

King George VI Varieties

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Part 1 Introduction and Ascension

Introduction

National and world events played their part to make the philatelic era embracing the reign of George VI a particularly interesting period. The majority of the definitive issues supplied to the Crown Agents were printed by recess (Waterlow, Bradbury Wilkinson and De La Rue), although a significant number were printed by typography/letterpress (De La Rue), with a far smaller quantity produced by photogravure (Harrison). The outbreak of war in 1939 brought problems for the security printers. They had difficulty in maintaining quality because of the loss of skilled workers. Bomb and fire damage to their premises forced the use of sub-contractors, not only for printing, but also perforation work, while the war-time shortages adversely affected the supplies of pigments, paper, ink and gum. All these difficulties resulted in different shades of colour, perforation and watermark varieties, changes of paper and coatings, different gums, locally overprinted issues, duty and key plate flaws in abundance, retouches, fresh entries, non-coincident and coincident re-entries and shifted transfers. To avoid complicating matters the term 'double entry' will be used generally during this series of articles to describe the last four types of double transfer mentioned in the preceding sentence, but now and again the subject will justify a more detailed description. Let there be no doubt that the Colonial issues of George VI can provide as much food for thought and scope for research as any of the earlier and almost universally accepted fields of the classical philatelic period.

In general terms, the production of stamps for the Dominions and associated territories, based on their own domestic security printers, was not affected as much as in the UK, although shortage of materials and personnel had to be overcome. The issues of the time have their share of shades and varieties, but bearing in mind the numbers printed are not as complex as those produced for the Crown Agents. It is noteworthy that despite all the war-time problems the printing of stamps for GB was maintained at a high standard by Harrison and Waterlow.

In this quarterly series of articles I intend to describe some of the varieties that appeared during the George VI era — many can be seen with the naked eye, but a good magnifying glass will help considerably, particularly the type that has an inbuilt light source operating from batteries or a mains charged power pack. I use one constantly and find it invaluable when visiting stamp fairs in dimly lit halls! I know that it is all too often customary to decry 'fly-spotting', but it pays to take note of 'fly specks'. They often

lead to repair work, and repair work usually leaves its traces. In the case of a repair in the form of re-touching, the repair does sometimes rate catalogue status at a high price e.g. Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika 'Retouched Value Tablet' on the 1c. (S.G. 131ab and ad) or 'The Mountain Re-touch' on the 10c. and 1s. values (135a and 145ab).

But the damaged or worn original is of just as much interest as it completes the story and is usually far harder to find, because the earlier sheets with the worn or damaged impression were broken up, whereas as soon as a re-touch was reported positional blocks were picked out with an eye to a 'quick sale'. Thankfully only a minority of the varieties have been given catalogue status. This is a blessing in disguise for the collector who is looking for a new field of interest and enjoys the thrill of the hunt for often elusive, but obtainable, stamps at 'normal' prices, that lurk unnoticed and unappreciated in dealers stock books, club packets and approval books. A glance at some of the specialist catalogues will reveal the chosen few and also provide an insight into the number of distinguishable shades and perforations yet to be granted general recognition.

It is a matter of regret that one often hears a collector say that he or she must give up the hobby because of the increased cost of living. This is surely foolish and unnecessary. If someone who is buying rare stamps or covers cannot afford, temporarily, to go on doing so why not turn to some cheaper field for a time? Just as much pleasure can be gained in other areas, at a much lower cost and after all expense can always be adjusted to the depth of a pocket or purse at any particular moment. Apart from this, the collector will find a wider interest in the hobby if a single track is not pursued for too long, while continuing to collect will ensure the relaxation, refreshment and satisfaction that comes from any good hobby and are needed more than ever in times of difficulty and stress.

It is the unusual, the out-of-the ordinary, that enhances a collection and stimulates interest — and possible envy. I, therefore, commend the study of the flaws and varieties of the George VI period to any collector. Those who belong to the 'unmounted only school' will just find the task more challenging and satisfying. The 'fine used' collector will often find that the c.d.s. conveniently misses the flaw he seeks. However, in all fairness I must say that the cover collector who wants to join in the fun is facing a very difficult task, but the joy of finding a variety on cover can only be matched by winning on the Premium Bonds!

Just as the London taxi-driver has to mas-

ter 'The Knowledge' before he can ply for hire, the stamp collector has to know the location and appearance of varieties, if he is to build up an attractive and interesting collection successfully. Pertinent background information also helps to attract attention to a display. I will, therefore, always give a brief written description of a variety and whenever possible will include a simple illustration, as there is so much truth behind the old saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' — never more so than when searching for varieties on stamps. So, without more ado let us start on our journey seeking out the unusual without recourse to our friendly bank manager.

Ascension

With such a plethora of varieties to discuss it is hard to decide where our journey should begin. Logically the letter 'A' comes to mind! This line of thought bore fruit as I turned the pages of my *Part 1* and paused to look at the illustrations of the recently catalogued plate flaws on the Ascension 1924-33 issue, because varieties also occurred on the recess-printed George VI definitives that came into use in 1938. This pictorial series was printed by De La Rue in sheets of 60 (10 rows of 6 stamps) and offers some very good examples over and above the design, perforation, paper, ink and colour/shade changes which in themselves total forty-three distinguishable stamps from the fifty-one known printings of the eleven values (½d. to 10s).

½d. The Long E

The ½d. value features a view of Georgetown, the capital, and Clarence Bay, the only safe anchorage. A retouch on the third stamp of the second row (R2/3) extends the centre bar of the second 'E' of the word 'GEORGETOWN' positioned at the foot of the vignette (Fig. 1). The retouch occurs on both the perf. 13½ and 13 x 12¾ issues. However, copies of the perf. 13½ exist with and without the retouch, which leads to a minor philatelic mystery yet to be resolved.

The records show that the ½d. centre (or key) and frame (or duty) plates were released by the Crown Agents representative to the De La Rue staff on only four occasions — February 1938, February 1944, sometime in 1948 (probably towards the end of the year) and November 1952. The physical issue and return of plates is the safest source of information about when they were used, since occasionally requisitions may have been met from stocks held by the Crown Agents Bureau. The 12 May 1938 printing (Req. 1586/3) was perf. 13½. It has been suggested recently that perhaps the next print-

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ing of the ½d. in 1944 was similarly perforated and the plate retouched prior to use. However, the 13 x 12¾ perforator had come into use with the release of the 1d. value in May 1942 and all the values issued with the ½d. in 1944 were changed to the new perforation. This being duly noted in *GSM* in July 1944, without any mention of the ½d. being issued in the old perforation. Furthermore, Mr John Marriott has confirmed that the Plate Block from Req.2549/1 in the Royal Collection and sent by De La Rue on 12 June 1944 is perf.13 x 12¾. In these circumstances the suggestion that the 1944 ½d. value was perforated 13½ must be rejected.

We are left to consider two further possibilities. First, that an unrecorded release of the plates was made for a second perf.13½ printing. The issue of the new 4d. value and the change of colour for the 1d. and 3d. values in July 1940 — all perf.13½ — would perhaps, have given the opportunity. But this is most unlikely to have happened bearing in mind the recording system used and the very tight security always associated with the control of plates. The alternative is that a retouch was done during the printing run for Req.1586/3 as both the centre and frame plates were apparently in the hands of the printers for two weeks (14–28 February 1938). This was a long time in comparison to the three days (8–10 February 1944) the centre plate was needed by the De La Rue staff to produce the 1944 printing (Req.2549/1) and surely long enough for a retouch to be made. On the other hand, my own postional blocks perforated 13½, with and without the retouch, although slightly tropicalised are distinctly different shades of violet; this could point either to a temporary halt during the 1938 printing run to do a retouch or to an unrecorded second perf.13½ issue. The mystery remains and if anyone can help to solve it I trust they will come forward and share their ideas. In any event I wish I owned a block showing the centre bar of the second 'E' either damaged or missing, this would, at least, demonstrate why the retouch appeared!

½d. Doubled Frame Lines

Every printing of the ½d. value shows doubling of the right frame lines on all stamps of the second and third rows, except for R2/1. the doubling of R2/2 is prominent and easily seen (Fig.2). It is worth noting that the right hand vertical frame line of the right value tablet is also doubled on this stamp, which makes it even easier to recognise.

½d. — Frame Plate Flaws

Several minor frame plate flaws occur. The figure '1' in the right hand value tablet on R1/6 has a thin diagonal line across it in a NE-SW direction, the position varies very slightly in the vertical plane from sheet to sheet. The figure '2' in the left hand value tablet shows a vertical scratch at R4/6. Lastly, the 'Torpedo Flaw' occurs on R3/4, where an almost vertical line of violet dots, resembling the track of a torpedo, appears just to the right of 'GEORGETOWN' (Fig.3).

1d. Double Entries on the 'Three Sisters' Centre Plate

The design showing the 'Three Sisters' was used for the last three printings of the 1d. value — 1 June 1949, 25 February 1953 and October 1955 — all perf.13. A new plate was made as small, but significant, changes had to be made to the design. Slight doubling of the diagonal lines of shading behind the head of the King occurs at the top of the head tablet

on the first stamp of all rows, except for the seventh, ninth and tenth. The clearest example can be found at R3/1.

1d. Double Entries on the 'Three Sister' Frame Plate

The change from the 'Green Mountain' to the 'Three Sisters' design also entailed a change of design for the frame plate and a fresh one was made. Double entries occur on fifteen of the sixty stamps in a sheet. The most noticeable can be found on R4/6, where the left frame and the side of the 'A' of 'ASCENSION' are doubled. Clear doubling on R3/2 affects the entire frame on the right hand side. The left inside frame line on R4/4 and 7/5 is similarly doubled as is the top of the left frame of R4/2. The remainder are insignificant.

1d. Missing Perf. Pin

In the March 1943 issue of *GSM* it was noted that the 1d value released in May 1942, and the first stamp of the series to be perforated 13 x 12¾, had an unusual feature. The comb head had a surplus pin in each of the short rows, resulting in intersecting holes being punched twice. Following on from this it was reported in the July 1944 edition that *the 1d. with the new perf.13 has now been followed by the issue of all values in this gauge perforated by a comb moving down the sheet. This comb appears to have been made for a slightly larger stamp as it has a surplus pin in each of the short rows, a feature already noted in the old issue, which results in the intersecting holes being punched twice.* The new colours for the 1d., 1½d. and 2d. were issued in June 1949 with mixed perforations — the 1d. was perf.13 comb, but the other two values were perf.14 line. The 1d. was apparently perforated by the old machine which had had a pin removed at the end of the teeth of the comb to avoid the double holes always found in previous printings. However, this left a nasty long gap at the top of each stamp which did not tear easily. It is reasonable to assume that the staff at De La Rue noticed this during printing and reverted to line perf.14 for the other two values. The pins were put back as the double holes re-appeared on the 3d. 6 December 1950 perf.13 issue, thus leaving the 1949 1d. perf.13 as an unusual perforation variety for the collector to find in this attractive pictorial series.

1d. and 2d. Mountaineer Flaw

This flaw occurs on the Green Mountain design for both the 1d. and 2d. values. A small black vertical mark, looking like a mountain climber, appears on the lightly coloured mountain side above the 'OU' of 'MOUNTAIN' (Fig.4). It is located on R4/4 of five issues from 13 May 1946 — two printings of the 1d. and three of the 2d. It probably occurs on the 4d. issued on 8 November 1951 but I cannot confirm this.

1½d. and 2s.6d. Davit Flaw

The 'Davit', 'Jetty' or 'Pier' flaw is probably the best known KGVI Ascension variety. It occurs on R5/1 on the centre plate depicting Georgetown Pier used for nine identifiable printings of the 1½d. and three of the 2s.6d. The original mark looks like a ship's davit and appears at the extreme left of the pier, with its reflection on the ground below (Fig.5). The mark lengthened on the 17 February 1949 printing and, depending on the positioning of the centre plate, can cross the left inner and middle frame lines (Fig.6). At the same time an 'Extra Rock' appeared just to the left of the line of rocks in the sea

beyond the pier (Fig.6). Both flaws remained on all further printings of the 1½d. The 'Lengthened Davit' and 'Extra Rock' do not show on the 2s.6d. as the three printings of that value occurred on 12 May 1938, 17 May 1944 and 14 February 1945. On the other hand, copies of the 2s.6d. from R5/1 will all show a small frame plate flaw — a faint, but distinctive vertical line runs through the '2' in the right hand value tablet and continues downward through the lower frame line.

1½d. and 2s.6d. Double Entries

Doubling of the shading lines behind the head of the King and on his face occurs on R5/6. On R6/6 the lines of the shed and boat are also doubled, the doubling of the vertical lines of the shed is usually more prominent. The right frame lines also show very slight doubling on the 1½d. at R1/6, 4/1, 5/1, 5/4 and 6/2. Similar doubling can be found on the 2s.6d. at R5/1, 6/1 and 10/2.

1½d. Derrick Flaw

Another centre plate flaw appears on the final printing of the 1½d. in December 1954. A small, but very clear mark crosses the lower right stay of the derrick at the end of the pier on R6/6 (Fig.7).

3d. Storm Clouds

The pictorial design used for the 3d. features 'Long Beach', one of the beautiful and sandy beaches with which the island abounds. The final release of the 3d. dated 6 December 1950 (perf.13 — grey-black and deep grey) has three noticeable retouches in the sky over the mountains, where the lines of shading have been strengthened. In particular, the retouch at R10/2 shows up really well — above and to the left of the central mountain peak. The retouched area covers some 3 x 2mm (Fig.8). The second retouch at R6/5 is less obvious. A series of short lines extends from the top of the cliffs into the shading lines of the sky for about 3mm, about half way between the left edge of the design and the central peak (Fig.9). The third retouch occurs on R10/4 (Fig.10). Some earlier printings have very faint lines of shading in the sky, indicating probable plate wear, it is likely that the retouches were an attempt to remedy the situation.

3d. — Double Entries

The heavy vertical lines within the top frame design are doubled in the right corner on R1/3 (Fig.11) and in the left corner on R7/4 (Fig.12).

6d. Double Entries

Doubling of the shading lines in the top right corner of the head tablet and behind the head of the King are numerous, the strength of the doubling varies considerably (Fig.13 illustrates an extreme example). In the top half of the sheet the first stamp of the first three rows show slight doubling. However, only R6/2, 6/6, 9/1, 10/1 and 10/2 in the lower half of the sheet do not show doubling. Suffice it to say that either an Imprint or a Plate Block of this value will ensure that a collector has examples.

6d. Weak Border

Mention of an Imprint Block in the preceding paragraph leads naturally to a minor variety that occurs on R9/3, where the left hand border design is weakened by the faintness of the two short horizontal lines, to the left of the series of boxed crosses, forming the design (Fig.14).

GEORGE (normal) GEORGE (re-touch)
Fig.1

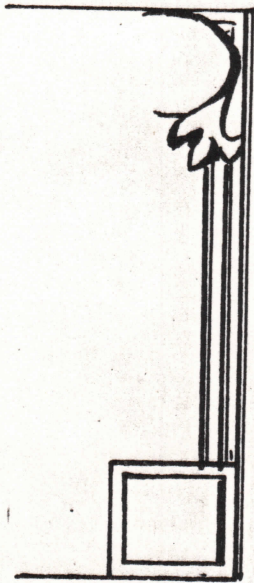


Fig.2

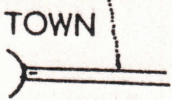


Fig.3

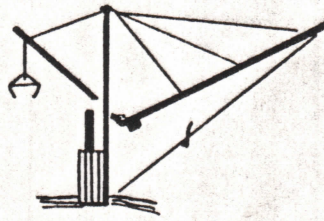


Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10

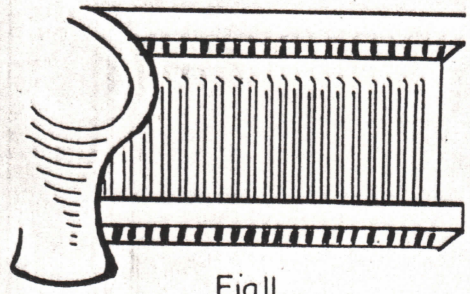


Fig.11

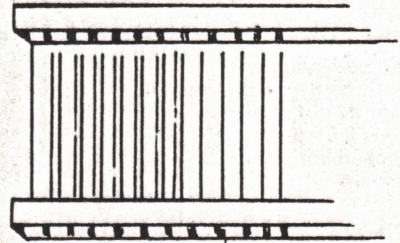


Fig.12

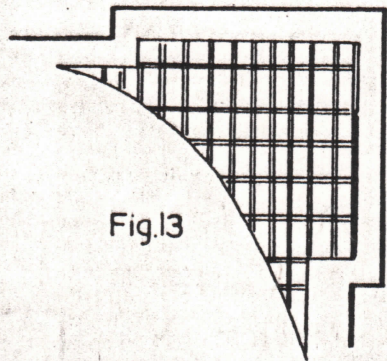


Fig.13



OU

Fig.4

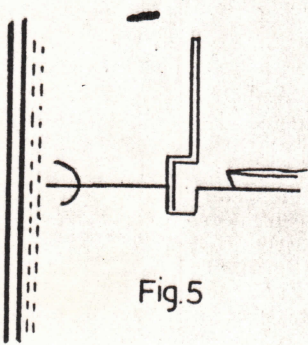


Fig.5

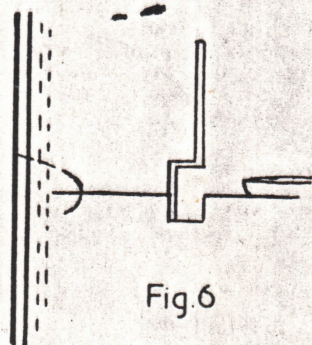


Fig.6

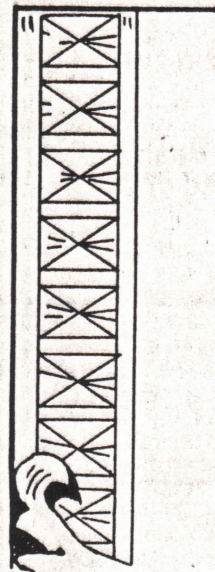


Fig.14

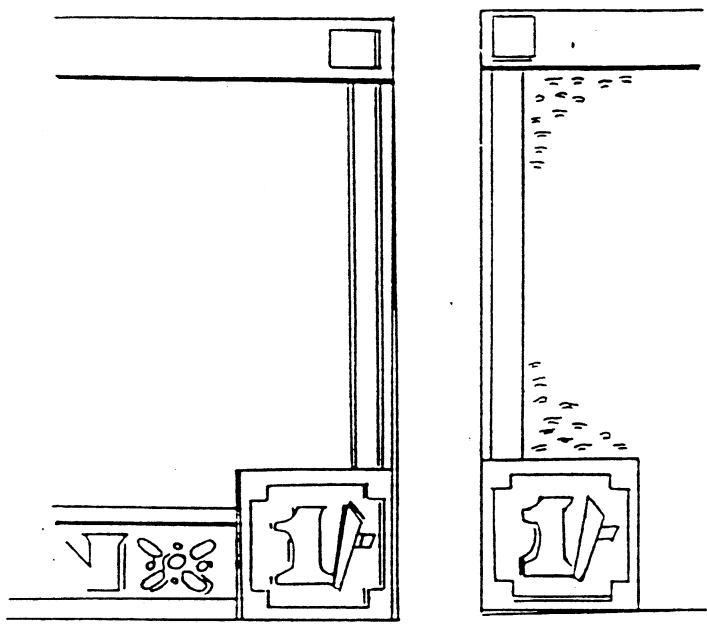


Fig. 15a

Fig. 15b

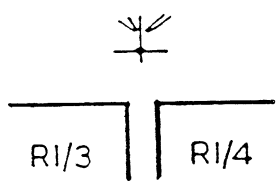


Fig. 16

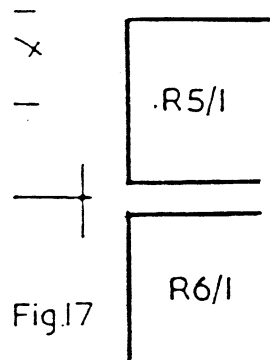


Fig. 17

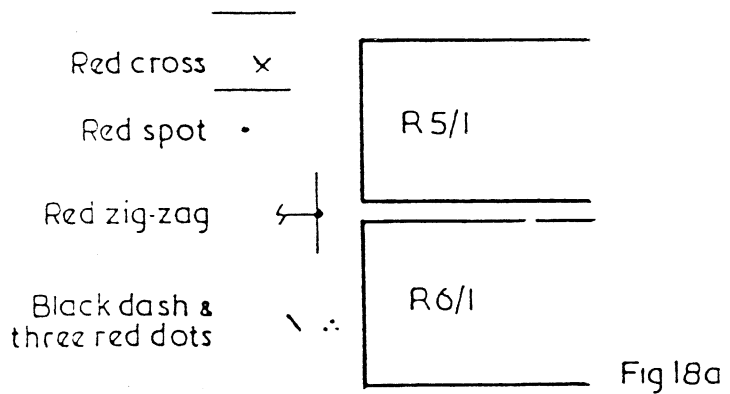


Fig. 18a

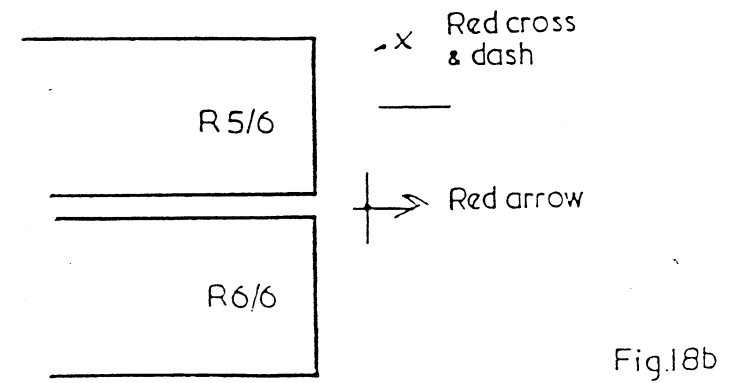


Fig. 18b

1s. Fresh Entry

In the Introduction to this series of articles I mentioned that I would group most instances of doubling under the general term Double Entry. The 1s. value provides an opportunity to be more specific because an outstanding example of a Fresh Entry occurs on R6/4. The duplication is very extensive, in both the vertical and horizontal planes, and affects the right hand vertical frame lines, the south-east corner value tablet, the ornament to the left, (Fig. 15a) the south-west value tablet and the north-west corner (Fig. 15b). The original impression laid on the plate must have been badly out of position and thereby affords the collector with one of the best varieties of the KGV period — a large Imprint Block of ten stamps, including R6/4, is an item to be cherished!

Printers Marks

Although not varieties in the traditional sense, the addition of small unorthodox marks on the sheet margins are of interest. They help to make an unusual sideline in any display of this attractive definitive issue and I will give details of some that have come to my attention. I am sure that others exist and do hope that readers will not hesitate to add to those now described.

1/2d. An arrow-like mark affecting the top printers guide cross appears on sheets from the 25 February 1953 issue of the half penny. (It is worth mentioning that both sides of this release were perforated right through unlike earlier printings.) (Fig. 16).

1d. A small, but easily seen, elongated black cross appears in the left margin adjacent to R5/1 on the 1d. February 1949 perf. 14 issue (Fig. 17).

1 1/2d. An increasing number of marks (dots, crosses, dashes, etc.) appear in the margins adjacent to R5/1 and 6/1 and on the opposite side of the sheet by R5/5 and 6/6. These began to appear with the 1 June 1949 issue of the 1 1/2d. and culminated with the penultimate release of February 1953 (Figs. 18a and 18b).

2d. and 4d. A black cross appears in the se-vedge close to R5/1 on some sheets of the 2d. issued in February 1949 and on later printings of the 2d. and 4d.

J.G. Initials on the 2d.

A news item in GSM dated July 1946 pointed out that the 13 May 1946 release of the 2d. has a marginal inscription, which if it was present on earlier printings has not been observed; the initials 'J.G.' in the frame colour appear just above the guide cross in the middle of the top margin. These are not properly engraved, but roughly scratched in and stand about 3mm high. It would be interesting to know what they stand for. I have never seen such an item, but suspect that somewhere there is an example waiting to be found, my fear is that someone will tear off the offending margin for the sake of neatness!

Sheet Numbers

Sheet numbers, if shown, are usually located in the top margin above R1/6, but I have seen half sheets, with the first three vertical rows, where the number is over R1/3. I can only surmise that possibly these came from damaged sheets reduced to half size prior to despatch from De La Rue.

In the next article (November) Mr Lockyer looks at varieties on Barbados stamps.