

# King George VI Varieties

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## Part 12—The 1946 Victory Issue for the Crown Colonies

Prior to 1983 I had regarded the 1946 Victory issue for the Crown Colonies as a cheap and cheerful set without much interest. However, all that changed after listening to a talk by Mr Marcus Faux to the King George VI Collectors' Society. He had been Chief Inspector of Colonial Stamps at the Crown Agents, followed by a spell as the Archivist at their headquarters at Millbank and his account was a fascinating look behind the scenes, particularly about the KGVI era when he was personally involved.

### Background

Mr Faux explained that many difficulties were encountered with the Victory Issue as it had to be prepared very quickly. As a measure of events it is worth reviewing progress through the pages of contemporary editions of GSM. The story begins on the first page of the 1 November 1945 issue where, under the headline 'They'll Never Know We Won the War', it was reported that, *In reply to a recent question in parliament, the Secretary of State for the Colonies stated that it is not proposed to arrange for the issue of special Victory stamps by Colonial Governments as the manpower and manufacturing position will not permit the necessary diversion of labour and materials. The editorial goes on to observe, the above announcement surely does make it all the more vital that the Mother Country should issue a Victory series and added that, at least one stamp should be issued and that should have reference to Dunkirk—the vital moment in the history of the modern world.* In April 1946 GSM noted that, *now we hear that our own country has had a change of heart and will issue a stamp or stamps on the occasion of the belated Victory celebrations in June. We cannot expect anything wonderful, but fortunately there is not much to beat.* (Some of the designs used by other Commonwealth countries had been the subject of biting criticism in GSM.) A month later the magazine reported that, *Peace Commemorative Issues, similar to the Jubilee and Coronation issues are in preparation for most of the Colonies. The design is the view of the Houses of Parliament with the River Thames in the foreground, the name of the territory in a panel at the top, a medallion portrait of HM the King on the right side and the words 'Postage and Revenue' in a panel at the base. Each colony will have two denominations. Another separate paragraph noted that Hong Kong would have a special design released by the Crown Agents.*

In June 1946 GSM gave details of the Peace Commemorative now in preparation. It was further noted that, *The stamps will be put on sale in each territory independently as soon as possible after their arrival and will remain on sale until December 31st 1946 or until stocks are exhausted, whichever is earlier. It is not expected that any of these stamps can be issued before the middle of August and their release will probably be spread over at least two months. A month*

later an article in GSM entitled 'Peace Puerilities' described the two GB Peace stamps issued on 11 June as *products of the Bits and Pieces School of Design.* This edition also advised readers that prepaid orders for the complete sets of the British Colonial Peace (or Victory) issues could be made at a cost of 25s.3d. post free. (Forty-four Colonial sets plus two overprinted sets for the Aden States and one for Zanzibar, making forty-seven sets in all.) In August, GSM said that the Victory issue for Hong Kong, *is to be recess-printed instead of typographed as previously intended.* (A small footnote to history bears repeating here as the same edition reported that Stanley Gibbons were 'Back in London' at 391 Strand from their wartime spell in St Albans.)

On 1 November 1946 the CA Bulletin dropped a bombshell when it announced that, *As the future form and title of the Postal Administration in the Malayan Union and Singapore have not yet been settled, the commemorative series will be regarded, at any rate for the time being, as complete without the sets for these two territories.* This caused an administrative headache for dealers, who had already accepted prepaid orders—Stanley Gibbons refunded 1s.6d. and reduced the price of the set of forty-five issues to 23s.9d. Gambia was first passed the winning-post with its stamps released on 6 August 1946. The specially designed Hong Kong pair were despatched to the Colony on 29 July and it is reasonable to consider that the aim was to release them on 15 August—the first anniversary of VJ Day. In the event the stamps were issued in Hong Kong on 29 August 1946, which was the first anniversary of the arrival of the British Fleet back in the Colony.

In November 1946 GSM observed that, *The date by which all Victory issues were to be available—mid-October—is passed with more than half still to be issued and continued, at the present rate of progress it will probably be at least mid-November before all the Victory stamps reach us.* In the following February GSM proudly reported that, *the last stamp of the series was received on 31st December 1946 and within a week all booked orders had been distributed.* Some fifteen months had elapsed since the Secretary of State for the Colonies had proclaimed that there would not be a Victory Issue—Marcus Faux was certainly correct when he told the KGVICS that the Crown Agents and De La Rue had had to work quickly!

### Some Technical Details

Mr Faux when outlining technical details, explained that for the Houses of Parliament issue soft steel dies were placed, one at a time, into a press and the transfer roller with the design on it was rolled above each. Dies were made for each of these transfer roller duplicates and they were then engraved.

The engraver etching the name of the Colony in the blank space at the top of each die and the value in the bottom corners. This method was used because time was so short. He also explained that the Crown Agents had been instructed by the Government to keep the value of the whole issue down to £2, with two stamps for each territory. Furthermore, it was ruled that a pair of stamps was not to exceed 6d. in value. It is ironic that only two years had to pass before the same Government approved the Silver Wedding issue with its multitude of high values.

The Houses of Parliament design, which was approved by King George VI, had been suggested by a member of the De La Rue staff and this company was awarded the contract for the entire issue. It was not until July 1949 that a photographic feature in GSM pointed out that, when the design on the stamp was compared with the actual scene, a portion of Westminster Bridge should be visible between the medallion and the right inner frame line, whereas, in fact, it did not. An example from this series can, therefore, be included in a display showing 'Missing Items', such as the KGVI 1½d. (Die I) from Fiji showing an unmanned canoe under full sail, which was quickly corrected with Die II and the inclusion of a human figure.

The series was recess-printed under the supervision of the Chief Inspector from the CA. The paper was produced at a mill at Ivybridge, in Devon, and the CA script watermark dandyroll was used. The paper had an 80 per cent rag content to provide the strength necessary to withstand the pressure needed to give good recess printed stamps. Tropical gum arabic was used and the sheets comprised ten horizontal rows of six stamps. Each value for each colony was printed from an individual plate. The normal plate number occurs in the margin beneath R10/5. This can be accompanied by the letters A or B signifying the use of two plates for a value, there are, however, a few exceptions to this rule. De La Rue also used another number inverted under R10/1. These numbers start at ten and then run irregularly from thirty to eighty-six. Only twenty-eight of the forty-one colonies using the Parliament design have these numbers and they will be called



'current numbers' to avoid confusion with plate numbers. The reason why some colonies did not receive current numbers or why the usual numbering sequence was used have yet to be discovered. Sheet numbers, when found, occur over R1/6 and indicate that the sheet was sent to the colony.

Finally, mention must be made of what could be described as the use of a strengthened die. The two masts on the launch, to the left of the design, are usually short and only just visible. However, on some stamps, for example the 4d. Ascension value, they look as though they may have been deliberately strengthened as they can be seen easily. Bearing in mind the earlier remarks by Faux it is more probable that in such instances extra pressure was exerted when the transfer roller was in use.

### Distribution

In the late 1980s, with large jet aircraft speeding everywhere, it is easy to forget that forty years ago travel could be slow and difficult. Most of the CA orders were delivered by ship and when time was short this could bring problems. For example, priority was given to printing the Victory stamps of the Falkland Islands and the Pitcairn Islands. In the case of the former, shipments could be made through Montevideo, but once there a package might have to wait for six weeks before being shipped on to the Falkland Islands—a far cry from the air journey today straight from the United Kingdom, via Ascension.

### Varieties

At this juncture I take the opportunity to express my thanks to Mr Barney Kleinberg, The Royale Stamp Co. and J. Sanders of Southampton, all of whom have very kindly allowed me to peruse their stock of the Victory series during the past few years. As each value for each colony was printed from an individual plate, none of the varieties can be found on other stamps in the series. Some of them, such as the major re-entry on the 3d. Falkland Islands and the transfer flaw on the 3d. Nigeria, are philatelic gems in their own right. Many of the others take the form of solid dots of colour, hair-lines or doubling. Only examples seen on, at least, six sheets have been included which indicates a fair degree of constancy. Random flecks of colour occur throughout the series and are indicative of the speed that was necessary to print this large omnibus issue. Mysterious marginal markings on sheets printed by De La Rue were mentioned in an earlier article on Ascension KGVI varieties (*GSM* August 1986) and they make a reappearance, but in a completely different form.

The issue consists of ninety stamps: eighty-two have the Houses of Parliament design, leaving the special Hong Kong pair and the overprinted stamps for the two Aden States and Zanzibar. These eight stamps will be dealt with first, with varieties on the remainder to be described in the next article.

### Hong Kong

The two stamps from Hong Kong must take pride of place, not only because of their strikingly different design, but because of the story of hope and bravery that they can tell. Details, based on information from Mr W.E. Jones, first appeared in *GSM* in January 1947 and the account deserves to be retold. Mr Jones, a senior member of the staff of the Public Works Department, had designed the

1940 Centenary stamps, apart from the centres which were from photographs. After the Japanese occupation of the Colony he was in the Stanley interment camp and while there was approached by Mr E.I. Wynne-Jones, the Postmaster-General, who asked if he could design a Victory stamp for Hong Kong. Suggesting the Pheonix as the chief motif with eight Chinese characters around it. Mr Jones prepared four or five sketches and one was selected as the most suitable. However, the Chinese characters that appear in the side panels of the issued stamps, were shown in the sketch on the wings of the Pheonix. It was decided that they would not show clearly enough when the sketch was reduced. A further version was, therefore, prepared in red and blue pencil and after that the final drawing, which was followed very closely in the design of the actual stamps. Mr Jones ran very considerable risks in producing his sketches while a prisoner of the Japanese. His courage, optimism and faith in victory is reflected in the Chinese inscriptions which read on the right, 'The Pheonix revives, Great Prosperity' and on the left, 'China and Britain, Good Fortune'. The Latin tag *RESURGO* means 'I rise again'.

Marcus Faux confirmed that the original drawings are now in the Royal Collection and were sketched on rice paper using pencil for the first draft and poor quality crayons for the coloured versions. He also explained to the KGVI CS that when it was decided to issue a Victory omnibus series the Houses of Parliament design was circulated to the Colonies for comment. The only difficulty was with Hong Kong where the Governor totally opposed the idea, proposing instead, that the design prepared by Mr Jones under such dangerous circumstances should be used for the Colony. The matter had to be referred to the very highest level and eventually the design was accepted.

**The Thirty Cents and One Dollar.** The two values were released in the Colony on 29 August and in London on 2 September 1946. Plate Number '1' appears below R10/5 and 6 in blue and red respectively on the 30 cents. The one dollar has plate number '1' in the same positions, the colours being brown and red. Both values were printed in sheets of sixty—ten horizontal rows of six stamps—and are comb perforated. The 'Extra Character' variety has now been listed in *Part 1* (S.G. 169a and 170a) (*Fig. 1*). However, the 30 cents can be found in a paler shade of blue and sheets in this shade, which I have seen, do not have the 'Extra Character'. Upper left

marginal corner blocks in both shades with and without the variety make a pleasing page in a collection. Some sheets of the 30 cents have a crude 'P' in red at the top of the right margin.

### Aden States and Zanzibar

It is curious that the Qu'ati State of Shihr and Mukalla, and the Kathiri State of Seiyun as well as Zanzibar had to be content with commemorative overprints on a pair of their low values. Could it be that they were simply overlooked in the rush to produce the omnibus series?

Both values (1½a. and 2½a.) from Shihr and Mukalla, released in London on 31 October 1946, show scratched letters at the top of the right-hand margin. Sheets of the 1½a. value have the letter 'B' (*Fig. 2*) and the 2½a. shows a 'P' (*Fig. 3*) or a 'B' with a cross above it (*Fig. 4*). The Seiyun pair, released on the same day, show a small letter 'B' scratched at the top of the left-hand margin on the 1½a. (*Fig. 5*) and either a large or small 'B' or the letter 'P' (*Fig. 6*) on the 2½a. The 1½a. is an interesting stamp as at R10/6 there is a constant flaw, which I suggest is an example of hand-erasing by De La Rue—a practice which is found on several other stamps issued by them during the KGVI period. The lines of shading in the sky are broken between the right-hand castle and the south-west edge of the medallion and the surface of the paper is disturbed (*Fig. 7*). It would appear that an unwanted mark, associated with the overprint, occurred on the stamp. This was noticed after the work was completed and, to avoid wasting the sheets or allow them to leave the printers with an obvious defect, someone went through the overprinted stock sheet by sheet, picking out the offending mark with a pointed instrument. I should add that I have examined a very large number of sheets and they were all similarly affected. For good measure there is also a minor overprint variety on the same stamp as the 'J' of 'JUNE' has a 'tuft' on its right side.

The 10 cents and 30 cents overprinted Victory stamps for Zanzibar were released in London on 11 November 1946. There was clearly a special printing as the stamps were comb perforated as opposed to the original line. Some sheets of the 10 cents have the letter 'P' scratched at the top of the right margin (*Fig. 8*) and the 30 cents has an inverted 'B' in the margin over R1/1 (*Fig. 9*).

*Part 13 of this series (August 1989) will describe further varieties on the 1946 Victory issue for the Crown Colonies.*

