

Misinformation Corrected: The “Waterlow Australian Essays”

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“Lot 547...**King George VI** 1937 essays incorporating the Australian Head in imperforate pairs in green, blue, red and brown, fine. Photo, valuation £100”

“Lot 339...**Australian Commonwealth 1937-52 King George VI Issues** Waterlow Essays in Green block of four on perforated, unwatermarked gummed paper, one unit showing diagonal flaw. Scarce in this shade. Photo. \$200

The first quotation is from a Robson Lowe GB sale catalogue for lot 547 on 15 June 1983. Items identical to those in the lot described are illustrated in Figure 1.

The second quote is from Millennium Philatelic Auctions (an Australian house) General Sale catalogue on 26 March 2009 and an example similar to that item is illustrated in Figure 2.



Figure 1.
Example identical to one of
the items in Robson Lowe
(1983) sale, lot 547.
The King is facing $\frac{3}{4}$ left



Figure 2.
An example similar to the item
described in the Millennium
Philatelic Auctions (2009) sale,
lot 339.
The King is shown full face

The quotations are of interest in perpetuating what we believe is a myth about these stamps. In fact, the items illustrated are some of a number of “dummy stamps” designed and printed by Waterlow & Sons Ltd, as demonstration showpieces for their rotary direct plate printing machine (“Rotaglio”).

One of us (GM) has a copy of a Waterlow publication about the “Rotaglio” process (Reference 3) and the story behind these printings was recounted in *Gibbon’s Stamp Monthly (GSM)* in August 1956 (Reference 4). The development of a rotary machine for intaglio printing had been led by the Institut de Gravure in Paris during the 1930s. Waterlow ordered some machines before World War II and French technicians came over as instructors. These dummy stamps using two effigies of King George VI but with identical framing were from several designs illustrated by Waterlow in their own publication. (Figure 3)



Figure 3
The Illustration of examples of Rotary direct plate printings from Waterlow's own publication (Reference 3)

There is no evidence that these dummy stamps were ever intended as essays for Australia and in fact, as we describe below, there are good reasons that indicate they could never have been printed for that purpose.

The King's head on the stamp in Figure 1 is based on a photograph by Bertram Park one of the court photographers (reference 1). This was the basis for the effigy in the vignette on many of the colonial pictorial definitives issued under the aegis of the Colonial Office and the Crown Agents before World War II. De La Rue, Waterlow, Bradbury, Wilkinson and Harrison all printed stamps in which it featured.



Figure 4
Bertram Park's 3/4 face portrait of King George VI
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Waterlow made at least two engravings from this photo (Figure 5). The most commonly used one is exemplified by the detail from the Grenada 5/- stamp illustrated and this was used on the majority of the colonial stamps printed by Waterlow. The other was by J A C Harrison and was used for the Cyprus high value definitives. The effigy on the dummy stamp is not as well done as either of these.



Figure 5.
One of the dummy stamps with details from Waterlow printed stamps. On the left Cyprus 90 piastres (J A C Harrison) and on the right detail from Grenada 5/-

In blocks based on this Bertram Park photo and which include the sheet margin, one finds coloured bars, typical of continental practice (Figure 6), but we have not seen these on printings using the Wilding portrait.

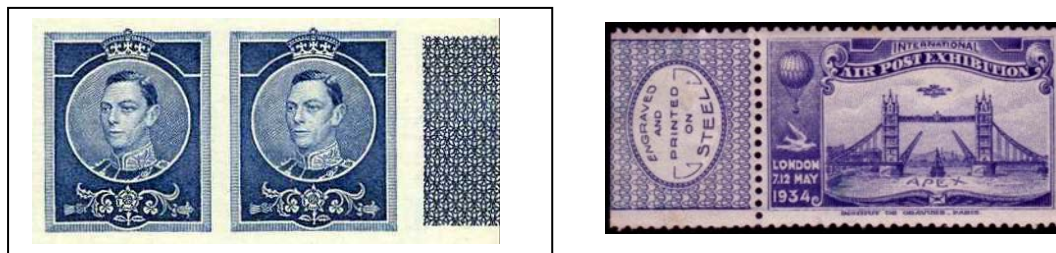
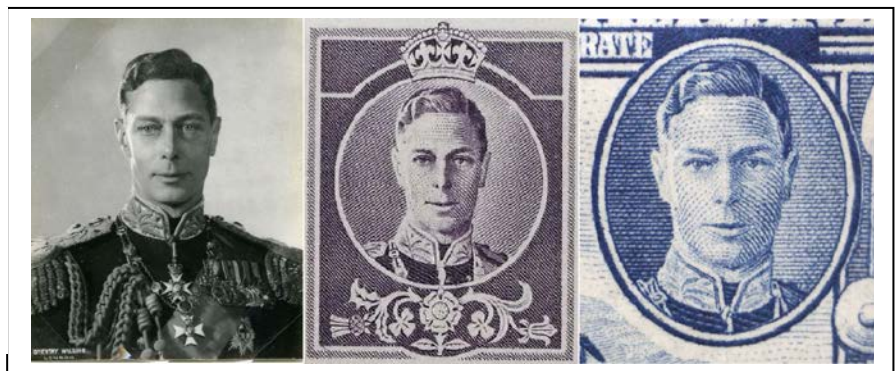


Figure 6.
Illustration of a marginal pair showing the colour block on sheets of the dummy stamps with the effigy based on Bertram Park's photo. On the right is an example printed by the Institut de Gravure showing a similar use of the colour block.

Figure 7 includes the photograph that was the basis for the other dummy stamp. The Colonial Office had instructed the Crown Agents that this should be used for all new definitive designs produced after 1939. Waterlow first used it on their second Somaliland Protectorate set in 1942. Again, the engraving of the dummy stamp head is not as good as on the production stamp.

Figure 7.
Dorothy Wilding's photo, one of the dummy stamps and detail from Waterlow's 1942 Somaliland Protectorate printings.
Photograph reproduced by permission of BPMA.



It is not recorded which, if any, stamps Waterlow printed from the rotary machines before or during the War but afterwards they were transported to Brussels to be used at their Belgian subsidiary, Imprimerie Belge de Sécurité.

There, "Rotaglio" was used for the Queen Elizabeth II Rhodesia and Nyasaland 1d and ½d coil stamps in 1955/56 (SG 2a and 1a). It was very suitable for this because the machine printed onto paper from a continuous reel. It also perforated and cut the sheets on the same pass. It could print up to four colours at a time and so it was hoped (at least by the writer in *GSM*) that this cheaper process would lead to increased use of intaglio printing even for GB low values. It was used again for the Nigeria 2d (SG 72c) in 1956 and the 3d (SG 73a) (References 5 & 6).

In the event, photogravure remained more economical and did not incur the costs or the skill of an intaglio engraver.

An Australian Essay?

It is not clear how the idea has arisen that these were connected with Australia but as the quotes from the auction catalogues show, this is a persistent concept.

We take the term "Australian Head" to mean the effigy of King George VI that was used on the Australian low value definitives for 1937 onwards. These were designed by R A Harrison and engraved by Frank Manley in Australia for the Government Printer (at that time John Ash).



Figure 8.
One of the 1937 Australian definitive set engraved by F Manley with the detail from original photo by Peter North.

This is not based on the Bertram Park portrait but on one by Peter North and it is a different pose. Figure 8 illustrates this with a detail from Peter North's photograph.

Similarly, it is difficult to see how it came to be described as an essay for an Australian stamp. A reference to this is made in 1990 by Bill Hornadge who wrote in his "Cinderella Corner" for *Stamps News Australasia* (Reference 2):

"In 1937 Waterlow and Sons, UK, prepared an essay of a King George VI Australia Head stamp printed in violet and prepared in both imperf and perf 15 x 14 format in a bid to procure a contract from the Australia Post Office. They failed as the Post Office produced its own design and had the stamps printed in Australia".

Looking at either of the dummy stamps this seems incredible. Apart from the lower quality of engraving and the absence of space for "Australia" or a value, perhaps the most telling feature is the nature of the floral decoration in the framing. (Figure 9)



Figure 9.
Detail of the floral elements
in the dummy stamps.

One can make out an English Rose, Scottish Thistle and Irish Shamrock. The flower pointing to the right is not easily identifiable as anything Welsh. It is probably meant to depict a daffodil (Reference 7). At any rate there is nothing in the least Australian about the design.

Waterlow produced stamps for most of the Empire countries but Australia was never one of them. The Australian Government printed all its own stamps after the contract with Perkins Bacon to produce dies and plates for letterpress George V stamps in 1914/1915.

Thus we conclude that there is no evidence to support the term "Australian Head" or the suggestion that these were essays for Australian stamps. The evidence against that is very convincing. In fact, these dummy stamps were printed purely to demonstrate the products from the Rotary Direct Plate Printing Machine.

References

1. *Photographing Royalty for Stamps, Interview with Mr Bertram Park*, Stamp Collecting, vol XLVIII, no.20, August 1937.
2. *Cinderella Corner* by Bill Hornadge, Stamps News Australasia, October 1990.
3. *The Printing of Value Papers with special reference to our Rotary Direct Plate (formerly known as "Rotaglio") Products*, Waterlow & Sons Ltd., January 1950.
4. *An Interesting G.B. Essay*, Gibbon's Stamp Monthly, Vol XXIX, no.12, p 168 August 1956.
5. *British Colonials Now Printed Abroad*, Gibbon's Stamp Monthly, Vol XXIX, no. 5, p 50 January 1956.
6. *Commonwealth and British Empire Stamps 1840 -1970*, Stanley Gibbons Stamp Catalogue, 110th ed. 2008 p 453.
7. T H S Duke, Chester Herald, College of Arms, Personal communication, August 2009

Acknowledgements

The images of the dummy stamps in Figures 1, 2, 5 and 7 are from specimens lent by Don Brookfield, King George VI Collectors Society.

The copy of the photo by Peter North in Figure 8 is courtesy of George Darby.

The 1983 Robson Lowe GB sale catalogue was obtained for us by Paul Skinner, British Library, Philatelic collections.