

# Varieties, Errors and Flaws

*Based on a talk and exhibit by Mr R. A Rostron  
at a meeting of the members of the Malta Philatelic Society  
on 04.11.09 and reported by Mr John A Cardona.*

Mr. Rostron said that he started collecting stamps as a child and soon acquired the first 1,000. As the collection expanded, so did knowledge about different watermarks, colour shades, perforations etc. The need to re-layout his collection became apparent. Now, after a lifetime of collecting stamps and many further collection re-layouts, it has only served to emphasise to him the magnitude of the subject.

Designers and printers over the years have taken a pride in being accurate and correct. It was probably due to their success that caused collectors to examine the product very closely. As a result, apart from known varieties, more were discovered as well as errors and flaws. It is hard to think of any other product where mistakes can result in it becoming more valuable than a perfect example!

To assist in understanding what is meant by the names, a Collin's Dictionary was used. It defined

- A variety as a different thing of the same kind,
- An error as a mistake, inaccuracy or misjudgement, and
- A flaw as an imperfection or blemish.

Due to the detailed and often “fly-speck” nature of the material, the assistance of Mr. Ken Wroe, a member of the Malta Philatelic Society was sought and the use of his overhead projector and equipment were kindly provided.

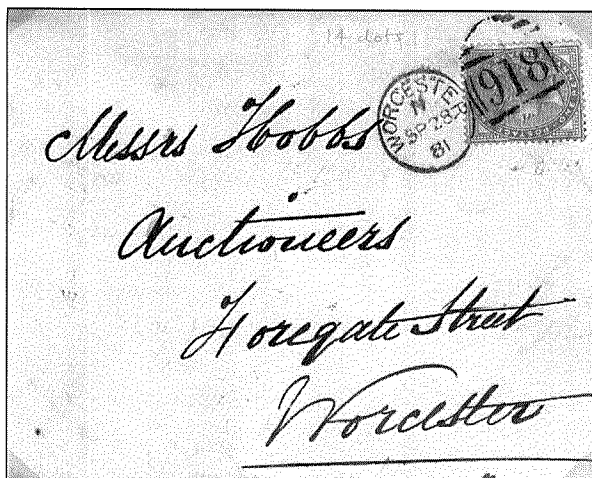
Mr. Rostron's personal interpretation of the above definitions was given and many example items shown. A “potted” version of each is included here.

**VARIETIES.** These occur where a basic stamp design changes by colour shade e.g. red or red-brown; perforation e.g. perforation 14 or 16; watermark e.g. Crown CA or Multiple Script CA etc. Then there can be paper types, gum differences, under-prints, and so on – the list is considerable.

To illustrate some of the above a page of Great Britain (G.B.) 1d. ‘Reds’ S.G. 17 to 29 was shown, demonstrating differences in dies, perforations, watermarks, alphabets and colour shades.

Other stamps shown in this category included G.B. Queen Victoria 1d lilac; the 14 and 16 dot varieties S.G. 171 and 174; a tête-bêche pair from Germany S.G. 143 D; and an under-print variety advertising Cadbury's from New Zealand.

**ERRORS.** These are mistakes that should never happen, e.g. designs not according to specification; design omissions; printing on reverse; misplacement or omission of colour; incorrect spelling etc. Again the list is considerable.



Corner 'Dot' variety on cover 14 dots Die I S.G. 171.



16 dots variety Die II S.G. 174



Under-print variety Queen Victoria  
advert from New Zealand



Positional variety S.G. 143 b  
tête-bêche pair – Germany

To demonstrate, a number of these were shown on a “fun” sheet issued at or about the time of the U.K. 1971 Postal Strike. This was followed by various stamps showing perforation shifts, a postmark error “1981” instead of “1861”, other examples included the Barbados Queen Victoria error with missing hyphen S.G. 104a and corrected S.G. 104; the Fiji design error on George VI 1½d die I empty canoe S.G. 251 and corrected die II with canoeist S.G. 252; the Guernsey Queen Elizabeth II latitude design printing error S.G. 14 I inscribed “40° 30' N” and S.G. 14 IV corrected to “49° 30' N”; and Malta overprint error namely misplaced ‘e’ in Pnney in lieu of Penny S.G. 37a.

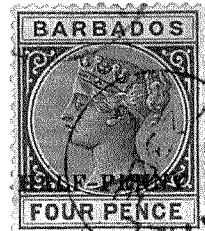
**FLAWS.** These are differences in printing caused by cracked or worn plates; inclusions in the paper e.g. dirt or hair; poor quality in printing and/or process control, resulting in spots, colour blemishes etc. The list is numerous.

The faults can be very minor and many on display were so, but imagine how difficult it was in the mid-1800's working by candle or gas light to detect flaws! A large number of examples were shown for three main countries – Malta, Australia and G.B.

## Barbados – Overprint Error

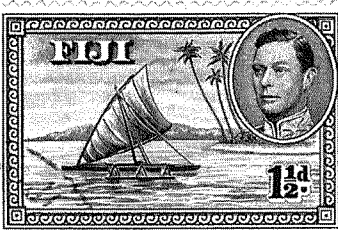


Missing hyphen S.G. 104a

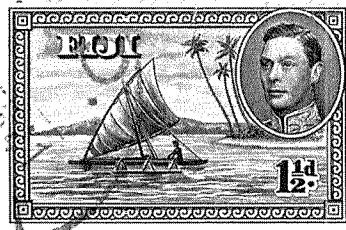


Corrected to include hyphen S.G. 104

## Fiji – Design Error

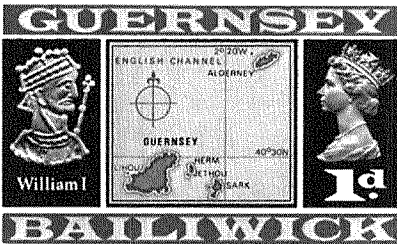


Empty canoe die I S.G. 251

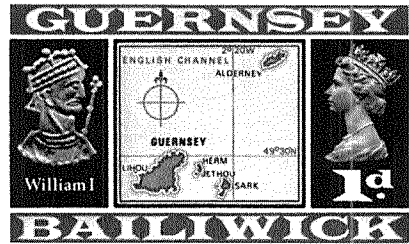


Corrected to include Canoeist die II S.G. 252

## Guernsey – Design Error



Latitude error 40° 30' N S.G. 14 I



Corrected to 49° 30' N S.G. 14 II

## Malta – Overprint Error



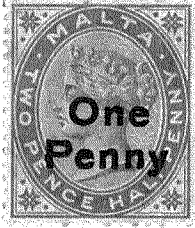
Misplaced 'e' in Pnney S.G. 37a



Normal overprint S.G. 37

MALTA.

- Minor 1935 Silver Jubilee flaws on ½d value.
- Minor overprint “One Penny” flaws on S.G. 37 including solid ‘e’s and nick in ‘o’ of ‘One”.
- Many George V self-government overprint flaws included on 1d red short top to ‘F’, ‘E’ and ‘L’ joined, thick ‘N’ etc.
- On Postage and Revenue overprints on ¼d George V many minor flaws including letter distortions by multiple black spots.



*Overprint “One” is more to right than normal and solid ‘E’ in Penny*



*Overprint “One” is normal but small nick in ‘O’ of One on left hand side*



*Short top to ‘F’. Thick ‘E’ and ‘L’ and joined. Note thick ‘N’ and broken ‘F’ in “Government”*



*Multiple black overprint ‘spots’ causing letter distortions*

AUSTRALIA. Many minor flaws were shown, particularly on George V “Heads”. Quite a number were identified in specialized catalogues including “HALEPENCE” and “HALFPENCF” and “no cross on crown”.



*‘HALEPENCE’*



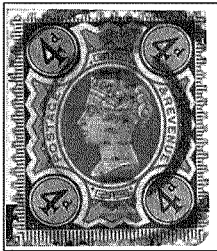
*‘HALFPENCF’*



*No Cross on Crown*

GREAT BRITAIN. A large quantity of minor flaws were displayed on several sheets, being mainly on Queen Victoria ½d vermilion and Jubilee issues through to Edward VII. Worthy of special mention being

- 4d Queen Victoria Brown and Green with hatching lines totally missing in top left hand 4,
- the 1912 George V “no cross on crown” S.G. 341a, and
- the 1937 Coronation “Colon” flaw S.G. 461a i.e. “12 : MAY”



*Missing hatches lines in 4*



*No cross on crown S.G. 341a*

Much additional material was available for scrutiny on the table, including various magazines extracts on the subject.

Mr. Rostron said that over the years many eminent philatelists had studied stamps in fine detail and he felt sure that there was nothing new in his presentation. He said that in putting the collection and display together it became obvious that the designers, engineers and printers had been fairly successful in keeping down the number of flaws and errors, considering the vast quantities involved. However there has been a strong desire to experiment, and still is, resulting in many varieties of the same kind.

It is encouraging to note that through Mr. Rostron’s love of bringing large “glory” boxes of stamps and ephemera, which often included large quantities of common, low face value stamps, he has been able to show to the Society previously, interesting talks on, for example, Liverpool Postmarks, Newspaper Branch Cancels and now Varieties, Errors and Flaws.

The speaker recognized that he will never become a “specialist”, due to his nature being similar to that of a grasshopper or butterfly, jumping and flitting from one interest to another, but, judging by audience reaction, his talk was much appreciated.



*“12: May” Colon Flaw S.G. 461a*