

Australia in Depth (Article #75)

By Simon Dunkerley (29th May 2003)

'New Discovery!' **KGV Large Multiple Watermark SIDEWAYS ½d Green,** **with watermark pointing to RIGHT.**

There has always been something special about watermark sideways errors. This is particularly the case with Australian Commonwealth stamps, as the list of such errors recorded is very small. Those known are restricted to the *Kangaroo*, *KGV* and *Postage Due* issues as listed below.

At this point it is important to clarify the direction of watermark sideways errors. My preference on how to view the *direction* of watermark sideways errors is to refer to them as they are seen from the *front* of the stamp. The Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue (ACSC) uses this policy, however, Stanley Gibbons (SG) note the direction as viewed from the *back* of the stamp. As watermarks are normally read from the front, to change it for *any* errors can lead to confusion. This is important for watermark sideways errors, however, it becomes paramount for errors such as 'inverted reversed' which can cause real confusion if not approached in this way.

In the *Kangaroos*, the ½d watermark sideways was first discovered in 1991. This example, with an attractive 'TOORONGA' circular date stamp in very fine condition, has the watermark pointing towards the *left*, and I was fortunate to handle it at that time. Since then, two examples have turned up, each with some faults and showing the watermark pointing towards the *right*.

Still in the first watermark, the 1d is scarce, particularly in mint condition. In this value it is recorded in both die I and die II, with examples pointing to left or to right in both instances. It is not recorded in the die IIA version of this stamp.

In third watermark, the 1/- is by far the most plentiful of our watermark sideways errors, although it is very rare in *genuine postally used* condition, as the vast majority of these appear to have been discovered at the time of issue. A significant number were purchased in sheets and large blocks by the collectors of the day rather than being used. It is also believed that some sheets were destroyed by the Note Printing Branch. The 5/- of which only one used example is known, together with the 10/- and £1 *chestnut* and blue are all very rare in *any* condition.

In the *KGV*, the *single watermark* ½d green was listed at one stage with sideways watermark; however, this is believed to have been an error. It has now been deleted from the Australian Commonwealth Specialists' Catalogue (ACSC), as there is no remaining substantiated evidence that it exists. The large multiple watermark ½d green with watermark sideways was listed in the mid 1970's for the first time. It was unpriced for most of this time and priced in 1982 at \$100.

A mint example of the small multiple watermark perf 13½x12½ 1½d scarlet, with the error resulting from a piece of additional paper at the top-left corner of a sheet was last offered at auction in 1989, where it was sold together with the sheet that it came from for \$5000. The stamp showing watermark sideways is printed on the gummed side of the paper, with some of the ink removed. In addition, the position in the sheet occupied by that stamp is blank underneath. This remarkable error is not currently listed in the catalogues.

In the Postage Dues, the 1912-23 thin paper 3d and 4d watermark sideways errors are well known and very popular. The 3d is very rare, with only a few examples mint and used known, whilst the 4d is a little more plentiful. It is rare mint and scarce used. Used blocks of six of the latter have been recorded with numeral and circular date stamp cancellations; however some of these are believed to have been broken up.

Other than the *KGV* 1½d scarlet, the watermark sideways errors occurred in one of two possible ways. Firstly, the sheets were incorrectly guillotined prior to printing for those printed in vertical format (upper and lower sheets only). An example of this is the *Kangaroo* ½d value. Secondly, due to accidentally turning the sheet ninety degrees to left or right 'prior to feeding into the press during four-plate printings', as noted in the ACSC. In the case of the latter, these relate to printings where the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the sheet were very close, so such an error is feasible where a sheet might have been dropped and

then placed back incorrectly. An example of this is the Kangaroo 1d value.

As the watermark on some of the sideways errors is known pointing to left and to the right, there is room for improvement in the catalogue listings. The ACSC lists the direction only for the ½d and 1d Kangaroos, whilst the fact that the only known example of the 5/- sideways shows the crown pointing to right is mentioned in a footnote. Stanley Gibbons only lists this distinction for the 1d value. It would be useful on two fronts to add the direction of the watermark to *all* listings. Firstly, the listings would be expanded to detail all of the currently known errors. Secondly, as will be demonstrated by the KGV ½d below, all new examples found can readily be compared to those already traced. For example, it may well be that the 10/- and £1 watermark sideways errors exist in *both* directions. I am not sure whether anyone can confirm or deny this possibility at the current time. This presents a wonderful opportunity for further research, and the possibility of a great find. Imagine if you found a £1 sideways that was in the opposite direction to all of the other known examples!

KGV ½d Green Large Multiple Watermark Sideways

At the Premier Philately auction of 17th May, we saw the second recorded example of the ½d green watermark sideways error come under the hammer for the first time. Although offered in less than perfect condition, it fetched \$25,000 plus 13.2%, making a total of \$28,300. This compares to an estimate of \$5,000, a 'current' ACSC value of \$8,000, and an SG value of £4,000 (exactly \$10,000 as I write). Although it was offered without a certificate, I have no doubt that it is genuine. This example will be known as example number two of the ½d green watermark sideways. Before we go further, it is appropriate to take a look at the history of example number one.

(1) Status Stamps (now trading as Status International) 22nd June 1988



Example 1 Watermark sideways to left

This example was first reported in the philatelic press in the August 1 1934 edition of *The Australian Stamp Monthly*. It was apparently discovered by Mitchell, a well known collector of the time, and is described in the entry as being in good condition. In the September 1 edition of the same year, it is noted as being shown by Mitchell at a meeting of the *Philatelic Society of Western Australia*. It also rated a mention in the newspaper shortly after that.

As I write, this example last came under the hammer almost 15 years ago. Featured on the front cover of that auction catalogue, it was described as 'a great rarity'; true then and still true today. This example shows a portion of a Western Australian roller cancellation and was offered with a certificate of genuineness from the Royal Philatelic Society of Victoria (dated 15th July 1987) at an estimate of \$1,600. I was in the room at the time with a bid well above estimate; this ultimately proved unsuccessful as it opened at \$1,900 and was finally knocked down for \$3,200. The buyer was Rod Perry. That was the total price, as this was before the days of buyer's commission at that auction. This example had previously been owned by well known Adelaide dealer David Mortimer. Speaking to David recently, he recalled how he had not been lucky enough to find it, but had bought it as the error, out of the UK he thought. I remember seeing it on display in his well known Adelaide shop. Upon asking how much it was, I was advised that 'it is going to

auction'. The rest is now history!

Although it has not been auctioned since 1988, it has changed hands privately on at least one occasion during the interim for an undisclosed amount, and currently resides in an outstanding Gold medal collection of KGV, and was most recently exhibited in Belgium during 2002.

The listing in the ACSC is based on this example; with no mention of the fact that the watermark (as depicted by the tops of the crowns from the front of the stamp) points towards the LEFT of the stamp. It is catalogued at \$8,000 in the current ACSC (2001) and £4,000 in the 2003 edition Stanley Gibbons 'Commonwealth & British Empire Stamps 1840-1952' catalogue.

I have recently been able to inspect this stamp and note that it exhibits the typical appearance of a large multiple watermark stamp. This being due to the relatively poor quality paper, similar to that associated with many of the Harrison printings of the 1d red in this watermark. The stamp itself is in a dull green shade and gives the appearance of being a poor quality printing.

(2) Premier Philately 17th May 2003



Example 2 Watermark sideways to right

With little known of the history of this example, it was offered by Premier Philately in their most recent auction with an estimate of \$5,000, and a statement that the estimate '...is likely to prove conservative'. Not surprisingly, that proved to be correct, with a starting price of \$8,750, before selling for a total price of \$28,300 as mentioned above. This almost *doubles* the previous record for any used KGV item. Whilst this is an extraordinary price in some respects, I believe that it represents better value than do some of the recent realisations that we have seen.

Speaking to Gary Watson after the auction, he was able to confirm that the vendor had recently found this error in a bundle. Someone out there is celebrating a very special find!

This stamp is quite attractive visually, being reasonably centred and with a nice portion of the 'CURLEWIS' (NSW) – DE18 circular date stamp. It exhibits a clearer print than the other example, due to a higher quality paper being used for its printing. It is also in a slightly brighter shade. Although described as '...a little faded and with faint pink stain at top...'; I prefer it to example number one. I do not believe that it is faded and also believe that the pink stain could be carefully removed, although such a task would not be one for the faint hearted! Other significant philatelists that I have spoken to since the auction agree with this opinion. At the time of the auction, I bid on it accordingly, although unsuccessful once again! *I have no hesitation in rating this as Australia's greatest used KGV stamp.*

It has been confirmed that examples 1 and 2 will be exhibited side by side in the future, and I look forward to that day. Whilst rather unobtrusive from the front, when that happens, I have no doubt that together, they will make the greatest used combination of Australian KGV stamps ever displayed.

What can you find?

As with any such error, where the value increases from around \$1 for a normal stamp, it is worth looking through all of those bundles, loose examples, or old album pages tucked away. I cannot guarantee that you will ever find one. However, what I can guarantee is that if you do not look, then you will not find one! Happy hunting, and if by chance you do find one, please let me know, so that it can be recorded!

Simon Dunkerley

