



Book Reviews

FIJI – Postage Stamp Issues of the King George VI Period. Authors: R.F. Duberal F.A.P. & Bryan A. Jones. Published by the Pacific Islands Study Circle, 2018. Soft card bound, A4, 228 pages, illustrated in full colour. ISBN:978-1-899833-24-5. £25 +p&p from booksales@pisc.org.uk

In 1960, when Frank Saunders wrote his article about the Fiji 1938 ½d, in the very first number of *GEOSIX*, he believed that there had been six printings of this stamp. Nine are now listed in this new book from the Pacific Islands Study Circle. On the other hand, the book's authors do not answer the question of why De La Rue's plate number "1" was duplicated on the lower sheet margin. So there are still things to find out (although that particular point seems unlikely to be resolved at this late date).

However, this encyclopaedic new study contains more than enough information for even the most enthusiastic collector of Fiji stamps, and it is sumptuously produced and illustrated. For each value of the pictorial definitives there is the usual information like the date of issue and withdrawal, perforations, sheet format and shades. In addition, there is an illustration of the original competition design (from the National Archive in Fiji), De La Rue's essays from the Royal Collection, the necessity for the value and some great examples of correct use on covers, together with plate numbers, and the printings and their noteworthy features. Enlarged illustrations record the common and constant flaws and, for those that have catalogue listings such as the "Extra island" (SG 256a) or "Vatulele curl" (CW 8c), there is more detailed treatment. If that is not enough, appendices deal with the detailed plating of both the ½d and 1½d, and enough flaws are detailed to satisfy any flyspeck philatelist. The section on the 1½d contains one of my favourite items, which is from the study by Frank Saunders, i.e., the results of cleaning of the die 2 version

of plate “1” (i.e., the one with a man in the boat and the plate number “1” sans serif) between the printings in 1945 and 1949. Sheets from each date are compared row by row (the rows were separated and mounted in pairs for this) as to the presence of the flaws and the difference is dramatic.

In fact, I have bought the book for its illustrations because there are so many items reproduced from sources that are not very readily accessible. The National Archive in Fiji, for the original design competition entries, is probably out of reach for most of us. One can make arrangements to visit the Philatelic Collections at the British Library or the Royal Philatelic Collection, and you will be made welcome and given every co-operation. However, such visits have to be time limited and supervised. They are most rewarding if the researcher knows in advance what items are available. Thus, very useful features of the book are sections that list what the authors found in both those collections. Of course, this is with respect to Fiji but if you are studying a different colony, there will probably be similar material. So, at least, you can have a fair idea of what to ask for. There are some errors in the list that the authors provide for the Royal Collection, which is unfortunate, but the overall quality of the research seemed excellent to me. One slight surprise was to see that the designs for many values had been agreed with De La Rue before the abdication of Edward VIII and his head appears on the essays. Despite such early preparations the issue did not come out until April 1938.

The story leading up to the issue is told in detail in Appendix 1 based on the research by J.G. Rodger and here is one criticism that I feel is justified. The information is rather broken up. It is reasonable to separate the details about plating the ½d stamp into an appendix, because it will not interest everyone. However, the history of how the issue came to be produced is surely basic and should be of interest to all readers, warranting full treatment in the first chapter. As it is, there is an introductory section that does also cover the changes in the series and the additions of new values. However, the reader is left rather up in the air at the end with the detailed story to be found 170 pages further on. Similarly, the detailed sequence of events about the 2½d surcharge is placed in an appendix separated by over 100 pages from where I think it should be, i.e., with the basic section on these stamps.

But that is being fussy. I really enjoyed the book and there is no doubt that it is a major contribution and source that brings together the current knowledge that was previously rather dispersed. The illustrations are excellent and the coverage includes not just the definitives but also the four omnibus commemoratives, the 1950/51 health stamps (a really good section), booklets, specimens and even ‘Cinderella’ items. There is a section/appendix that contains a series of extracts about Fiji from the Australian Stamp Journal between 1938 and 1950, and finally a very full bibliography. I fully recommend this book to readers. It won a Large Vermeil at STAMPEX in February.