

“T” Markings

by
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Waterlow Setting Marks

Waterlow setting or ‘T’ marks are frequently met with. Although small they are intriguing and the reason behind their existence is given in the following letter, published in Stamp Collecting on 24 September 1954, from P. A. Waterlow, the Chairman of the Company, to W. T. Williams who had queried their presence on the GB 5 shillings value. The final sentence is of particular importance and relevance.

Dear Sir,

King George VI High Values

In reply to your query regarding the ‘T’ mark traced in the above stamps, this mark is used by us when transferring printing plates and is used to line up the transfer cylinder with the marked out plate. It is cut into the original die on both sides of the stamp and taken up together with the stamp impression when the transfer cylinder of the die is made.

The method of use is to move the cylinder in the transfer press until such time as these marks coincide with the marked outline of the plate. This may entail several attempts before correct alignment of the stamp is obtained. When the correct position is found, the cylinder is held in position and the various marks made and the area of the marked outline on the plate are removed by burnishing.

In this particular instance we would imagine that these ‘T’ marks have not been completely burnished out. It sometimes happens that to the transferor’s eye the burnishing is complete, and in the facing of the plate with chromium these marks become able to print due to the building up of the deposited metal around these burnished marks, making them just prominent enough to give a weak impression.

For this reason we try to place these marks in some position of the engraving, where it is either rolled out by transferring or hidden by surrounding work.

All stamps are transferred in this manner and not solely the ones in question.

Yours faithfully,
WATERLOW & SONS LTD.
P.A. Waterlow, Chairman.

At first sight it would appear that these markings are irrelevant to us but in fact

they are often the reason for small, or large, varieties appearing on the stamps we collect. Indeed examples are recorded by specialists on the majority of the King George VI definitive stamps of Malta and some of them raise basic questions.

Perhaps the best examples of one of these which was not cleared at all is the “semaphore flaw” on the King George VI 5/- value. This has achieved catalogue status as SG. 230a and SG. 247b.. What is intriguing about the two stamps is that the first is relatively common whilst the second is extremely rare – but only one printing plate is stated to have been used.

I have believed for a long time that when the SELF-GOVERNMENT stamps were created the bulk of the stock held in Malta was returned to Britain, overprinted and then returned. I also believe that when stock of the 1938 set was received in Malta it was simply put on top of the existing stock. The result of this was that the stamps sent to Britain could be from ANY PRIOR printing as well as the latest received although the vast bulk would always be stamps from the latest printing. I personally have corner plate blocks showing plate numbers which can only have been produced had the stamps been originally handled in the manner I believe. I have also seen a report that a block from plate 3 of the ½d. Brown shows the “joined NT” flaw but have not had this confirmed. Plate 3 was last used for the March 1944 printing and there were later printings from plate 4 before that stamps were overprinted. Of course, for some of the stamps only the latest printing existed and even if earlier printings were returned to Britain they might be from quite early printings with later ones used up.

In thinking this two things become clear. SG. 247b is rare because only a few sheets were sent for overprinting which came from an early 5/- printing and these were simply used in the normal manner – indeed the stamp is only listed so far in used condition. The other is that at some point another printing plate for the 5/- value was created or the original plate was treated again to remove the “semaphore”. If this is the case then the change must have been carried out relatively early because nearly all of the stamps were used BEFORE the overprinting was considered, i.e. only a very few of the early sheets were still there with most stamps overprinted being from a more recent printing.

The new King George VI study paper by Graham Pound gives information on more stamps showing traces of the “T” markings and it may well be that these reveal more apparently new printing plates. A research project for a member who has a large KG6 collection?

The 5/- (British 1939-48 type) may be found with a “T” guide mark in the hair. The late Gerry Bater, well known as a philatelic photographer and philatelist, wrote a series of articles in Gibbons Stamp Monthly, which were full of new observations on the British “square” high values of 1939-48. Gerry was responsible for getting me to understand how “T” guide marks came into being. I quote and paraphrase

him, from his book *Waterlow Procedures; King George VI "Arms to Festival" high Values; Design to Press:* "For most of the arms high values, two "T" guide marks were impressed in the original die, one each some 5-6mm ABOVE and BELOW the stamp design. (These could) "sometimes be transferred to the printing plate". The "T" guide mark ABOVE would become the lower "T" of the stamp above. Few actually appeared on the plate; most were carefully burnished off and the position re-engraved when necessary. Sometime partial marks remained. Doubled marks, marks on the neck (from a plate differently set up), marks at the base and even one where there is a clear "T" in the hair as well as another, diagonally placed across the hairline all exist. The assumption by philatelists that ("T" guide marks) must always appear in the King's hair on Great Britain high values is now proven to be uniformed".

This explains to me why the "T" marks on King George VI stamps of Malta are in different positions and why they happened. I hope that it helps you as well.