

KING GEORGE VI VARIETIES

Part 32—The 1937 Coronation Issue of South Africa

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In 1994 it is hard to imagine the intense interest aroused by the King George VI Coronation omnibus series issued to commemorate the event which took place on 12 May 1937. Stanley Phillips writing just before the end of May, for the July edition of *GSM*, could report that the first batch of two million stamps received by Stanley Gibbons from the Crown Agents on 13 and 14 May, had been separated into sets of 135 stamps. He noted that advance postal orders had been satisfied, thus allowing over-the-counter sales to begin on 28 May. He forecast that the Dominions and miscellaneous sets would not be despatched until mid-July, when the last sets were expected to reach London.

Collectors and dealers were equally busy in the Colonies. For example, a Kenya correspondent reported to *Stamp Collecting* that the Nairobi Post Office had sold 72,000 sets over the counter after only four hours of very brisk business on 12 May. This total did not include dealers supplies previously ordered. 'Philatelists Stamp with Rage' was the headline in *The Sunday Times* of Johannesburg (23 May 1937) over the following news item from Bulawayo: 'Rhodesian Philatelists are angry over the alleged failure of the postal authorities to make adequate provision for the issue of Coronation stamps. The impeachment is officially denied. It is further complained that in many cases the cancellations were done carelessly and were badly ruining the philatelic value of the stamps.' (The last comment has a familiar ring, at least in the United Kingdom, nearly sixty years later!) In Hong Kong the *South China Post* noted that at 8.30 a.m. on 12 May the Post Office was besieged by masses of people. Another correspondent in Ascension wrote on 20 May that: 'Ascension went stamp crazy yesterday, the entire population of one hundred and fifty being engaged in licking stamps. I doubt if the first day covers reached 10,000. As you probably know, no complete sheets of the 2d. value were issued. Apparently, the Governor detected an error in a stamp near the bottom right hand corner and had them all taken out before sheets were sold to the public.'

In the Pacific, a correspondent of M A McGoff, writing from Ocean Island in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands on 15 May, regretted his inability to complete an order for first day covers, but issues had been limited to 60 sets per person. He added that the postal staff of one European and one native had found it impossible to cope with the rush and in any event stamps had only been on sale between 10.30 a.m. and 1 p.m. on 12 May. In his view a fraction of the orders for first day covers had left the colony. He also explained that, on a personal note, the need to attend the Coronation parade at 9 a.m., Church Service an hour later, followed by the Chinese dragon Procession at 4.30 p.m. and an official dinner at 7 p.m. had not helped him with a sticky job, even with the assistance of his wife. It is relevant to note that at a later date Robson Lowe stated that only 1200 f.d.c. were posted in Ocean Island and, of these, over 500 went to J Sanders of Southampton, whose two sons



now carry on their father's business. In addition, further supplies had gone to other importers in England. Lowe pointed out that these facts cast considerable doubt on the authenticity of 880 extra f.d.c. supplied by J D Harris on 4 August 1937 by his agent, Mr Mercer of Ocean Island, even though the postmarks were genuine. On the other hand, in March 1938, *GSM* stated that the Chief Postmaster of Ocean Island had told them that approximately 5500 f.d.c. (12 May 1937) with full sets of Coronation stamps passed through the post office on Ocean Island. The explanation behind these contradictory figures could well be the different interpretation given to covers definitely cancelled on the first day of issue and covers bearing genuine postmarks dated 12 May 1937 and applied to meet special needs at a later date. The Chief Postmaster added that Coronation stamps were not available at any other island within the colony until some weeks after 12 May. In any event the extra 880 covers supplied to Harris were used by him to replace those he had supplied at an earlier date and he advertised to this effect in the *Philatelic Magazine* on 15 October 1937. Readers will recall from Part 29 (*GSM* August 1993) that he and G Whitehouse were eventually convicted on charges of forging Coronation Day postmarks from various colonies. It was the opinion of the judge at Stafford Assizes that Whitehouse, who had pleaded not guilty, was the fountain-head of the conspiracy and had it not been for his good record, would have been given far longer than his 18 months imprisonment. Harris was imprisoned for nine months. Contemporary comment in *The Philatelist* noted the heavy losses caused by the drop in the market value of genuine covers and the sympathetic fall in the price of mint sets. It was estimated that the actual cash which changed hands for forgeries was between £10,000 and £12,000—a most significant sum in 1937.

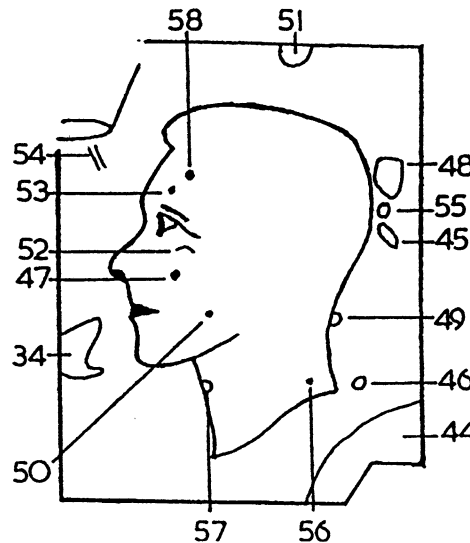
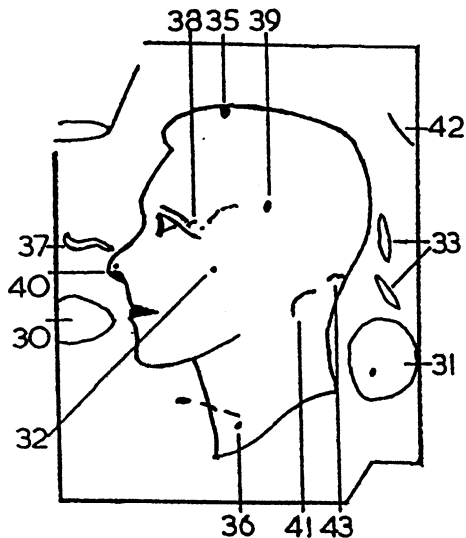
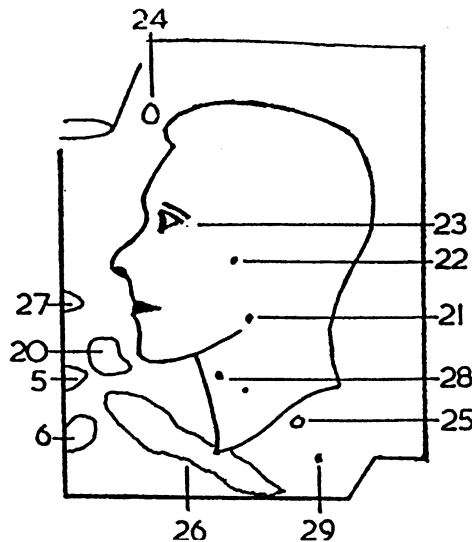
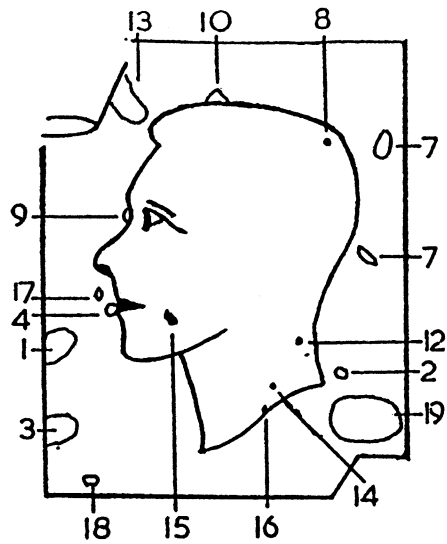
The South African Issues

In comparison to all the excitement elsewhere, philatelic comment stemming from the issue of the five-value Coronation set in South Africa was confined to descriptions of a good number of varieties, largely caused through the use of photogravure. As early as 6 June 1937 the 1s. value lacking a hyphen and with a foreshortened 'R' in 'AFRIKA' had been described in *Stamp Collecting*. During the following weeks many others were mentioned and on 4 September the 'Mouse Flaw' on the 1½d. made its first appearance. 'The Hyphen Omitted' (SG 75a) has been listed in *Part 1* for a few years, but the 'Mouse' had to wait patiently until 1993 (73a). Both are illustrated on the front cover.

Printing Details

The Coronation stamps were printed by the Government Printer in Pretoria by a photolithographic process in sheets of 120 alternately inscribed in English and Afrikaans and arranged in twenty horizontal rows of twenty stamps comb perforated 14. They were issued on 12 May and withdrawn on 11 August 1937. In a letter addressed to *The South African Philatelist* dated 9 August the Government Printer stated that the total quantities of sheets delivered to the Postmaster-General were: ½d.—216,975, 1d.—352,000, 1½d. 39,875, 3d.—32,835 and 1s.—24,625. These figures are for the numbers of sheets printed and, it must be stressed, not for those sold to the public. It is believed that a large number of stamps were returned and presumably destroyed.

Two cylinders were made (Cyl 30A and 55) to print the King's head. Cyl 30A was used to print the ½d., 1½d., 3d. and 1s. and Cyl 55 for the first 113,000 sheets of the 1d. after which this value was also printed from Cyl 30A. 1d. stamps printed from Cyl 55 have a relatively clear impression, greyish-black shading around the head, ear well outlined and the face and neck completely shaded. The watermark, featuring the multiple Springbok's head, faces right when viewed from the front of the sheet on 1d. stamps printed from Cyl 55, whereas the watermark can face either right or left on 1d. stamps printed from 30A and for all the other values. Stamps printed from 30A have an inferior impression with black shading, the ear is not outlined and the shading of the neck and face is patchy. It is worth noting that the *Commonwealth Catalogue* gives the 1d. printed from Cyl 55 a much higher price rating. *Part 1* does not differentiate between the cylinders. Different frame or exterior cylinders were made for each of the five values—½d. No 54, 1d. No 22, 1½d. No 26, 3d. Nos 32 and 69 and 1s. No 25.



Varieties

Because of the high speed of the printing process there are a great number of flaws to be found on these stamps. Some forty of the 120 stamps printed from Cyl 30A for each of the five values can be plated, while thirty impressions of the 1d. from Cyl 55 can be similarly identified. Varieties from the frame or exterior cylinders are not so prolific. Some of the flaws can be detected easily by eye. Others are very small and a good glass is needed. The white patches or smudges in the dark background behind the

King's head are best picked out by eye. When they are all combined together they make an interesting and colourful display and to assemble such a collection to-day is an acceptable challenge, as examples can be found lurking unappreciated in dealers' stock books. To save editorial space, the varieties to be found on the interior cylinders are illustrated using a composite format. Each horizontal row will be considered in turn and either 'E' or 'A' will follow the positional number indicating either an English or Afrikaans inscription. Once again thanks are due to Mr Barney Kleinberg for his kindness in allowing a leisurely examination of his splendid stock.

Cylinder 30A

Row 1. 1E, a light white mark by the chin adjacent to the frame (Fig 1). 2A, a white dot close to the back of the lower neck (Fig 2). 6A, a white smudge near the frame line opposite the lower part of the throat (Fig 3). 9E, a white dot on the mouth (Fig 4). 10A, a white mark opposite the chin (Fig 5). 13E, a white area in the lower left corner (Fig 6). 15E, two small white patches behind the head (Fig 7). 20A, a black spot at the rear of the head (Fig 8).

Row 2. 1A, a white stroke on the bridge of the nose, it has been called the 'Pince-nez' or 'White Eyebrow' (Fig 9). 4E, a white spot on the top of the head (Fig 10). 14E, a clear black dot on the rear of the neck (Fig 12).

16E, small white area above the line of the forehead (Fig 13). 18E, a very small black dot midway on the base of the neck (Fig 14). 19A, a black mark just above jaw line (Fig 15). 20E, a black dot very near the bottom of the neck at the midway point (Fig 16).

Row 3. 1E, a very small white dot in line with the upper lip (Fig 17). 3E, a noticeable white dot in the south-west corner and a pale area over the value tablet (Figs 18 and 19). 4A, a large white area in front of the chin (Fig 20). 5E, a black dot on the jaw line near the ear (Fig 21) and another on the cheek bone between the tip of the nose and the ear hole (Fig 22). 6A, the top eyelid is distorted at the rear and has been called the 'Swollen Eye' (Fig 23). 10A, a small white area close to the wave of hair on the front of the forehead (Fig 24). 17E, a very small white spot below the base of the neck (Fig 25). 18A, a very large white area under the chin running to the frame above the hyphen (Fig 26). 19E, a white smudge in front of the upper lip (Fig 27).

Row 4. 2E, two very noticeable black spots on the lower throat (Fig 28) and another in the background below the neck (Fig 29). 4E, an easily seen white smudge in front of the mouth which has been called 'Misty Breath' (Fig 30). 13A, another easily seen and very large distinctive white area adjacent to the back of the neck with a black dot frequently occurring in the centre (Fig 31). 16E, a black dot in line and midway between the tip of the nose and the ear (Fig 32). 18E, two almost vertical 'comet-like' white marks behind the head (Fig 33).

Row 5. 1E, a large white area close to the left frame and in line with the chin (Fig 34). 2A, a dark spot on top of the hair (Fig 35). 15E, some black marks in line cutting the lower part of the throat accompanied by a dot (Fig 36). 16A, a very long, almost horizontal, mark in front of the nose (Fig 37).

Row 6. 7A, a very clear black line and some dots (NE-SW) cutting the hair line on the temple (Fig 38). 12E, a black dot in the hair just above the ear (Fig 39). 14E, a minute black dot on the tip of the nose which, although very small, is easy to spot (Fig 40). 16E, a semi-circular line of black spots on the back of the neck, which have been called 'ringworm'! (Fig 41). 18E, a scratch close to the frame and below the 'N' of 'CORONATION' (Fig 42). 19A, a thick black line cutting the back of the head in line with the ear (Fig 43).

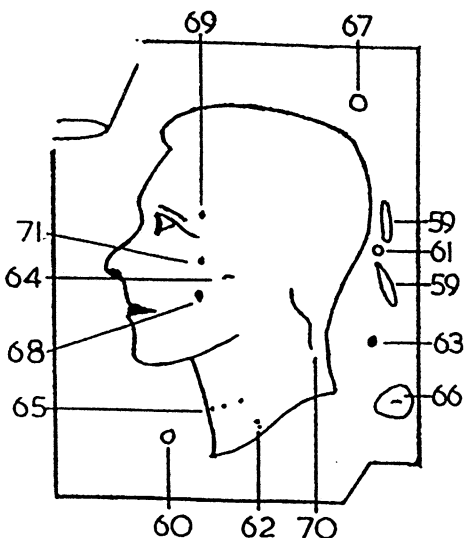
Cylinder 55

Row 1. 2A, the black background in the corner above the value shows whitening (Fig 44). 15E, two white patches behind the head and the base of the neck (Figs 45 and 46). 16A, a black spot on the cheek in line with the nostril (Fig 47). 20A, a white smudge behind the upper part of the head (Fig 48).

Row 2. 3A, a white spot on the back of the neck (Fig 49). 7A, a black spot to the right and in line with the mouth (Fig 50). 13A, a small semi-circular white area abutting the frame above the head (Fig 51). 15A, a short, but most noticeable, horizontal black line below the eye (Fig 52).

Row 3. 2A, a black spot above the eye (Fig 53). 10A, some scratch marks running almost vertically under the base of the crown (Fig 54).

Row 4. 4E, a white dot behind the head (Fig 55). 11A, a black dot in the lower right



corner of the base of the neck (Fig 56). 14E, a very small white dot on the front of the throat (Fig 57). 17A, a large, easily seen, black spot on the upper forehead (Fig 58). 18E, two white patches behind the head in line with the ear (Fig 59). 19A, a white dot in front of the throat (Fig 60) and another behind the head (Fig 61).

Row 5. 9E, a black dot just above the neck line (Fig 62) and another large one in the black shading behind the nape of the neck (Fig 63). 10A, a light black mark just to the left of the lobe of the ear (Fig 64). 11E, a line of three dots across the throat (Fig 65). 15E, a pale smudge containing a black line behind the base of the neck and vertically above '1d.' (Fig 66). 16A, a smudge above the rear of the head (Fig 67). 20A, a noticeable black dot on the cheek (Fig 68) together with an obvious white patch behind the head in the area occupied by Figs. 59 and 61.

Row 6. 1A, a black spot to the right of the eye (Fig 69). 2E, a long, almost vertical, black line behind the ear (Fig 70). 15A, a black dot on the cheek midway between

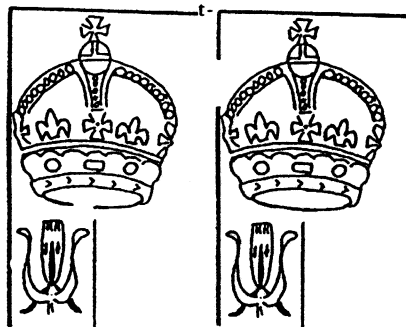


Fig.72

Fig.74



Fig.73



Fig.75

Fig.76



Fig.77



Fig.78



Fig.79

Frame Varieties

1d. R3/18, the base of the crown is broken (Fig 72). R6/2-3 on some sheets a line cuts through 'AFRICA' and 'AFRIKA' (Fig 73). R6/15, the left outer frame line, adjacent to the crown, is badly broken (Fig 74).

1½d. R4/1, 'The Mouse Flaw' (SG 73a) (Fig 75). R4/18, a white dot over 'O' of 'CORONATION' (Fig 76).

3d. R6/14, an extra blue dot below the 'd' of '3d.' in the value tablet (Fig 77).

1s. A large number of the 1s. value show varieties caused by extra heavy blue inking in the area of the country and value panels. The most obvious is, of course, the 'Hyphen Omitted' on R2/13 (75a) (Fig 78). Another, mentioned in a footnote in Part 1, is on R4/17 where extra inking covers most of the hyphen making it look like a dot (Fig 79). It is as well to make special note of the differences as optimists have been known to mistake it for SG 75a! Both illustrations show the areas of heavy inking ignoring the normal blue background behind the letters. In addition, the following brief descriptions of similar extra inking are included as an aid to plating the stamp. R1/2 has slight over-inking amongst the letters and in the cross stroke of '1-'. R2/17, heavy extra inking in '1' of '1-' and slight to the right of the last 'A' of 'AFRIKA'. R2/19, slight above the last 'A'. R3/5, heavy ink filling in the 'U' of 'SOUTH'. R3/10, heavy between 'S' and 'U' of 'SUID' and also around the first 'A' and on the '1' of '1-'. R3/11, slight between 'U' and 'T' of 'SOUTH'. R4/15, slight to the right of 'D' of 'SUID'. R4/16, heavy to the left of the 'C' of 'CORONATION'. R5/19, extra ink in the '1' of '1-' with R5/20 similarly affected.

Two Most Unusual Items

The 9 October 1937 edition of *Stamp Collecting* contained an article by Dr Alec Kaplan originally written for *The South African Philatelist*. Kaplan wrote that Mr S Legator had shown him an interesting freak consisting of a sheet of the second printed 1d. with the right side of the sheet cut through the stamps of the last vertical row. This had been done during the trimming of the sheet. The sheet was then trimmed properly and an extra piece was stuck on the sheet, whilst it was still damp. The result showed the twentieth vertical row of stamps on the sheet apparently partly printed, whilst the attached portion of the row showed an excellent offset. Another contemporary report noted another mishap, which although not constant, deserves mention. All the seventh vertical row of one sheet of the 1d. value had been printed on double paper caused by the joining of the paper in the roll. These two items may still be in existence or perhaps, during the intervening 57 years, they have been split up to provide examples for several collectors.

Part 33 (GSM August 1994) will begin an account describing some of the plate varieties to be found on the King George VI stamps of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.

Collectors interested in the philatelic era of KGVI can obtain information about The King George VI Collectors' Society from the Secretary, 24 Stourwood Road, Bournemouth, BH6 3QP.