopedia of British Empire Postage Stamps* where, although not commenting directly on the 1947 issue, the existence of retouches is noted on the 1908–20 issue. A cryptic sentence states, 'There is considerable scope for philatelic research in the definitive types of Brunei.' It was not surprising, therefore, to find that in the early 1950s Alan M Morley had described, in *GSM*, some of the retouches on the 1947 stamps that had come to his attention. A considerable number of new collectors have arrived on the philatelic scene since then and, having examined sheets of the values up to 25c. through the kindness of Mr Barney Kleinberg, I now take the opportunity to refresh some memories and provide information for those who have become collectors in more recent years.

The footnote to the series in the *Part 1* Catalogue confirms the use of pre-war plates for the four values mentioned by Potter. It also notes that, 'the 30c. was initially a pre-war plate, but it is believed that a new plate was introduced in 1951, and that the 8c., 15c., 50c. and the three dollar values were from new plates.' So far as I am aware none of these, nor the 30c., were retouched. This leaves the 25c. which is omitted from the footnote, but from available evidence it appears to have been printed from a pre-war plate and this will be considered later.

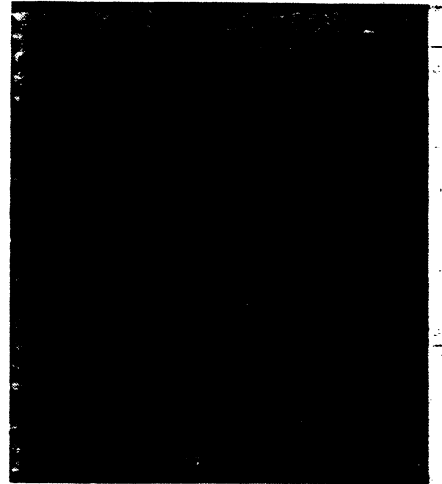
The 'Brunei River' design is one of the longest lived in the Commonwealth and ranks with the 'Sudan Camels'. Its demise in 1952 meant that, not only did it miss its Golden Jubilee by five years—Robson Lowe notes 26 February 1907 as the first date of release—but also the loss of one of the last issues produced on the old 'masterplate cum pantograph' system. In this instance a pantograph was used for inserting the values.

Sheet Layout

Before describing the retouches on the 1c., 2c., 5c., 10c. and 25c. it is necessary to make a couple of points about sheet layout. The position of the top and bottom marginal guide crosses present a trap for the unwary. All the 1947–52 releases were printed in sheets of six by five horizontal rows of ten stamps. It was usual for the guide crosses to mark the half-way point, as their primary purpose was to help the engraver and printer. At a later stage

they also helped post office staff when splitting sheets or accounting for part sheets. However, on the 1c., 2c., 5c. and 10c. the upper and lower crosses occur between the sixth and seventh columns, rather than the fifth and sixth, and, to add a little more confusion, on the 25c. they are located between the fourth and fifth columns. This happened because, although the plates were originally five rows of twelve impressions, they were reduced to five by ten by the simple expedient of cutting off two vertical columns from the left side of the 25c. and the right side of the other four values. Howard Lee reported in the *Collectors Club Philatelist* (Volume 41 No 5) that this happened in about 1931 to facilitate accounting. The *Commonwealth* catalogue confirms this date.

It is curious why the plates were not the reduced size in the first place as the straight forward dollar currency had been in use in Brunei for longer than stamps had been used there. Furthermore, the original 1895 issue had been printed in sheets of 50 (five rows of ten) as had the 1902–3 Labuan set, printed by Waterlow and used for the 1906 overprinted



Above: The long-lived 'Brunei River' design;
Below: Stamps five to eight in the bottom three rows showing the sixth and seventh stamps set lower than their neighbours.

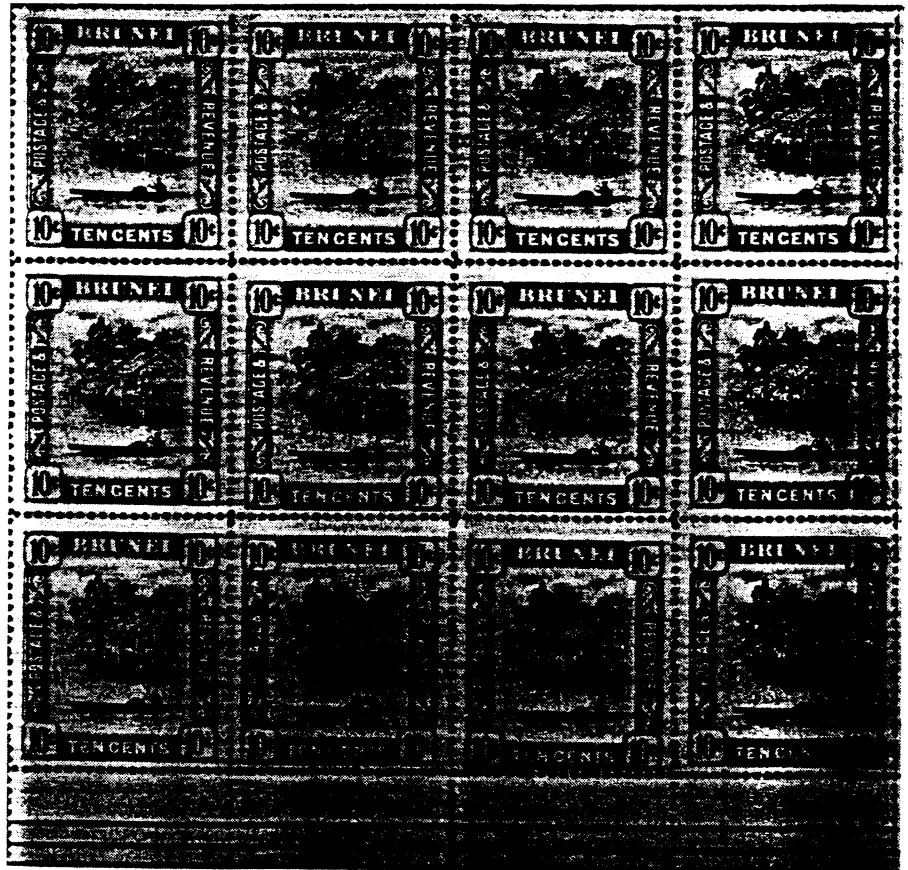




Fig.1

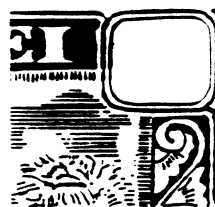


Fig.2



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5



Fig.6

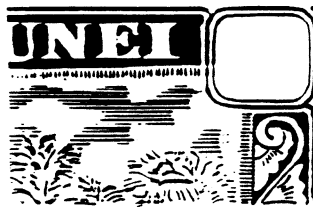


Fig.7

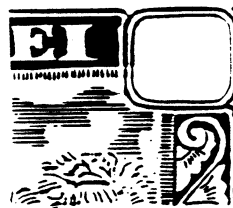


Fig.8



Fig.9

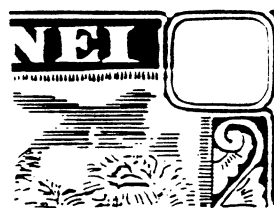


Fig.10

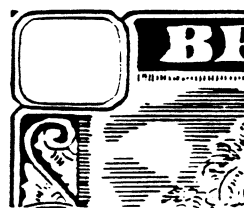


Fig.11

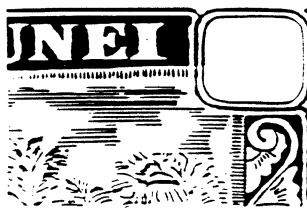


Fig.12

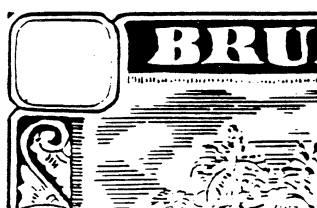


Fig.13



Fig.14

release for Brunei. A strong precedent had been set, and yet De La Rue chose to print sheets of 60 (five rows of 12) with the Brunei River design issued in 1907. I suggest that this probably happened because they were printing similar sized stamps, also perforated 14, in sheets of 60 for Nyasaland (SG 63/7) and retained the format forgetting that it was related to £.s.d. and not cents and dollars. The very handsome large Nyasaland keyplates were also in the course of preparation and must have been much in their minds and, again, these were printed in sheets of sixty to be released in 1908. As a small aside it is interesting to note that in June 1951 Robson Lowe valued Brunei SG 11a at £50 mint and £35 used—at the current £2000/£2500 it is a stamp that has kept ahead of inflation.

Another peculiarity affecting the five low values can be clearly seen when examining a sheet. On the 1c., 2c., 5c. and 10c. the sixth and seventh stamps in the third, fourth and fifth rows are set lower than their neighbours

(see illustration). The same features can be seen on the 25c. but this time affecting the fourth and fifth stamps in the same horizontal rows. The difference is not so marked on the third row, but it is very noticeable on the others particularly on the bottom right stamp in the block of six. A moment's reflection leads back to the loss of the two vertical rows in 1931. This accounts for the differing locations between the 25c. and the remainder, but not why the six impressions were misplaced in the first place. Morley pointed out that as all the plates for the five values show the same misplacement 'it is evident that they came from one undenominated master-plate and that the value was inserted later'.

The Retouches

Pen and ink illustrations, when compared to photographs, tend to over-emphasise the characteristics of a variety. On the other hand, the camera lens often cannot 'see' the philatelic imperfection or repair that is of interest to the

collector, even though they may be visible to the naked eye. Many of the retouches on the River Brunei definitives fall into this category. Fig 1 is an attempt to offer a 'norm' so that retouches shown in later illustrations can be compared with it, remembering that the aim is to give clear and unambiguous information.

In the design there are three 'white cloud formations'. They are on the left and right sides and in the centre. Projecting into the sky are three groups of palm trees—left, right and centre. They all make useful points of reference, because it is in this upper area of the design that retouches were made to the lines of horizontal shading used to simulate patches of blue sky. There is no doubt that a good magnifying-glass aids identification preferably the self-illuminating type as there is nothing like carrying one's own lighting when visiting stamp fairs in poorly lit halls! Clearly the hunt is easier if large multiples can be found, but regrettably they seem to be in short supply. In any event the important thing is to know where to look and without more ado a start will be made with the 1c. value.

One Cent

Three retouches can be found in the top row. The first, on the fourth stamp shows up as extra lines of shading in the sky to the lower left of the right hand value tablet (Fig 2). The second, on the seventh stamp, has severely reduced the size of the white cloud above the central trees (Fig 3). The third, on the ninth stamp, is a small one, but the right cloud has been partly filled in by some extra lines below the 'NEI' of 'BRUNEI'. Row 1/6 has an interesting feature, a vertical projection runs down from the south-west corner of the top left value tablet (Fig 4). It could have been caused accidentally by an engraver, on the other hand, another similar sized vertical mark occurs in the shaded portion of the design just to the left of the 'O' of 'ONE' on R3/1—could they have served a definite purpose? On R2/4 the central clouds have been reduced to one by shading to the right of the left and tallest palm. The engraver has also been busy in the sky below 'EI' and over the right palm (Fig 5). Further along the second row a minor retouch affects the right cloud on the ninth stamp (Fig 6). There is only one retouch on the third row, where on the fifth stamp extra lines run through the white cloud below 'EI' (Fig 7). On R4/1 some lines have been added to the south-west of the top right value tablet (Fig 8), a faint plate scratch also crosses the left cloud (Fig 9). R4/4 is a most unusual impression as the whole stamp is paler than normal. The lines in the sky cry out for retouching, while the palm trees have a skeletal appearance. Bearing in mind the small size of some of the retouches it is very odd that R4/4 did not receive attention. However, no less than six did have remedial work in the fifth or bottom row. On R5/2 the right cloud has almost disappeared (Fig 10), while on R5/3 the left cloud has been reduced in size adjacent to the left palm (Fig 11) and the lines over the centre palm have been strengthened. R5/4 shows strong retouching in the upper right corner and the cloud there has almost vanished (Fig 12). A very careful retouch on R5/7 is difficult to spot, but the sky is split in two by some faint lines of additional shading (Fig 13), and finally on R5/9 the left cloud has been closed by re-cut lines of shading (Fig 14).

The next article in the May 1990 edition of GSM will describe retouches occurring on the 2c., 5c., 10c. and 25c. values.