

# KING GEORGE VI VARIETIES

## Part 31—The 1947 Barbados Surcharge

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### Early Reports

The description of the Barbados surcharge in 'Stamps in Brief' in the June 1947 edition of *GSM* sets the scene: 'a surprise item appeared on April 21st.: the current 2d. carmine was surcharged ONE PENNY owing to the non-arrival of supplies of the ½d. and 1d. stamps. Local speculators have been quick in acquiring supplies and are already asking high prices.'

A contemporary report from Herbert Bayley, a prominent philatelist in Barbados and already mentioned in Part 2 of this series (*GSM* November 1986), noted that it was the second time within a few months that the Post Office had run out of stock of the 1d. value and had used ½d. stamps instead. Writing on 23 April 1947, the Trinidad Philatelic Society told *GSM* that the surcharge had been noted in two different positions—either at the top or the bottom of the stamp.

### Behind the Scenes

Fortunately for KGVII collectors, these few bones from long ago can be fleshed out, thanks to the dedicated and thorough research work undertaken by Edmund A Bayley FRPSL, the elder son of Herbert Bayley. In his recently published book *The Stamps of Barbados*, Edmund Bayley has included an excellent account of the activities in official circles which eventually led to the authorisation of the surcharge. The description of events that now follow are based on the record of written correspondence and comment on pages 174–178 of the book, which was published by the author in 1989—1000 copies were printed in Barbados.

On 10 April 1947 the Colonial Secretary was told by the Colonial Postmaster (Mr H N Armstrong) that the position with regard to 1d. stamps was becoming acute. Annual consumption had been 480,000, but a new stock of 455,000 had been disposed of in less than four months. A cable was immediately sent to the Crown Agents requesting the urgent despatch of 120,000 1d. stamps by air. This partly satisfied an order dated 14 March for 120,000 ½d. and 960,000 1d. stamps. On 12 April the Chief Clerk (Major J E Griffith) reported to the Acting Colonial Postmaster that the consumption of ½d. stamps in lieu of 1d. stamps was alarming and it appeared that certain stamp dealers were trying to create a situation when some other denomination would have to be overprinted. In his words this was 'a philatelic ruse'. He added that one customer had asked one of the stamp sellers if an order for £100 worth of ½d. stamps would exhaust the stock. At the time 50,000 remained, thus such a purchase would have left just 2000! On the same day the Acting Colonial Postmaster proposed to the Colonial Secretary that: 'in order to avoid a catastrophe' he recommended that 144,000 2½d. stamps, recently withdrawn from circulation, should be overprinted ½d.



*This block (perf 13½ × 13) shows the severe damage to the 'N's' of 'ONE PENNY' on row 2/8. The varying position of the two words also illustrates the measure adopted to safeguard against forgery*

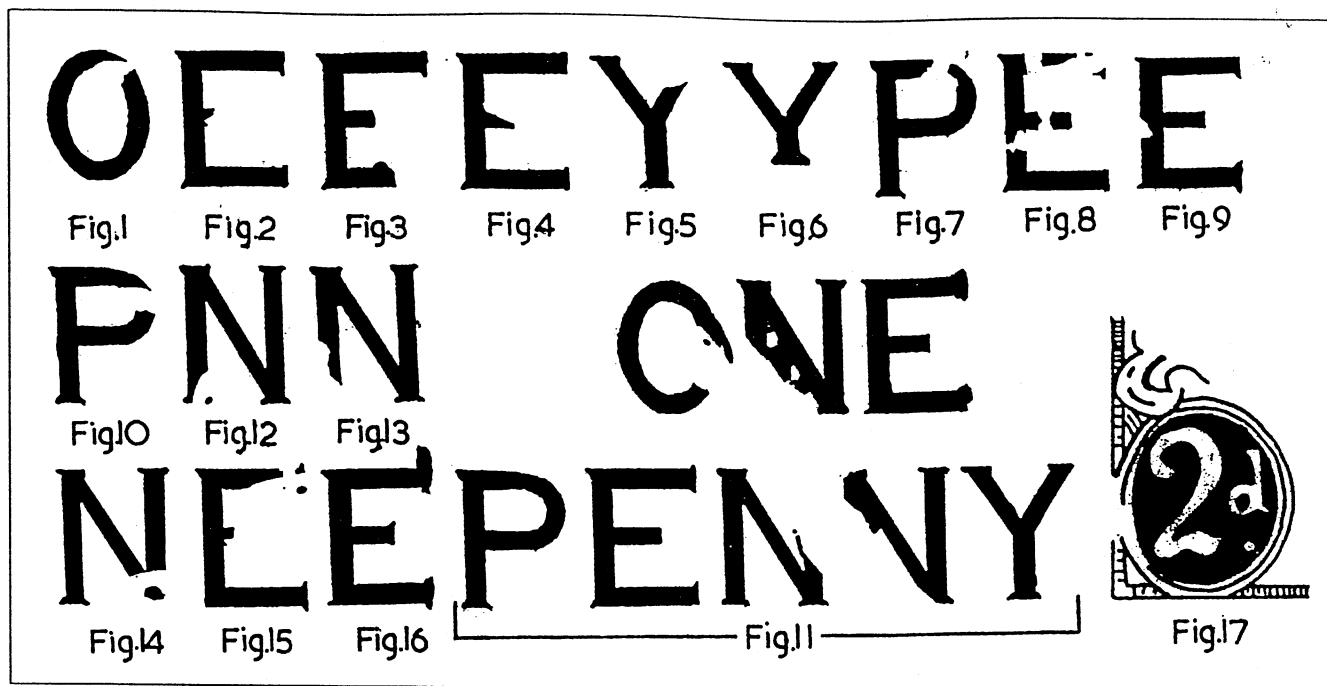
On 17 April the Acting Colonial Postmaster advised the Colonial Secretary that only a day's supply of the ½d. was available and sought quick action. On 18 April a minute from the Acting Colonial Secretary to the Colonial Treasurer and copied to the Acting Colonial Postmaster read: 'I am directed by the Governor to inform you that in view of the shortage of the 1d. and ½d. stamps, His Excellency has authorised the surcharge to ONE PENNY of a portion of the stock of 2d. stamps in case the supplies of these denominations, which are on the way, do not arrive in a few days.'

### Printing the Surcharge

The stamps were surcharged by the Advocate Company Limited from slugs cast on a Ludlow typesetting Machine. The first batch of 120,000 (1000 sheets) was overprinted on 19 April and the surcharge appeared on the lower half of the stamp. Sales started on 21 April. A second printing of 60,000 stamps was made on 22 April with the surcharge placed in the centre of the stamp. The third printing of 40,080 stamps was made on 28 April, to be followed by the final printing of 20,040 stamps on 1 May. The surcharge was placed near the top of the stamp on the third and fourth printings. The description by the Trinidad PS already mentioned does not quite match these facts. It seems probable that the *GSM* staff misread 23 April for 28 April, the news would then have matched events exactly. The overprinted stamps were not withdrawn until 1 May even though the supply of 1d. stamps which had been ordered arrived, via Trinidad, on

28 April. Sales totalled 237,702. Of the balance of 2418, 2414 were destroyed on 27 April 1950. The odd four stamps formed a block of four overprinted 'SPECIMEN' in purple by the Board of Survey and given to the Colonial Postmaster for insertion in the official album of the Post Office.

Frank Saunders, when writing in *Geosix*, the quarterly journal of the King George VI Collectors' Society, some thirty years ago, suggested, without the advantage of detailed local knowledge that, as the format of the surcharge on each of the 120 stamps was the same sheet by sheet then it was probable that the overprinting unit had been kept in being throughout. He also considered that as it was most unlikely that the Advocate printer would have had enough type to set up the forme letter by letter 'ONE' and 'PENNY' could have either been set up as a single unit and 120 slugs cast from it or the two words could have been cast separately. After careful examination of his material he chose the latter. Saunders also suggested that as 'ONE' fits conveniently over 'ENN' of 'PENNY' the slugs had been positioned by eye. Misplacements, he considered, were the result of misjudgement or perhaps slippage of the packing. The first two deductions appear to be very sound, but the third judgement about misplacements is far from correct as Bayley makes very clear in his book: 'the overprint was deliberately staggered, so that the word 'ONE' did not fall in the same position in relation to the word 'PENNY' on each stamp, as a precaution against forgery.' A measure that turned out to be fully justified.



### Human Nature

As the stamps were sold only in Barbados, local stamp dealers were in a position to control the supply to overseas buyers and, thereby, make an additional profit; hence the terse comment in *GSM* quoted in the opening paragraph. Soon after 21 April the Post Office was forced to limit the quantity purchased at any one time to twelve. A sure way to increase demand when human nature comes into play. This point is reminiscent of events associated with the 1946 Great Britain threepenny Victory stamp and warrants a minor digression away from the activities of forgers associated with the Barbados surcharge. It was stated before the issue of the Victory stamp that 24 million had been printed. This quantity was intended to last for two months. However, following suggestions that speculators were active with the stamps and a completely irrelevant letter in *The Times* that the 'ration' was about half a stamp per head of population, a reprint of eighteen million was ordered—'a nice little earner' for the GPO and a salutary lesson for speculators. The stamps were not withdrawn from sale until sold out.

### Forgers at Work

Bayley notes that locally produced forgeries appeared on the local stamp market in Barbados. The forger had managed to obtain the same type used by the Advocate printer, but faced a practical difficulty as his printing press could only print a maximum of twenty-four stamps at a time. Therefore, sheets had to be broken up into panes of this size. A rash of these small multiples aroused the suspicions of local dealers, who on closer inspection realised that a forger was at work. Unfortunately for him, he had failed to notice the significance of, the staggering of the surcharge and anxious to produce a good quality product had carefully produced perfectly aligned overprints. An arrest was made and the stamps and plates were confiscated.

Inverted Overprints. Bayley states in his book that two sheets were discovered with an inverted overprint, but were destroyed.

However, to add a touch of spice, Saunders wrote that although the overprint on the genuine stamps was not known inverted, a sheet of perf  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  had appeared in New York with the bottom row in that state. On this occasion the forger had failed to measure the word PENNY which is normally  $13\frac{1}{2}$ mm, but was  $11\frac{1}{2}$ mm on the forgery.

### The Final Report

A report by the Chief Clerk dated 28 April 1947 explained the reasons leading to the surcharging of 240,120 2d. stamps. He explained that the shortage of 1d. stamps had been caused by abnormal sales due to unusual circumstances, difficult, if at all possible, to foresee and an error of judgement on his part. Abnormal sales stemmed, first, 'from the lowering of the franchise resulting in a larger voting electorate receiving circulars from an unprecedented number of candidates seeking legislative honours'. Secondly, a general increase in wages had meant that 'a very much larger number of wage earners affixed 1d. stamps to vouchers and receipts'. Thirdly, a rising standard of living caused a greater number of bills to be posted. Fourthly, an increase in the number of clubs entailed an increased number of notices to members. Fifthly, an increase in airmail postage especially at the 1s.1d. rate to USA and Curaçao had added to demand. Lastly, a big increase in the number of parcels received from abroad had also increased demand as each delivery note had to have a 1d. stamp affixed. In 1944 17,635 parcels had been delivered, but between 1 January and 28 April 1947 13,000 had already been handled. His error of judgement deserves some sympathy. He explained that he had been given to understand that during the war years it had been the practice to keep two years supply of stamps because of the risk of enemy action against shipping and the general uncertainty of steamship service. With the return of peace he had not thought this precaution was as necessary. He had noted that the annual requirement of the 1d. stamp amounted to about 1,250,000 to

1,350,000. The Chief Clerk's explanation then becomes detailed. In brief, he had unfortunately under-ordered by about six months supply of the 1d. stamp. (On a point of detail the annual consumption of 480,000 quoted by the Colonial Secretary on 10 April reflected a single order that had been made for 1946-47—a fact included in the Chief Clerk's report.) This under-ordering combined with the unforeseen very heavy demand necessitated the surcharge. With hindsight it is surprising that the sale of 1,307,000 1d. stamps during the nine months prior to 28 April did not alert someone that a supply problem was developing rapidly, other than local stamp dealers!

### Varieties

Perforations. Another early news item from Herbert Bayley said that perf 14 and  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  stamps had been used and that a local survey estimated that the latter would be the scarcer in the ratio of about four to one. Edmund Bayley is more cautious stating that it is not known how many of each perforation were overprinted, but it is certain that there were more of the perf 14 and the first printing was on such stamps. Catalogue pricing in 'Part 1' tells a story. In 1953 mint copies of the perf 14 were the equivalent of 15 pence, with the perf  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  at 20 pence. By 1978 the prices were 30/40p, in 1981 45/70p, in 1988 20/70p, in 1989 15/70p, in 1991 15/85p, in 1992 15p/£1.25 and in 1993 20p/£2. However, looking back to November 1947 it was stated in *GSM* that the current general price for the scarcer perf  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  was 12s.6d. i.e. 62½p. The same amount of money would have paid for a Leewards 10s., SG 113b, or even 113a, or better still 113ae, as at the time they were all grouped together under the same number. Could the message be, do not be hustled into following fashion? Finally, Edmund Bayley confirms that the perf  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  stamps came from those in stock from Requisition No 3367/1 which had reached Barbados early in 1944. The rest came from Req 3441/1 perforated 14 and received in October 1944.

**Broken and Deformed Letters.** Readers of this series will be aware that it is difficult to make an overprint register on a line engraved stamp. The 2d. used in 1947 was no exception. Relevant comment in *GSM* (June 1947) that, 'There are numerous and badly formed letters' should be heeded. The item continued by describing two constant varieties on Rows 2/8 and 6/2 as being the most noticeable. The latter was listed in 'Part 1' in 1992 (SG 264a and ca). Both have been in the *Commonwealth* catalogue for many years. Saunders was able to examine complete sheets of both perforations postmarked to order with the date 24 April 1947. The perf  $13\frac{1}{2} \times 13$  sheet was an earlier state than the perf 14 sheet. He suggested that they came from the first printing, but based on the information from Edmund Bayley that the first printing on 19 April was all perf 14 then the sheets seen by Saunders must have come from the second printing on 22 April. They were, of course, originally printed by De La Rue in sheets of 120 stamps with twelve horizontal rows of ten stamps.

In the early State Saunders confirmed the 'Broken "O" of "ONE"' at R6/4 (Fig 1), the 'Short Middle Shaft of "E" of "PENNY"' at R7/4 (Fig 2), the 'Short Lower Shaft of "E" of "PENNY"' at R8/8 (Fig 3) and the 'Short Middle Shaft of "E" of "PENNY"' at R11/4 (Fig 4). In addition, there were two dots like full stops on R1/3 and 1/5 and a mark like an apostrophe after the 'O' of 'ONE'. On the later perf 14 sheet Saunders reported that the 'Short Right Arm to the "Y"' had appeared on R1/6 (Fig 5), as well as the 'Short "Y"' at R6/2 (Fig 6). The dots on R1/3 and 1/5 and the apostrophe on R8/10 had

disappeared. The other flaws already mentioned were present. In 1992 the varieties on R6/2, 7/4 and 11/4 were listed and illustrated in 'Part 1' (264a and ca and 264b and cb).

It is impossible to say when in the printing run the perf 14 sheet had been surcharged on 22 April, but Saunders noted the following damaged or broken letters and they exist in sufficient quantity to deem them constant and occurring from that time onwards. The 'P' of 'PENNY' shows a break on R7/8 (Fig 7). The 'E' of 'PENNY' was badly damaged on R10/4 (Fig 8) and a nick breaks the left side of the 'E' of 'ONE' on R10/9 (Fig 9). As already noted R7/4 and 11/4 have a defective middle shaft to the 'E' of 'PENNY'. The damage differs as is shown by Figs 2 and 4. A further identifying feature is that the 'P' is broken on R11/4 (Fig 10). 'Part 1' and *Commonwealth* illustrate the defect on R7/4 for both stamps. The surcharge on R2/8 must have suffered severe damage caused most probably by a slanting downward blow (Fig 11). The damage is most noticeable and attracted comment in *GSM* in June 1947. The variety has been listed by *Commonwealth* for many years. R12/4 has a defective foot to the first 'N' of 'PENNY' (Fig 12). On later sheets the first 'N' also shows signs of damage on R12/9 (Fig 13) and 12/10 (Fig 14) and on R 7/4 the top bar of the 'E' of 'PENNY' shows damage giving a second state (Fig 15). It is worth noting that, although the type used was generally serified, it can be seen that on many occasions the serifs print irregularly. This is particularly apparent on the horizontal arms of the Es which are often serifless, but for good measure the 'E' of 'ONE'

frequently carries a pronounced upper serif to the top bar (Fig 16), probably caused by a flaw in the original type from which the slugs were cast. Finally, the *Scott Catalogue* lists a double overprint variety, but Bayley notes that, 'this is believed to be caused by an offset'. *Commonwealth* restricts comment to: 'A double surcharge is reported to exist, but we have not seen this.'

## Plate Varieties

Readers new to this series may wish to read Part 2 (*GSM* November 1986) which describes the plate varieties to be found on the definitive stamps. A weak entry occurs on R12/1 of the 2d. value where the outer frame line gives the impression of a break at the low left where the left hand value tablet touches the frame line (Fig 17).

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Edmund Bayley's book *The Stamps of Barbados* may be purchased from him at PO Box 61, GPO Bridgetown, Barbados, WI. Price £50 inclusive of postage by Registered Surface Mail.

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*Part 32 (GSM May 1994) will describe varieties on the 1937 South Africa Coronation issue.*

Further details of the King George VI Collectors' Society may be obtained from the General Secretary, KGVICS, 24 Stourwood Road, Southbourne, Bournemouth, BH6 3QP.