

King George VI Varieties

Part 58—Burma 1938–40

Richard Lockyer OBE returns to this issue, documenting additional flaws which have come to light as a result of recent discoveries

Regular readers of this series will recall that varieties on King George VI Burma stamps were featured in Part 49 (*GSM*, August 1998). As a result, John Higgins, who lives in the West Midlands and is a collector of the stamps and postal history of India, was inspired to dig out an original official storage book, inherited from his father, containing sheets and many large multiples of the Burma 1938–40 set overprinted 'SERVICE'.

The book, with a light brown cardboard cover, measures 17 by 11 inches. It and the contents were originally brought back from the Far East by Higgins senior soon after the end of World War II. Because of the climatic conditions, some large multiples have stuck to the pink blotting-paper pages which are separated by several sheets of flimsy tissue paper. They are, nevertheless, still useful to plate varieties. Traces of a white label with a single typed letter 'n' shows on the cover and the only other clue to its origin is the name 'AHMED' in manuscript! It seems most probable that this type of storage book was originally used in government offices in Burma, prior to the retreat in the face of the Japanese invasion in 1942, and this particular example somehow or other moved around to meet Higgins senior eventually.

Treasure from a bottom drawer

John Higgins and his wife, Judie, have diligently examined all the sheets and the many large multiples and have been able to plate, not only some of those mentioned as unprinted in Part 49, but add many others. They spotted and listed over 215 varieties on 13 values, thus following in the footsteps of Frank Saunders who constantly reminded fellow collectors to commit their findings to paper for the benefit of those who will enjoy the hobby in the future. A selection of the more obvious are now described and illustrated. Brief descriptions of the others, some of which are tiny, can be supplied by the author to specialist collectors.

Sheet format

The size of post office sheets for the values overprinted 'SERVICE' were: 3p., to 2a. and 4a. (small King's head design)—20 horizontal rows of 16. The 2a.6p. and 8a. (large horizontal design)—16 rows of 8. The 1r. to 10r.—12 rows of 10. It appears from examination of the sheets and part sheets of the values with the small King's head design printed by lithography that, although the post office sheets were the size stated, the original printing plates may have been larger, as a flaw in one sheet is often not present on another. It is, of course, possible that the flaws developed during printing. Nevertheless, this is a possible complicating factor and must be borne in mind.

Varieties— Small King's head design

3p. Row 1/3—Tiny spot of colour above the 'M' of 'BURMA'. R10/4—Spot on the rump of the right-hand Chinthe. R10/5—Spot above 'RM'. R13/5—Spot above 'R'. R20/12—Spot on the rump of the left-hand Chinthe (Fig 1). R20/13—Break in the outer frame at bottom left (Fig 2).

6p. R14/3—Blue line running up in a north-westerly direction, from the centre of the central medallion around the neck of the King (Fig 3). This was described in Part 49, but not positioned. R16/5—Break in the inside (wide) frame opposite the nose of the Chinthe. R17/4—White dot south-east of the fan in the frame design (Fig 4).

9p. R13/15—Projection from top of 'M' (Fig 5). R14/16—Tail of 'S' of 'POSTAGE' deformed (Fig 6) when compared with the normal (Fig 7). R20/16—White line runs upwards from the back of the front foot of the right Chinthe (Fig 8).

1½a. Unfortunately, it has not proved possible to position 'The Broken Leaf' variety mentioned in Part 49 and reported by Pilcher in *Stamp Collecting* (12 July 1979). However, negative information may be useful. On the blocks available for study, it

does not occur on the first to eighth and 13th to 16th vertical columns of the first ten horizontal rows. There is also no sign on R11/9–15, R12/9–15 and R13/9–16 to R20/9–16. There is, however, a white line running in a SW/NE direction across the neck of the right-hand 'Naga' or dragon on R3/1, a small white mark across the left frame opposite the base of the crown on R19/4 and a spot on the tail of the dragon in line with tip of the King's nose on R19/15.

2a. Higgins has two complete sheets, one has seven detectable abnormalities and the other has 13, none are common to both sheets. Only two are significant and occur on the same sheet. R11/4 has a very distinct white mark through the frame behind the King's head (Fig 9) and R17/13 has a clear break in the top outer frame line above 'MA' (Fig 10).

4a. For this value there are two very large part sheets. On one of them is an easily seen and most distinctive white mark below the tip of the King's nose at R16/15 (Fig 11). It is not present on the other part sheet. On a concluding note, the 'Chinthe' is the legendary Burmese equivalent to the British Lion and two 'Chinthes' are usually placed at the entrance to Buddhist pagodas, while the 'Naga' is a mythological amphibian dragon symbolising friendly protection.

Large horizontal design

1a.6p. R3/3—Extra flag on the left rigging line of the Golden Royal Barge (Fig 12). R4/5—The figure '6' in the value is broken on sheets with different shades of claret (Fig 13). R12/3—Spot of colour between clouds (Fig 14). R15/2—Large mark breaks the frame immediately right of the barge (Fig 15). R15/3—The well known 'Birds above trees', listed in the *Commonwealth catalogue*.

3a. (Overprinted 'MILY ADMN') R1/2—Break in frame below 'BURMA TEAK'. This and the repair were described in Part 49. R3/5—Break in the oval frame surrounding the King's head opposite his upper lip (Fig 16). R9/3—Large white mark, shaped like a brick, over the first 'E' of 'THREE' (Fig 17). R10/6—Swelling of the thick-coloured background to the left of the 'T' of 'THREE' (Fig 18). R16/2—Dots through 'MA PO' at the top of the letters (Fig 19). R16/5—Dots through 'MA PO' in the middle (Fig 20). R16/8—Dots through 'MA PO' at the bottom (Fig 21). (This series of dots was considered in Part 49, but R16/8 could not be illustrated). The Higgins duo also noted that the second stamp in Rows 9–16 show signs of slight doubling of the King's head.



Fig 1



Fig 2

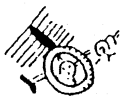


Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9



Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12



Fig 13



Fig 14



Fig 15

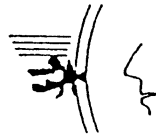


Fig 16



Fig 17



Fig 18



Fig 19



Fig 20



Fig 21



Fig 22



Fig 23



Fig 24

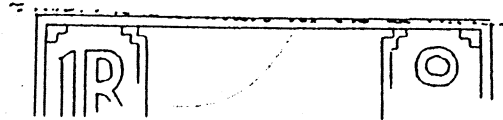


Fig 25



Fig 26



Fig 27



Fig 28



Fig 29



Fig 30

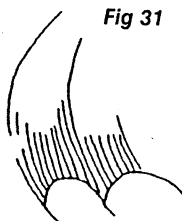


Fig 31

8a. R11/5—Loose pearl by the King's crown with the 'SERVICE' overprint (Fig 22) and a large white mark under the crossbar of the 'H' of 'EIGHT' on stamps without any overprint (Fig 23). R16/6—Large diffuse white mark under the 'T' of 'POSTAGE' and a small white mark to its right with the 'SERVICE' overprint (Fig 24).

The Rupee values

1r. Row 4—A strong line of blue dots runs roughly parallel with the upper frame line. At R4/1 they are above the line and drop progressively until at R4/10 they fall within the dark blue background. Fig 25 illustrates the effect on R4/6. A broad band of dots also shows in all the letters of 'POSTAGE' throughout the row. Fig 26 is typical. Both the line and band of dots extend into the two side margins.

2r. The only small defect noted is a strong fleck of colour outside the outer frame line, adjacent to the top tablet. It affects a stamp in the second vertical row by the upper half of a marginal arrow.

5r. R3/1—Large, blurred white mark in front of the King's mouth (Fig 27). R12/10—Coloured line down the 'C' of 'POSTAGE' (Fig 28).

10r. R2/6—A spot of colour below the neck of the high priest on the left (Fig 29). R2/8—Row of dots through 'OSTAGE' (Fig 30).

The Service overprint

Some minor examples of pollution occur, the most noticeable affects R16/1 of the 5r. and 10r. (the corner stamp), where a small black inverted cone-shaped mark shows below the 'E' of 'SERVICE'.

Marginal markings

From general observation, it seems that sheets of the 8a. have a series of three arrow marks in the side margins (between rows 4 and 5, 8 and 9 and 12 and 13), with the left margin perforated right through. However, a large left and a right lower corner multiple from the Higgins selection do not have arrow marks. Furthermore, the left margin on the former is partially perforated (with six pins) leaving a blank space to the left of the first column of stamps, while the latter multiple has the normal margin without any horizontal perforation holes. Perhaps they are remnants of a very early printing before arrow marks were adopted. As a matter of record, R16/1 has a most noticeable defect, the outline of the sail and the first inner line of shading is broken (Fig 31).

Part 59 (GSM February 2001) will describe King George VI varieties on stamps of Grenada.

Collectors interested in the study of the stamps of the King George VI era are encouraged to join the King George VI Collectors Society. Further details can be obtained from the Secretary, KGVICS, 98 Albany, Manor Road, Bournemouth, BH1 3EW.