

King George VI Varieties

Part 52—Ceylon

A vast number of plate number combinations but relatively few varieties characterise this popular and attractive set—Richard Lockyer OBE explains

The study of the stamps of Ceylon printed during the reign of King George VI has fascinated many collectors in the past and continues to do so. F R Saunders contributed a long series to *Geosix*, the quarterly journal of the King George VI Collector's Society, entitled 'Ceylon—An Attempt to Unravel Some of the Complications', which aptly describes the size of the task. David Wood, of the Ceylon Study Circle of Great Britain, is currently undertaking a review of all the printings. He would welcome information to help produce a definitive study of the very many issues. Letters care of the editor of *GSM* will be passed on promptly.

In general terms, the following paragraphs describing King George VI varieties on the stamps of Ceylon will not include comment about printings, but inevitably there will be a temptation to digress—just a little.

De La Rue and Bradbury, Wilkinson were the printers of the attractively designed stamps, inherited from the King George V era. Sheets and imprint blocks show their names, but it is worth noting that individual plate blocks can be identified just as easily, because De La Rue used Roman letters and numerals, whereas Bradbury, Wilkinson used the italic form. Correct identification is important for the 2c., 3c. and 50c., as, due to bomb damage suffered mostly during the night of 29/30 December 1940, De La Rue eventually handed over the printing of these values to Bradbury, Wilkinson for some years. There is contemporary written evidence that the De La Rue management was most reluctant to do this. It is a reflection on human nature that, when the task reverted to them, De La Rue ignored the plate numbers used by Bradbury, Wilkinson and continued with their own as though nothing had happened. The positioning of these numbers in the bottom margin of sheets by both printers is a topic in its own right and will be part of the study by David Wood.

The surcharged issues

Ceylon, in common with other colonies, did not escape a shortage of postage stamps. The 3c. value was affected, due, it has been said, to the torpedoing of a ship in August 1940 and five more during the following month, all of which were carrying supplies to the colony. It is probable that Japanese submarines were responsible. However, it is possible, that some of these sinkings were an early result of the use of a secret transmitter aboard the interned German ship *Ehrenfels* in Marmagoa Harbour, Goa, to send details of Allied shipping, derived from the espionage network in India, to waiting U-boats in the Indian Ocean. Heavy Allied shipping losses eventually led to the employment of 14 civilians drawn from the Calcutta Light

Horse and a further four from the Calcutta Scottish, another Auxiliary Force unit in India, to put the transmitting equipment and the *Ehrenfels* out of action during the night of 8/9 March 1943. Two other German ships, the *Braunfels* and *Drachenfels*, and an Italian vessel, the *Anfora*, were scuttled at their moorings by their crews. This little-known event was the subject of a book entitled *Boarding Party*, by James Leasor, published in 1978. A foreword by Admiral of the Fleet, The Earl Mountbatten of Burma, paid tribute to those who planned and carried out this most secret operation.

Whatever the background to the loss of merchant ships in 1940, it became necessary to produce a local replacement for the 3c. value. The surcharging of the 20c., followed a little later by the 6c., was carried out in the Government Printing Office in Colombo. Thus, there are not the many minor varieties that resulted from such work in Barbados, Bermuda and Fiji, where local newspaper staff were given the responsibility. Nevertheless, there are worthwhile characteristics to study. The 3c./20c. was issued on 5 November 1940, followed by the 3c./6c. on 10 May 1941.

The 3 cents/6 cents surcharge

Albinos at little cost—the sheets of 60 stamps (six horizontal rows of ten) of the 6c. value had their top and right-hand margins folded over before being surcharged. This resulted in reverse albino partial surcharges appearing in the right-hand margin. The albino bars, derived from those cancelling the original 6 cents on the face of the stamps, can be picked out on the side of a sheet without difficulty. If the right margin is wide enough the 'TS' and even 'NTS' of 'CENTS' show as a reverse albino. A single marginal copy provides an example at little cost. There are no albino impressions in the top margin as the fold-over was insufficient to impinge on the surcharge. It is generally accepted that 30,000 sheets of 60 were surcharged (1,800,000).

The sliced '3'. A noticeable defect to the surcharge is a slice off the foot of the figure

'3' on R6/10. It varies slightly in shape. *Fig 1* illustrates the normal state. *Fig 2* shows a semi-circular indentation. This was presumably an early state of the damage with the straight edge (*Fig 3*) occurring at a later stage. Only one sheet (FP4/CP5), from a selection of 35 inspected, has a perfect '3' at R6/10. On the same sheet the top of the '3' on R 4/10 shows signs of a clear break, resembling a sock (*Fig 4*). On all the other sheets, from earlier plate combinations, the figure on R4/10 is perfect, except that a black mark of varying length shows just above the figure on those with the 4A/5A combination (*Fig 5*). On a significant number of sheets the 'N' of 'CENTS' at R1/10 shows either signs of deteriorating type or a trace of oil on the overprint plate, repelling ink. *Fig 6* illustrates an example. On some sheets the same letter shows signs of faint printing and damage on stamps in the last vertical column. The 'N' on other positions on some sheets also show imperfections. These signs point to overall weakness of the letter 'N', rather than oil or grease affecting just this single letter at a variety of locations. This leads to the suggestion that early sheets, as would be expected, bore perfect



Fig 1



Fig 2



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6

surcharges. The '3' on R4/10 started to break and was repaired. The repair, having some form of protuberance, left an additional black mark for some time. Concurrently, the base of the '3' on R6/10 was dented and over a period of time changed shape. Finally, the 'N' at R1/10 began to break-up, as did others in the last vertical column, but to a lesser extent. Plate numbers are no help, as sheets would have been surcharged as they came from stock. Indeed, they could have been mixed-up further as they were moved around in the printing works prior to surcharging. If the suggested hypothesis is correct then the existence of a perfect '3' at R6/10 on a sheet from FP4/CP5 shows that controlled rotation of stock was not a practice always used by those in charge.

A cracked head plate. A very nice example of a cracked head plate can be found at R1/2 on sheets printed from the unnumbered head plate (1) with vignette, or centre plates 2a. and 3a. The defect appears as a faint irregular network of blue lines, resembling a weather-worn cobweb. On sheets used for the surcharge it shows immediately above the 'T' of 'CENTS'. It can be missed with the naked eye because of the intrusion of the surcharge, but with a glass is easy to see. Its characteristics are broadly similar to the cracked FP2 flaw that appeared in the margin alongside R2/10 of the St Vincent Id. value from the September 1944 and July 1945 releases. The damage was most probably caused, in both cases, by a blow cracking the chromium facing of the plate. A sheet printed from Frame Plate (1)/Centre Plate 3a. exists without the damage which indicates the defect was repaired.

Forgeries. A brief footnote in Volume III of Robson Lowe's *Encyclopaedia* states that forged surcharges of the 3 cents on 6 cents are known.

The 3 cents/20 cents surcharge

There is no chance of an albino in the selvage as it appears from examination of sheets and part sheets that the top and bottom margins were folded over during surcharging. Early editions of the *Commonwealth* note that 1,800,000 stamps were so treated and this figure is retained for the 1997 edition. It has been claimed that the 'S' of 'CENTS' on R1/3 is a figure '8', but examination with a strong glass shows that it is far more likely that heavy and long-lasting pollution was the cause. However, the fun begins when misplaced or inverted surcharges are considered.

Caveat Emptor. In the April 1942 edition of *GSM* there was detailed comment about a sheet of genuine 20 cents stamps with a misplaced surcharge and another sheet of genuine surcharged stamps with an inverted surcharge placed near the King's head. The material was examined very carefully and it was concluded that a forger had been at work. The reasons leading to this decision will now be given so that these, and other examples, can be recognised. First, the ink used for the misplaced surcharge was dull grey-black instead of the bright shiny black used for the

genuine surcharge. Secondly, the size of the forged surcharge was found to be larger than the genuine one. It also gave a blurred impression, while in many instances the ink had not been applied evenly, leaving the surcharge weak and defective. Thirdly, the forged bars cancelling the value were ragged, whereas those on the genuine stamp had clear-cut outlines. Fourthly, while the impression on the back of the genuine stamp was scarcely noticeable, on the forgery it was very heavy and in some cases almost bit through the sheet. Finally, the area around the forged surcharges were blurred and dirty, possibly due to careless handling of the sheets, as well as dirty fingers, during printing. Examination of the sheet with the inverted surcharge revealed the same printing press was used as the same differences in size, ink, type and appearance were all evident. Careful scrutiny of some used copies, which had also appeared, showed that the surcharges had been printed over the postal cancellation and the differences previously mentioned were present. The short article finished with a warning that collectors needed to be very careful. Advice that still holds good!

GSM did not state the direction of the shifted surcharge on the 3c./20c. However, a photocopy of a large marginal block from the left side of the sheet has been seen where the shift is to the right. For all but the first vertical column, the 3c. and the cancelling bars are located across the right frame with 'CENTS' on the left side, above the original value. The stamps in the first vertical row do not show 'CENTS', just the 3 and the cancelling bars over the right frame. Presumably the right margin showed 'CENTS' alongside each horizontal row.

The 1938-49 set

The 2c. value. W A Harrison, of East Sussex, told the author of a distinctive flaw on the 2c. in early 1996. It is a large red mark shaped like a comma, just south-east of the stop below the 'c' in 2c. His four used single copies span the three early

(1938) printings by De La Rue (SG 386, a and b). At the time, the variety was un-plated, but Peter Stainer, writing in the *Ceylon Study Circle Bulletin*, has since placed it at R5/6, suggesting that it may come from FP2A, though this has yet to be conclusively proved.

The 3c. value. Captain C W Purvis of South Shields reported in *Stamp Collecting* that the full stop was missing after 'ADAM'S PEAK 7360FT' on R10/4 from FP3B CP7. This will be in an imprint pair and confirmation will be welcomed as this is not the case on three sheets in the author's collection. It is possible that mal-adjustment of the plates on the example seen by Purvis caused the green dot to be hidden by one of the nearby black lines.

Re-entries. During 1945 the Crown Agents announced that the 3c. and 50c. values would once again be printed by De La Rue. The CA Requisition Book and Plates Issued Register show that 307,875 sheets of the 3c. were printed by De La Rue using CP10A/10B with FP4A/4B, 5A/5B and 6A/6B. On 14 January 1946 the De La Rue printing of the 3c. value, comb perforated 12, was released (The 50c. perf 12 was released at the same time).

It is not surprising that sheets of the 3c. from the FP5B/10A combination caught the eye of Bentley Kettle, resulting in a long article in *GSM* (January 1952). The stamps in the last, or sixth, vertical column are all a darker shade of green when compared with the rest of the sheet, except that R1/6 and 2/6 are normal and 3/6 and 10/6 are an intermediate shade. Their appearance is a reminder of the last, or tenth column, of the Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika 1c. printed from FP2, where every stamp, except for R5/10, was re-entered and, consequently, are darker than the other 89 impressions on the sheet (Part 33, *GSM* August 1994).

Kettle found that, generally, the impressions were weak on a sheet of the 3c., but those in the right-hand row were nearly all stronger, with the King's face showing slightly heavier shading and the diagonal





Fig 7

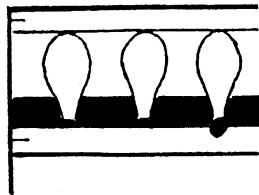


Fig 8

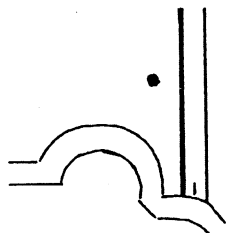


Fig 9

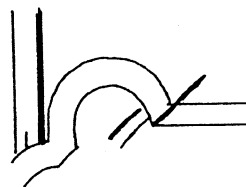


Fig 10

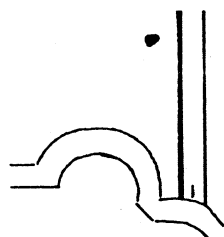


Fig 11

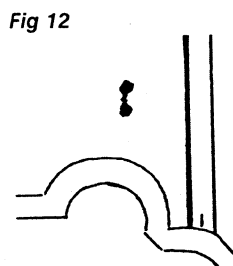


Fig 12

lines behind the head, enough doubling to indicate that at least the last stamp in the fourth to ninth rows, had been improved by rocking-in the transfer roller. In addition, the right vertical frame line on those stamps showed strengthening with most noticeable doubling affecting R6/6. (They appear like railway-lines and are easily spotted, when found). R3/6 and 10/6 also showed similar signs, as did R10/1. In a later letter to GSM (May 1952) Kettle confirmed he had found a sheet of 5B/10A without the re-entries down the right of the sheet. From this he concluded that they must have been made during the print of the 5B/10A combination. He also suggested they would be present on all sheets from 5B/10B. He confirmed that the small re-entry on R10/1 was present from the first use of the FP5B.

The 5c. value. E H Ryan Tenison, who served for nearly 30 years in the Ceylon Civil Service, stated in an article in *Stamp Collecting* (24 June 1950) that the lack of a 5c. stamp in the series was felt by the postal authorities to be a hindrance to expeditious business. The matter came to a head while he was an official in the Ceylon Treasury. (He had given the news that he had been appointed Controller of Finance and Supply to a friend with Bradbury, Wilkinson in a letter dated 25 February 1941). Approval for a new stamp was given and, as stamps came within his area of responsibility, the details were left to him to work out. He explained that it had been agreed originally that the scene of the coconut palms by the shore, used on the King George V 20c., issued on 1 January 1936, should continue in the new reign. However, the 9c. value, depicting tea-plucking, in the King George V set was dropped from the King George VI series. This had left Ceylon's principal revenue producer unrepresented. It was then decided to use the tea-plucking design for the King George VI 20c., thus omitting the coconut design from the set. However, when a 5c. stamp was authorised he considered that the coconut industry should be featured once again. Furthermore, as the security printers would have little time to devote to designing a new stamp in war-time he gave orders to use the King George V 20c. design and selected the colours. It was to be the first Ceylon stamp printed by De La Rue after their factories suffered very severe bomb and fire damage in December 1940 and came into use in 1943 for the postcard rate to India which had been 3c. Three 5c. stamps also conveniently added up to the 15c. Imperial surface rate of the time.

Sheet size was six horizontal rows of ten stamps. The initial release of 1 January 1943 was comb perforated 13½. However, supplies of the comb perforated 12 stamp came into use in Ceylon without any being released in London. This drew a cry of anguish from GSM. Fortunately, a supply was obtained by Stanley Gibbons and new issue customers duly received their copies for 2d. This unannounced distribution in the colony is perhaps why *Part 1* and the *Commonwealth* catalogues only list 1947 for the change of perforation. The latter lists two shades; deep dull yellow-green and

orange-red for 1947 and pale dull yellow-green and orange-red released on 8 March 1948, although GSM (May 1948) noted that a new printing (FP2A/CP3A) arrived from the CA on 15 March.

Frame and centre plate varieties.

Little did Tenison know that an accidental, but fortunately placed, mark on Frame Plate 1A would result in the 'Apostrophe Flaw'. It occurred on R6/6 from the initial perf 13½ printing of the 5c. (SG 387fa) and is illustrated on the front cover. Used copies of this variety seem to be hard to find. An orange dot immediately above the '5' of 5c. is also noticeable on R3/9 (Fig 7). There is another one on R4/9, but this time in the framework above the figure 5 (Fig 8) and justifies mention as it adds a base to the third light bulb! A tiny orange spot in the lower right corner also occurs on R5/7 (Fig 9). Frame Plate 1B has a nice flaw at R5/1—a strong mark affects the design of the frame at the lower left (Fig 10). R5/7 has a small orange spot in the south-east corner; it is slightly higher than the one on FP1A (Fig 11). The most noticeable CP1 variety are two green dots that occur on R5/9 on some sheets from both frame plates 1A and 1B (Fig 12). A falling coconut, reminiscent of those on the Fijian ½d. and 1½d. values (Part 3, February 1987) has been reported on R4/3. Another comment mentioned three people standing on the beach (this could be R3/3), as well as a man on the bowsprit of the sailing ship at R5/10 on CP1/FP1A sheets. These could, and most probably do, occur on sheets for FP1B, but have not been noted. Equally sheets from CP1/FP1A have been seen without these minor defects. Other plate combinations may well display similar minor varieties. For example, another very noticeable 'man' on another 'bowsprit' occurs at R3/8 from an unidentified centre plate.

Plate numbers. As the 5c. was the only low value printed solely by De La Rue, a collection of plate numbers makes a nice assembly. The following have been recorded: FP1A/CP1, 1B/1, 1A/2, 2A/3A, 2B/3A, 2B/3B, 2A/4A, 2B/4B, 3A/3B, 3A/4A, 3B/4B and 4A/4B.

The 6c. value. This value, with its slightly modified design from the one used during the reign of King George V, had a lengthy period of issue. Tenison stated that, when issued, 15 million a year were needed to pay the rate on inland letters weighing up to two ounces. By 1946, nearly 28 million a year were used. This very large increase was due largely to the rapid strides in the country's development, improved education and the general effects of war.

Sheets of 60 were printed in six horizontal rows of ten stamps by Bradbury, Wilkinson. Plate numbers were in italic form. A huge number of frame and centre plates were used in many combinations, as will be seen in a later section entitled 'A Daunting Challenge'. When referring to plate numbers on the 6c. it is important to remember that combinations up to and including CP3a/FP3a were engraved on the plates so that the centre plate number appeared in the bottom margin astride R6:8-9 and the FP between R6/9-10. With

the introduction of FP4 CP4 the numbers switched over and the FP number appeared under R6/9 and the CP under R6/10.

Frame Plate 31, used with Centre Plates 34, 35, 36 and 37, had a most interesting characteristic which only affected R6/10. It consists of a straight line three millimetres long which diverges upwards and outwards at a slight angle, from the right vertical frame line, very close to the outside curve of the large scroll below the 'N' of 'CEYLON' (Fig 13). Dr L W Gunaratne considered that the cause was a slip of the engraver's burin as he strengthened a weak area on the right side. A plate pair or block from FP31 will provide an example. Saunders reported single copies with slight doubling in the sky and sea, but was unable to position them. An examination of sheets from 15 or so different plate combinations has not revealed any examples.



Fig 13

Essays

Tenison must have enjoyed his duties connected with postage stamps. An auction at Hammers on 15 May 1996 featured a 5c. composite essay (1942) submitted by him and executed in deep carmine and green/yellow-green with a horizontal design entitled 'Ehela Tree'. (It is a matter of conjecture whether rejection of this led to the adoption of the coconut palm design). There were also composite essays of the 20c. submitted by him, circa 1942, for a proposed issue to commemorate the Restoration of the Ruanweli Dagoba. Three enlarged hand-drawn essays by Tenison and Muhundiram S V Rodrigo, of the Ceylon Survey Department, and other associated items were also included in the sale. One of the three essays was for a 6c. value entitled 'National Park' depicting a pair of deer by a jungle pool in full moonlight. A scene witnessed by Tenison and described and illustrated in one of a series of articles concerning the background to the pictorial stamps of Ceylon published in *Stamp Collecting* during 1950. The projected stamp did not go beyond the design stage. The other two essays were rejected designs for the 1947 Inauguration of the New Constitution issue (15c. Governor's Residence and 25c. Arms of Ceylon). In the event, the issued four-value set was designed by Tenison and Rodrigo, recess-printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson and released on 25 November. The central design for the 25c. (SG 405) bears a striking resemblance to the 1942 essays.

Perforations

The issue dates in *Part 1* for the many perforation varieties are, with a few exceptions, specific. One of the exceptions is the 50c. Perf 13x13½ (394a). It is worth noting, therefore, that R E Stonehouse described a first day cover in *Stamp Collecting* (January 1950). It had been registered at Cinnamon Gardens and was dated 25 April 1938.

Perforation forgeries

It is pertinent to reiterate a warning in the *Philatelic Trader* (17 August 1956) about forged perforation varieties of King George VI stamps. It was reported that the 50c. value had received particular attention by the forgers. Used copies had been apparently chemically cleaned to remove the postmark, then cleverly reperforated to conform with the rare perforation and regummed. 'This may be the height of ingenuity, but is apt to destroy confidence of collectors and dealers' was the apt conclusion by the correspondent giving the information. Once again *caveat emptor*.

Watermarks

Stamp Collecting noted (probably 1945) that a 5c. Perf 13½ (387f) with an inverted watermark had been reported by G C Woolatt of Nottingham. It was a used copy with a 12 March 1947 postmark. The discovery of an example now could mean another entry in *Part 1* to join the 'A' of 'CA' missing from the watermark on the 3c. (387da) found by M R Barnes, a KGVICS member, a few years ago. His find rated television coverage, mention in the national press and *GSM* (March 1996). David Aggersberg, writing in 'Catalogue Column' (*GSM*, February 1997), confirmed the existence of another example on a sheet printed with Plates 9/12 perf 11½x11. There had been no other reports of this watermark variety on Ceylon stamps, but Aggersberg considered that a likely candidate was the accompanying 50c. printing (394d).

A daunting challenge

It was noted in *GSM* (May 1940) that the April issue of the Crown Agents Bulletin stated that no less than 12 different plate combinations had been used in printing the latest supply of the 6c. despatched to Ceylon. In February 1941 *GSM* listed 14 more different combinations in a fresh despatch. Later editions carried news of yet more combinations. A complex situation developed quickly. Saunders traced 15 printings and suggested that, at first, it seemed that three or four double-frame plates were used in conjunction with three or four double-centre plates in various combinations. However, after about 1942 the number of plates used increased for each printing but the combinations were fewer and, in general, one frame plate seemed to have been used with one centre plate.

In March 1971 Dr L W Gunaratne wrote in the newsletter of the Stamp Circle of Ceylon (now defunct) that he had seen 169 different plate number combinations for the 6c. value. This implied that more could be added to his extensive list. A swift response from A E Butler in the next newsletter added a further 18 combinations. Even this was not the end, as *GSM* between December 1948 and February 1954 had previously given details of five combinations released in London not included in the two lists. In recent years David Wood, using all these records and help from members of the Ceylon Study Circle, has now recorded some 272

different combinations, of which all but 70 have been verified by the Study Circle. The latest batch of nine only came to light during late 1998, thanks to Tony Belfield of the KGVICS. It is most likely that other unrecorded numbers will come to light. FP51a/CP52a is, at the moment, the highest combination recorded. Such a large number of different plate combinations recorded for one stamp is breathtaking. They would make an astounding display.

On a smaller scale, but still offering a real challenge, is to assemble the range of centre and frame plate numbers used for the 3c./6c. surcharge. 18 are needed. The following check list, based on Gunaratne's listing, will help in the search. The unnumbered centre and frame plates are shown as (1) and the small 'a' reflects the size of the italic letter printed on a sheet. The combinations are: CP(1)/FP(1), CP2/FP(1), CP2a/FP(1), CP3/FP(1), CP2/FP2, CP2a/FP2a, CP3a/FP2a, CP3/FP3, FP4/CP4, FP5/CP4, FP4a/CP4a, FP5a/CP4a, FP4/CP5, FP5/CP5, FP4a/CP5a and FP5a/CP5a. The best of luck, and do not forget the plate numbers switched over their positions!

A general comment

The use of many plates for all the values seems to have almost eliminated the need for remedial work, thus there are only a few varieties to find on the stamps of this most attractive pictorial series. On the other hand, the search for plate number combinations helps to offset this. It appears that Bradbury, Wilkinson, in particular, generally used a new plate for each printing and sometimes introduced others during a printing run. It is as though it had been previously decided how many sheets a plate would print, and when that number was reached the plate was automatically changed for a new one. This is pure conjecture and contributions to the discussion will be most welcome.

Part 53 (GSM August 1999) will feature Basutoland, Cayman Islands and Cyprus.

Readers are reminded that some 360 collectors are members of the King George VI Collectors' Society. Display meetings will take place at Swinpex (Swindon) on 12 June and at Midpex (Coventry) on 3 July 1999. The third London meeting of the year will take place at the British Philatelic Centre, 107 Charterhouse Street on 4 September. Further details about membership can be obtained from The Secretary, KGVICS, 98 Albany, Manor Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3EW. Equally, readers may wish to join the Ceylon Study Circle who hold meetings at Stampex in the spring and autumn and have some 160 members. Further details from R W P Frost, 42 Lonsdale Road, Cannington, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA5 2JS.