

From Victory to Controversy

Len Jury

Len Jury continues the series of articles written by members of the New Zealand Society of Great Britain with his analysis of the controversial 1920 Victory issue

The 1920 Victory issue was the first New Zealand commemorative set on sale at all New Zealand's Post Offices. The Christchurch and Auckland Exhibition sets, were only sold through their Exhibition post offices. The issue, conceived in patriotic euphoria in 1918, met with a stormy reception from New Zealand stamp collectors and the general public when released in 1920.

Soon after the Great War ended, the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department was receiving submissions for a stamp to commemorate the declarations of peace. The Postmaster General, Sir Joseph Ward, approved the idea only 18 days after the signing of the Armistice! Four months later the concept of a single stamp had grown to a set of six. The Postmaster General arranged with De La Rue and Co to produce the designs and to manufacture the plates. The designs were to be 'Imperial in character with a modest indication of the country of origin'.

The British Lion was selected as an imperial symbol and was featured in some manner on four of the six stamps. The ½d. and 1d. values included a lion with an allegorical figure of Peace. The lion on the 3d. was copied from those famous figures flanking Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square. The 1s. value featured King George V flanked with the heads of two lions.

The 1½d. value with the head of a Maori warrior, carved faces and tree fern fronds, was the only value that could be considered authentic New Zealand. Maori were exempt conscription, but many volunteered. The 6d. value symbolised 'Peace' attendant on 'Progress' and was inscribed 'Peace and Progress'. The other values were inscribed 'Victory' on the 1½d. and 'Victory Stamp' on the other four. All values were also inscribed 'Postage and Revenue' so that revenue payments could be made with these stamps.

On issue in New Zealand, the set, with the exception of the 1½d. value, met with widespread public condemnation due to the lack of New Zealand character.

Design work appeared to be relatively slow, with progressive die proofs being produced during June, July and August of 1919.

Born in controversy

When the set was finally issued in New Zealand on 27 January 1920, not only was there condemnation for the lack of New Zealand character, but uproar over the set being released in Britain over two months previously, on 9 November 1919. The New Zealand High Commissioner in London had received enquiries for the stamps to be sold direct to dealers in London. He telegraphed for approval and was authorised by the New Zealand Government to meet these requests. The Christchurch Philatelic Society was especially scathing and passed a resolution, which read in part: 'It considers that this haste to make money out of an issue that is intended to celebrate New Zealand's share in the Allies' Victory and to commemorate the sacrifices of its sons, and which should be dignified in every respect, is degrading to the Dominion.'

It is claimed that, as a nation, New Zealand had suffered the highest losses per head of population of all the allies. There was so much criticism from the public and from returned soldiers in particular that the New Zealand Government was forced to give an assurance that future issues would not be released elsewhere before the day of issue in New Zealand.

I wonder if there was not a degree of annoyance by New Zealand stamp dealers at having potential sales lost to an enterprising British trade. It does, however, raise two interesting questions. Were any sent by the British dealers to clients in New Zealand and used before the official date of issue? In theory this was possible. I am unaware of any such covers or even covers sent from Britain using the stamps with or without British stamps. If any collector has such items I would be delighted to hear from them.

Controversy also arose in Australia where for a short time the Post Office refused to



The basic set of stamps, including the carmine-red and bright carmine shades of the 1d. and the surcharged 2d. issued in 1922



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recognise the stamps. The reason has not been recorded, but it may have been because they did not conform completely to the UPU colour scheme. Originally, the 6d. was to be in red, but due to possible confusion with the 1d. in red and the 1s. in orange, the colour was changed to the violet colour of the British 3d. stamp. The Australian postal authorities treated mail bearing them as unstamped. Again, if any collector has a cover or covers with Australian postal markings such as 'Postage Due' or 'Refused', I would love to see such.

When De La Rue came to print the stamps they only had paper watermarked NZ over Star of a size that was used to print the small, regular-size King George V definitive stamps. Due to this, the plates for the Victory stamps had to be made up in 20 horizontal rows of seven stamps for the ½d., 3d. and 1s., seven rows of 20 for the 6d.; eight rows of 20 for the 1d. and 20 rows of eight for the 1½d. All sheets show an outer printed buffer bar to help with printing consistency as well as 'eyes' to aid perforation alignment. Significant wear shows on these markings.

All values can show parts of marginal watermark letters, 'NEW ZEALAND' or 'NEW ZEALAND POSTAGE', due to the sheets being printed out of register. The ½d. developed an interesting variety giving the appearance of a re-entry caused by the rolling in of a second impression. On examination, the plate shows no sign of a re-entry. It is believed that, due to humidity at the time of printing, the paper may have buckled, causing a shifted or bumped print. The variety is consistent to the right-hand side of the sheet, but varies in extent from sheet to sheet.

Significant shade varieties are present in the 1d., 6d. and 1s. Shades also occur in the other values.

These shades are also evident among the imperforate proofs on watermarked paper that were run off the plates by the printers. Sometimes these are incorrectly described as imperfs, but they were never sold over post office counters.

The issue remained on sale for about three years, with a 2d. overprint being added in 1922. The actual day of issue of the 2d. has not been recorded, but a 'cancelled to order' block for 15 March is the earliest so far known. There are a number of varieties in the overprint, with '2a' for '2d' being the most prominent.

Controversy does not go away

In the years since it was issued, this set has continued to arouse controversy, with the appearance of imperforate and perforated proofs in various colours, with and without 'SPECIMEN' overprints. It is known that De La Rue and Co used some of these proofs on printers' sample sheets as examples of their workmanship. One of these is illustrated here.

The 1d. and 1½d. colour trials were printed on paper without watermark. To date I have not seen blocks larger than four, but larger pieces could exist. The volumes of *The Postage Stamps of New Zealand*, published by The Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand, record four colours of each:



½d. and 3d. values showing the six different colours, overprinted 'SPECIMEN'

SPECIMEN

SPECIMEN

The two overprint types:

Type A with short 'V' in 'M'

Type B with 'V' reaching to base of letter

De La Rue sample sheet



Could the New Zealand Government have been going to do something extra, but cancelled the idea once news of the set's release in Britain drew so much indignation in New Zealand?



Block of four of the 1d. value in an unrecorded sepia colour (as used for the 1½d. value)

Plate proof of an unaccepted design by Henry W Barr, a designer with De La Rue and Co



Gutter pair of the 3d. value in a rich grass-green colour, annotated 'Die accepted 15/11/1919'



Perforated sheet of eight of the 1½d. and 1s. values showing the stamps separated by gutters

1d. in violet, deep magenta, yellow-buff and green
1½d. in deep violet, sepia, olive-green and pale sage-green.

As the information at the time was drawn from two collectors some thousands of miles apart, Mr J G Evans of England and Mr C A McKeown of America, there was conjecture that the 'violet' and 'deep violet' shades may be the same. In my collection the violets of both values are the same. However, in the greens, the 1d. is a dark sage-green while the 1½d. is a pale shade. In addition to the above colours, I have an unrecorded sepia—the same as the 1½d.—in the 1d. I would be surprised if more colours do not come to light, such as olive-green in the 1d. and yellow-buff and magenta in the 1½d. These stamps to my knowledge are always found perforated and with 'SPECIMEN' type 'A' overprint—short 'V' in 'M', in black.

It is in the ½d., 3d., 6d. and 1s. values that an interesting field opens up. These can be found in a variety of colours, with and without watermark, with and without 'SPECIMEN' overprint, imperforate, partially imperforate and perforated, singly, in pairs and in blocks of four with gutters. The 12 colours are recorded, but I believe there are only six, with shade variations accounting for the others. These are red, magenta, purple, deep sage-green, brown and blue. The 'SPECIMEN' overprint is type 'B', with the 'V' of the 'M' reaching to the base of the letter.

However, there are other colours of the 3d. on watermarked paper without 'SPECIMEN' overprint, which leads me to believe they are early colour trials. These are in orange and rich grass-green, as well as the red and sage-green already listed. Each item is a top left-hand corner vertical gutter pair. Gutter pairs? What is going



In Samoa, perhaps in deference to the German population ... Victory stamps were only available on request



Block of the 1s. value showing both types of overprint and albino impressions. The parallel lines indicate where the overprint should be placed

on? The rich grass-green carries a printer's mark and notation 'Die accepted 15/11/1919'.

The questions tumble. Accepted by whom? For what purpose? The date is six days after the set was released in Britain. If De La Rue was going to use them for trade promotion, why did the Die have to be accepted? Colours yes, but the Die? Could the New Zealand Government have been going to do something extra, but cancelled the idea once news of the set's release in Britain drew so much indignation in New Zealand?

Gutter pairs

Each of these four values can be found in gutter pairs, blocks of four with gutters and in sheetlets of eight of two values with gutters—the 3d. above the 6d. and the 1s. above the 1s. The *Postage Stamps of New Zealand* records these as being printed in sheets of 16 and records horizontal pairs of the 3d. and 6d. and the 6d. and 1s. I would be most appreciative to hear from anyone with these. To date, I have not seen such pairs and thus doubt that sheets of 16 were produced. The 3d. colour trials mentioned

earlier did not come from these blocks as the selvedge below the lower stamp is wider than the gutter used in the 3d. and 6d. sheetlet.

Pride of place in my collection is a gutter block of the 1s. which shows both type 'A' and 'B' 'SPECIMEN' overprints, and even 14 albino impressions, in various positions on the sheetlet. The printer has drawn in parallel lines showing where the overprint should be placed. Obviously a trial, but sadly undated. Are there other values used as trials like this?

The issue was also overprinted for use in Samoa. The date of issue has not been recorded. I have a cover with complete set postmarked on 27 July 1920 at Apia, which purported to be the first day. However, I have since found a 1s. with a 21 July 1920 Apia postmark. Evidently, perhaps in deference to the German population still present after New Zealand took over the islands in 1914, the Victory stamps were only available on request. There are some overprint varieties. The most noticeable are a double overprint on the 1s. value and an inverted 'V' for the letter 'A' on one stamp of the 1½d. sheet.

In conclusion, New Zealand's Victory issue of 1920 continues to cause controversy more than 80 years after its issue. The study is fascinating, but locating further examples of the De La Rue colour trials/proofs 80 years on may prove a difficult challenge. I welcome correspondence from anyone who can throw more light on any of the questions raised in this article.

About the author: Len Jury is a well-known stamp dealer and keen collector from Auckland, New Zealand. He visits stamp auctions and major shows in England three to four times a year. His 1920 Victory entry won a Large Vermeil at the 2002 Northpex New Zealand National Stamp Exhibition. He can be contacted by writing to him at Box 4400, Auckland, New Zealand or to his e-mail lenjury@xtra.co.nz address. Len is also a regular advertiser in *Gibbons Stamp Monthly*.

Len wishes to acknowledge the *Postage Stamps of New Zealand* volumes, published by the Royal Philatelic Society of New Zealand for much of the information on which this article is based.

This article is one of a series written specially for GSM by members of the New Zealand Society of Great Britain in recognition of the 50th anniversary of the Society this year.

The Society caters for all levels of collecting and holds a main meeting in London every other month, as well as regional meetings in Scotland, the North and the Midlands. Member benefits include a circulating packet, annual auction, competitions and a comprehensive library, not to mention the Society's award-winning bi-monthly journal, *The Kiwi*.

For further information please contact the Honorary Secretary, Keith C Collins, 13 Briton Crescent, Sanderstead, Surrey, CR2 0JN; telephone 0208 657 4566 or through the Society's website: www.cs.stir.ac.uk/~rgc/nzsgb/

Samoa overprint on the 1½d. showing an inverted 'V' for 'A' on the first stamp in the block



Block of the 1s. value showing 'SAMOA' double overprint

