

Varieties of the Papua Series – hidden Gems!

The Papua Series of 1907-11 represents a fascinating area with a plethora of scarce varieties which offer enormous pleasure for the collector and in addition, have yet to realise their true market value. The purpose of this article is to outline the Papua Series, create an awareness of some of the varieties and consider how to value varieties which are not normally listed in catalogues. This discussion on the vignette and frame varieties of the Papua Series is limited to those varieties which are derived from the lithographic stones themselves, and not those derived from irregularities due to foreign matter or ink during the printing process.

The Papua Series is divided between two categories based on the letter size of the title 'PAPUA' referred to as Small Papua and Large Papua. While the Large Papua 1910-11 was predominately printed on paper with watermark Upright and perforated gauge 12½ (except for the 1907 printing of the ½d and 2/6 values only with Wmk Upright, Perf. 11, & Wmk Sideways, Perf. 12½), the Small Papua series was printed on paper with the watermark both Upright and Sideways and perforations both 11 and 12½ thereby producing 4 distinctly different sets of values from ½d to 1/- shilling. In addition, changes and developments in the lithographic stones themselves have given rise to a plethora of interesting and unique stamps.

The lithographic stones of the Papua series were produced from the printing plates of the British New Guinea (BNG) Series which consisted of two sections, the central vignette illustrating the Lakatoi, and the outer frame. In order to produce the lithographic stones the original 4 working BNG vignette plates referred to as A, B, 1 & 2 and the 7 BNG working frame plates for each value were used. Four new lithographic vignette stones were developed from the BNG working plate A (referred to as Vignette Stones I, II, III and IV). Frame plate stones for each value were also produced from the respective BNG copper engraved frame plates. These vignette stones and frame plate stones were brought together to print the various values as per the table below. Values printed using that vignette stone will display any flaws present across those values, whereas frame varieties will be limited to that value alone.

Values	Vignette	Frame
Large Papua ½d	Stone I	½d
Large Papua 2/6 Type A (1907)	Stone II	½d
Small Papua ½d to 1/-	Stone III	½d to 1/- respectively
Large Papua ½d to 1/-	Stone IV	½d to 1/- respectively
Large Papua 2/6 Type B & C (1910)	Stone IV	1d
Large Papua 2/6 2 nd Printing (1911)	Stone IV	2/6

From the table you will notice the Small Papua were printed using the Vignette Stone III. But, the Large Papua were printed using the Vignette Stone IV. Each of these stones have uniquely different vignette varieties. The Small Papua has five distinct varieties, whereas the Large Papua has only two. There are three vignette varieties that appear throughout the Small Papua series on all printed values. These are the "Spot in the Sky" [20], the "Rift in the Cloud" [23], and the "Comet" flaw [28]. The other two Small Papua vignette flaws are the "Pole to Sail" [7] and the "Cross on the Hill" [11] which appear in various quantities due to developments in the 'States' of the vignette stone III. This stone is described as being in 5 different states with the

first stamp issues reflecting the first three states, before the stone was retouched to defuse the appearance of the 'Pole to Sail' flaw and removed other flaws like the 1d 'Line through the 1 of the left hand value tablet [24]. This change in appearance of the "Pole to Sail" flaw defines State 4. State 5 was defined by the emergence of a vignette flaw in position [11] the 'Cross on the Hill'. A detailed discussion and explanation of the varieties would require considerably more exposition however, my initial purpose of this article is to raise your awareness to their existence, and consider the merits

The scarcity of any particular flaw is a result of its origin. Some flaws were transferred from the original engraved plates of the BNG series or from the transference process and are consistent through all printings, some from retouching of the lithographic stones themselves and can appear in quite limited numbers depending on when the stone was retouched, while additional consistent flaws changed appearance or state and or emerged through use over time and similarly appear in limited numbers. The relative scarcity of these varieties is a function of quantities of the base stamp printed and the origin of the flaw itself.

The value of any stamp like any commodity is the result of the 'supply and demand' curve. In this case the 'supply' side of this equation might be said to be in decline as stamps age and are slowly destroyed by circumstances making the remaining stamps even more valuable. While the initial assessment for the value of a stamp is its' relative scarcity, it is the demand side of the equation that has the greatest impact on the value of a stamp. This is one of the reasons why the stamps of Papua and New Guinea have always attracted high values. Interestingly, it is one of the few countries where the postally used stamps often attract higher prices than the mint item. This again is due to their relative scarcity. The other main reason for stable high prices is the broad world-wide base of collectors from countries like England, Australia, New Zealand, America, Germany and other European countries. So, a large market base coupled with a steadily declining availability across a range of limited or scarce items has assured stable high prices. The Papua Series is a great example of this. While still being affordable and fascinating from a philatelic point of view it can also be seen as an area for good investment returns.

The big question is always how much should I be prepared to pay, and what should I buy? If you asked Jerry Blair, one of the leading authorities on PNG stamps in Australia, he would say "be disciplined, and only buy quality". While some stamps are so scarce as to be rare and would present the exception to the rule, on the whole I believe he is right. In which case, the starting point should be auction prices from a professional auction house like Prestige in Australia, UK or America. For main stream items Catalogues like Stanley Gibbons (SG) update their price estimates based on auction results around the world and provide a starting point. But when it comes to the varieties of Papua and New Guinea, they are stunningly silent. So, let's consider how to evaluate and determine a price based on current market values for the base stamp.

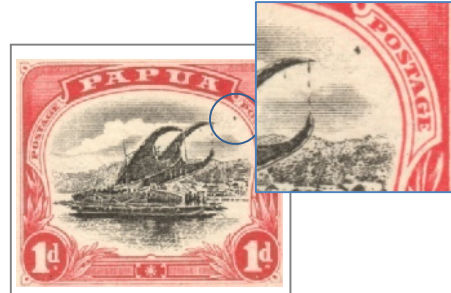
The degree of scarcity of any particular stamp in some cases can only be resolved by deduction and extrapolation as figures for quantities printed of the Papua Series are not available, and figures for the Large Papua are general. In the majority of cases there is usually only 1 of any variety in a sheet of 30 Papua Series stamps. This means that there are 30x fewer of them than the base stamp. This calculation becomes marginally more difficult and significant when dealing with varieties that changed form during printing like the "Pole to Sail" [7] with 4 distinct states (changes in appearance), or appeared late in the printing process like the "Cross on the Hill" [11]. Or for example, colours that were printed in small quantities like the 2½d Bright-

ultramarine which is more scarce than the Pale-ultramarine. As such I would propose that base stamp prices can provide a starting point to which a premium needs to be calculated. And this premium should reflect the relative scarcity.

Illustrations: Vignette Varieties of the Small Papua.



Pos 11: "Cross on the Hill" – on RH on the horizon of the hill
State V



Pos 20: "Spot in the Sky" – below P of POSTAGE to RH



Pos 23: "Rift in Cloud" – a white curve line above the Lakatoi in the sky



Pos 28: "The Comet" – vertical line to RH of the tip of upper claw of sail



State 3
The pole has an elongated black dot parallel and to the right of it.

As a practical example, consider the Large Papua frame variety SG48a 2/6 "POSTAGIE" [4]. This is one of the few frame varieties listed by Stanley Gibbons in the 2009 Western Pacific edition. The SG48 2/6 base stamp had only 4,080 printed and is currently valued at about \$100. The SG48a "POSTAGIE" is valued at \$1,100. This would reflect an 11x premium multiplier. The other frame variety listed is the 4d "Deformed 'd'" [18]. Again, the value of the base stamp of

the SG63 4d is \$9.50 whereas the 'Deformed 'd'' version SG63a is valued at \$64. This is about a 7x multiplier. Recent auctions have achieved even higher prices for these varieties. For example, bidding at Prestige Auction in April this year for a MH and FU SG48a reached \$1,400 for the MH and \$2,500 for the FU item. These auction prices reflect an even higher premium.

In reflection though it can be said that the demand side of the equation has been positively affected by the notoriety of this particular variety (it is listed in SG and other catalogues). However, there are other varieties that are equally scarce and philatelically desirable like the vignette varieties and certain frame varieties of both the Small and Large Papua. The scarcity of some of the vignette varieties particularly with reference to colour and vignette State has been underplayed. Not only are the stamps of Small and Large Papua intriguing with all the varieties, I'm of the opinion that there is still considerable room for appreciation in value of these lesser known but equally rare varieties. Clearly even the basic variety is worth more than double the SG valuation, with those particularly limited items worth up to 11x the listed base stamp valuation.

A detailed study has been done on this subject with illustrations, listings and tabulated data presenting all the information as an easy to use reference source complete with a CD of high-resolution scans of Small and Large Papua full sheets. If you wish to follow-up on this fabulous issue please contact PnR Philately on 07-3286 6651 or go to the web site www.pnrphilately.com.au