

Previous Articles - 73

The Silver Jubilee of His Majesty King George V

At the request of a member of the local philatelic society in Lourdes, Nova Scotia, Geoff Locke furnished an epistle, which is reproduced below. (The member's name was Barry Zolkivski – hence the reference in a caption).

The 6th of May 1935 was the 25th anniversary of the accession of George V to the throne, and many agencies decided to produce articles of commemoration to mark the occasion. To this day it is possible to purchase cups and plates, statues and photographs etc. that have survived, so it was no surprise that the Home Office decided to request a set of postage stamps to mark the event, after all, the stamps for the British Empire Exhibition of 1924/5 had been a success. The printers for the crown agents, Harrison and Sons, were contacted, and eventually a set of proofs were produced and tendered to the King for his approval, and the following set was the chosen outcome.



Once this set had been chosen, then to all intents and purposes that was the end of the matter, because the dominion countries like South Africa, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand were doing their own thing and producing their own sets of stamps. An order was placed with Harrisons and work began on this set. However, there were increasing demands from many parts of the empire, from smaller nations, demanding that they too would like to commemorate the jubilee. Because of this demand a series of meetings were held at the Home Office and the Foreign Office, and it was suggested that the colonies could have their stamps, and *it* would be

a simple matter for Harrisons to overprint the existing set with the appropriate country. In fact that is precisely what they did with places like the Morocco agencies. The authorities and Harrisons in their infinite wisdom, could not at this stage have anticipated how many countries were eventually to become involved, nor the size of the task that they were setting the printer, until some person from within the bowels of Whitehall suggested that it might be a better idea if a separate design might be employed by the Empire countries, to show, not only the size of the Empire, but the unity therein. It was then decided to ask all the members of the Empire if they were interested in taking part in this exercise, and were taken aback when they realized that there were 42 countries interested, they were as interested in the revenue that this issue would generate for them as well as a celebration. Bear in mind that, at that time, immediate reply, by return of post took many weeks from some more remote parts of the globe, so much time was used up in conducting this survey.

The King's jubilee was in May 1935, but it was not until the October of the previous year that serious discussions began regarding a common issue of stamps for all these countries that had expressed an interest. It was during these discussions that it was realized that the task before them was enormous. Just picture the scene when they accepted that they had to tender for and approve a design, decide how many stamps in each set and how many on each sheet, decide what values for what country, what colours, what type of paper, how many on a sheet, not to mention the logistics of distributing these stamps around the Empire in time for a May 6th release date, so the race was on.

It was clear that Harrisons had no chance at all of handling the printing, so other printers of high quality work were to be sought, in fact there were 3 applicants who were fierce competitors of each other at the time, and much infighting took place to try to secure the contract. They could not have known that none of them were big enough to have handled the job alone.

While this was going on the Leeward Islands and Newfoundland decided to join the previous 42 countries, making a total of 44 in all.

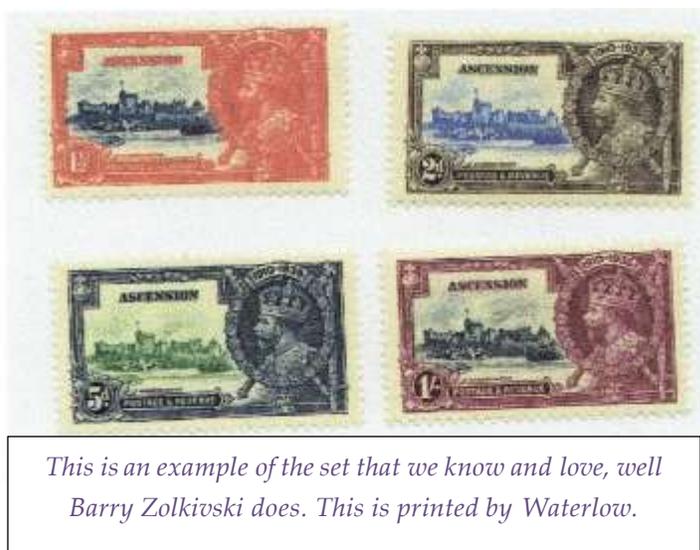
The issue was to be aimed directly at the collector, the archives say that the issue was to be "within the pocket of the ordinary man" with the highest value to be no greater than 1/- or the local equivalent. It is thought that the King, who was a keen philatelist, suggested that this be the case. Because things were so rushed, the instructions for valuations were incredibly vague, they stated: - "There should be 4 denominations, one shilling or local equivalent, and 3 others to include an inland letter rate, an inland printed matter rate and an overseas postage rate". Because of this vagueness, many of the values issued cannot be used correctly, and they are to be found on cover only in multiples or in conjunction with definitives. There are exceptions

which I will show you later.

To save all the arguing amongst the alternative printers, it was decided to share the work as evenly as possible amongst them so Bradbury Wilkinson got 15 countries; Waterlow got 15 countries and De La Rue the remaining 14. This is where the specialist comes into his own, because each printer produced constant flaws that are only found on their printings. You will see examples of these later.

So the whole omnibus issue was cobbled together in indecent haste, therefore it was not surprising that errors were made. There were another 19 countries that produced their own issues, including GB, making a total of 63 sets issued.

For your interest, of those 63 countries 43 managed to issue their commemoratives on time on May 6th 1935, there were 6 more on the 7th and 4 on the 8th. Strangely enough, there were 2 sets issued on the 1st and 4 on the 4th, the remaining 4 were well off target. I think that considering the chaos that must have been the lot of the organizers, and the problems of getting the stamps all around the world, not to mention the bureaucracy at the time, they did a fine job, and are to be congratulated on giving the world its first omnibus issue.



These sets were very popular with collectors all over the world, and it was normal practice at the time to send a set as a registered letter. This was well above the going rate so all these covers, and there are millions of them, are very nice to look at, and they do give a used set into the collection, and many are on first day covers, they are all in fact philatelic and are not normal usage. The cost for these covers vary, of course, according to how many of the stamps were issued but average out about £35 each (app. 80 dollars), so even today they are still fairly obtainable.



This is a typical cover, showing a good CDS usually cancelled by hand, and usually registered.

Because of the huge demand for covers there were some special pictorial envelopes produced, below are a couple of examples.



Around about this time in 1935 /6 many of the airlines were attempting to establish postal links around the world, bearing in mind that there were lucrative contracts to be won from the postal authorities. One such airline was Imperial. Following the success of the Australia-England regular service, which was started in December 1934, they extended the line by a feeder service from Hong-Kong via the Philippines. I include for your perusal a cover that was on the first through flight from Hong Kong to London. You will note that the format for including the set on cover is still the same as the "normal" covers, with the notable exception that these stamps have an "Air Mail" cancellation.



Correct Usage for SJ Issues

I mentioned earlier in this piece, that it was very difficult to use these stamps correctly, that is to say, a single stamp on a cover which is the correct rate. The speed at which the rates had to be chosen, and the fact that postal rates changed shortly after the issue meant that the stamps had to be used with other stamps to obtain the correct rate. So, covers that have a single stamp of the correct usage are about as rare as chicken's teeth, therefore, when you are looking through piles of covers at your local sales places, if you see any of these stamps as singles or multiples, you buy them immediately and send them to me, OK?

I will show you a few examples of correct usage; these have taken many years to find, so don't expect to pick them up easily.



This is the foreign letter rate for which there was no SJ stamp issued, and shows 2 x 1d plus 1/2d definitive



This shows 1d plus 1/2d definitive to make up the letter rate to UK



This is what to look for...a single stamp, in this case from the Bahamas, a 2½d to USA which was the correct foreign rate



This is one of the few to values that paid the proper rate and is a 25c from the Straits Settlements. Airmail rate to UK

Constant Flaws found on SJ stamps

There were 3 different printers producing the Silver Jubilee issue, and each printer gave to us, the eager beaver philatelists, their own particular flaws. I call them flaws rather than errors because they occur regularly, in the same place on the sheet of a particular plate of stamps. Firstly we will look at the most well-known of the flaws, the "Extra Flagstaff". This is a Bradbury Wilkinson printing, and occurs on stamp 1 of row 9 of plate 1. As an additional point of information, most of the flaws found on Bradbury Wilkinson plates are vertical lines appearing in the wrong place, conversely, if you spot an extra vertical line on a SJ stamp you can bet your shirt that it is a BW printing.

This is an example of The "Extra Flagstaff" Flaw from stamp1 of Row9



This will show it clearer



The line in fact disappears downwards into the design, and on later printings BW has erased the piece that is exposed above the skyline, but the piece into the design remains. This is very difficult to spot.

The most well-known flaw provided by Waterlow is the "Flying kite & horizontal or vertical log". This appears on plate 2 row 10 stamp 6. Waterlow wore the first plate 2 out so they referred to their first plate2 as 2a, and the second as plate 2b. Plate 2a gives us a kite with a vertical log; plate 2b gives us a kite with a horizontal log. Don't ask the obvious question, because I have no idea how come, that's just the way it is. I am going to show you where to look for the kite and horizontal log.

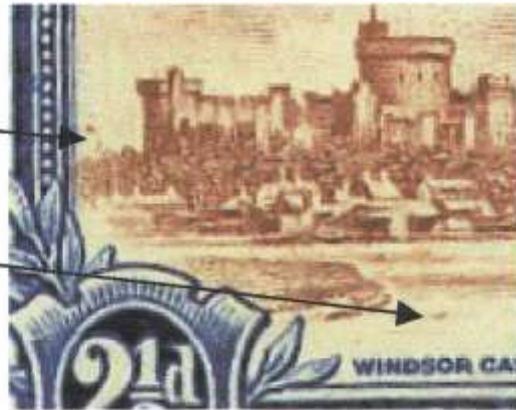
Here is the kite

Here is the log



Here is the Kite

Here is the log



The kite is much clearer on plate 2b because the whole of the vignette has been moved slightly to the right, thus moving the kite away from the frame.

Most of the flaws appear on the vignette of the stamp, but we have the De La Rue printers to thank for the only flaw to appear on the frame.

This flaw shows a line running through the "0" of 1910 and occurs on stamp 2 of row 4. It only appears on K.U.T. stamps and only on the 1/-.



This will show it better



Showing you a stamp from K.U.T. will also show you one of the problems presented to our designer Mr. H. Fleury. He had to produce a common design that would accommodate all the names of the countries of the Empire, from Fiji to Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, in the same space on the stamp, and also find space to include the huge variation in values.

My enthusiasm for this issue is boundless; I never cease to be amazed by the problems that these pioneers overcame, and the artistry that was their final contribution. I hope that I am not boring the pants off you because there is more.

There were 19 other countries that issued sets of stamps to commemorate this event, my country was one of them and your country was another.

This next one is an odd ball, and is the second scarcest stamp of the issue and it was issued in Egypt.



British forces were allowed a special rate to send their mail home, and a stamp was issued with a similar design to the existing Egyptian issue at the time. To commemorate the jubilee this stamp was overprinted as you see above, but these stamps were affixed to the back of the covers, and are therefore sometimes referred to as seals.



This is the attractive set issued by Canada, and is the only set to show 5 different monarchs, but it also demonstrates the problems with usage. Although the user has included the full set on this cover he has still had to add a 1c definitive to obtain the correct rate of 35c for registered to the USA. The 3c is one of the few stamps to include the Queen in the jubilee celebrations, the others to include her are the three stamps issued by New Zealand, shown below.



This next and last cover is shown to illustrate that although airmail was on the scene there were the more remote parts of the Empire where it literally took weeks to get a letter to go anywhere. This is a cover from Papua and I show the reverse also so that you can see the routing it took to reach Kilmarnock in Scotland. It was posted in Port Moresby on 16th Aug 1935 and has travelled via Brisbane and Sydney to arrive in Scotland on 7th Oct. This time lag is perhaps why Papua was not included in the omnibus issue.



So, there you have it, a brief look at the most comprehensive commemorative issue ever. 250 stamps were issued by 63 different countries, involving 4 main printers and many smaller ones.

What is the most difficult stamp to obtain? I hear you ask. Well, it is a Prussian blue from the GB issue; only 3 sheets (360 stamps) accidentally reached the public.

Normally when one is describing a collection of stamps the time period covers many years, but in this case we are dealing with only one day in history, the 6th. May 1935. I doubt that any event will ever again have such an impact on our world of philately.