

# Pahang: A Fresh Look at the 1897 Bisects—Part 1

Rob Holley reviews the circumstances surrounding this issue

**The only accepted occasion of stamps being bisected in Malayan philately occurred in 1897 at a place called Kuala Lipis in the state of Pahang. (Some Indian adhesives were similarly divided in Singapore in 1859 but that was in the Straits Settlements and before the colony had stamps of its own.) With the Pahang bisects now comfortably past their centenary it is perhaps time to review the circumstances of their issue, and, after sifting some of the philatelic wheat from the chaff, to assess their validity. This article will also take a look at some of the men involved with them, in 1897 and later.**

Today, Kuala Lipis is a bustling town in the centre of modern Malaya and, although outside the mainstream of commercial life along the western seaboard, is well served by both road and rail. This was not so in 1897, however, when the town was a rough and ready settlement newly established by the British after they had assumed protection of the state of Pahang in 1888. They regarded a central location as important for a state capital and, although Kuala Lipis was deep in the jungle, chose it as their administrative centre in preference to the royal and ancient Malay town of Pekan on the coast. As a result, in the first few years of its existence Kuala Lipis's links with the outside world, were, at best, rudimentary. The Pahang River served as the main road to the east but, even when it was fully navigable, required a 200-mile journey of several days down to Pekan where steamers provided a link to Singapore. To the west was a jungle track, initially traversable only by foot-runner, but later widened to an 8ft bridleway, providing access for bullock carts to rumble the 83 miles over the central mountain range to the nearest railway link at Kuala Kubu in the State of Selangor. Although an early start had been made to convert this bridleway to a road, it was not completed until 1898 when the Resident (the chief British official in Pahang) and the telegraph moved from Pekan to Kuala Lipis. It seems these poor communications may have contributed, at least in part, to the stamp shortage which occurred in August 1897.

## Postal duties

A British district officer was posted to Kuala Lipis the year after Pahang became a protectorate and a post office was set up on his arrival which would have been amongst his many responsibilities, although its day-to-day running would have been left to a native clerk. The office itself would probably have been on the ground floor of the district office building but, other than being accessible to the public, it is doubtful if it bore much resemblance to a modern post office. Business was not brisk—total stamp sales in 1896 were \$950 (postal and revenue) and though these increased to \$1249 in 1897 (representing about half of the annual total for Pahang) the clerk would hardly have been overworked as, assuming roughly 300 working days in a

year, postal income would have been little over \$4 a day on average.

In August 1897 Kuala Lipis would have had only six values of Pahang stamps in stock, four postage and two revenue, plus an indeterminate number of Straits stamps (judging from postmarks, mainly 5c. and 8c. values), which were needed to frank foreign correspondence. None of the Federated Malay States, of which Pahang was one, was a member of the Universal Postal Union, and so their stamps had no postal validity beyond the Malayan Peninsula. The States therefore had to buy Straits Settlements stamps, at face, from the postal department in Singapore and these were then sold on to those members of the public wishing to write overseas. The Annual Report of the Straits Settlements Postal Department for 1897 stated that a total of \$470 of Straits stamps were sold to Pahang in 1897 for this purpose. Assuming these were all sold during the year and that half were sold in Kuala Lipis (the same proportion as for total stamp sales in the state) then about \$235 of the \$1249 of stamps

sold in Kuala Lipis in 1897 were not state stamps at all. This reduces the daily sales of Pahang stamps in Kuala Lipis to about \$3.30. (\$1249 minus \$235 divided by 300 working days.) The significance of this figure will become clear when the number of bisects sold is considered.

Three of the Pahang postage stamps held in Kuala Lipis post office, 1c., 2c. and 5c., showed a half-tiger emerging from the jungle, *Fig 1*. The other, a 3c., was in the new design of a tiger's head, *Fig 2*. The two revenue stamps were a 5c. and a 10c. (both overprinted Straits stamps) but their sales were probably negligible as they are both scarce to rare today. It seems it was the 3c. postage stamp (franking the local letter rate), and also perhaps the 2c., which ran

short in August 1897. The cause, it seems, was an indent for a new supply being overlooked or mislaid in the State Treasury in Pekan.

As can be seen from the bibliography, much has been written over the years about the means taken by the Kuala Lipis District Officer, John Fortescue Owen, who rather curiously had the title of 'Superintendent', to

meet the stamp shortage, i.e. bisecting a quantity of 5c. stamps and marking the two halves '2c.' and '3c.' in manuscript figures. Bisects are every postal administration's nightmare as they are so vulnerable to abuse, and it appears the Pahang provisionals of 1897 were no exception.

.....  
**Bisects are every postal administration's nightmare as they are so vulnerable to abuse**  
 .....

**Fig 1 Tiger emerging from the jungle**



**Fig 2 Tiger head**



### Inaccuracies

The first article about them was by R E James which appeared in *Gibbons Stamp Weekly* in 1907. The author claimed to have met Owen in the Kuala Lipis Club and that the article was based on what he had been told. It contains so many inaccuracies, however, that the claim must be doubted. Unfortunately, being the first to appear in print on the subject, this article has been the main one used by subsequent writers and so its inaccuracies have been repeated time and again and, indeed, can still appear today. Quite unnecessarily, as it happens, as the great pioneer of Malayan philately, Dr F E Wood, took the trouble to verify the facts by seeking out J F Owen, then retired and living in London, and wrote up his findings in the *Philatelic Journal of Great Britain* of January 1934. For reasons of his own, however, Wood was a little reticent about one or two aspects of the affair and perhaps this is why doubt still seems to surround the status of the bisects.

### The basic facts

Wood's 1934 article is rather long but he summarised his findings in the Pahang section of his book, *The Postage Stamps of the Native Protected States of Malaya*, published in 1948, and this is worth reproducing almost in its entirety in order to establish the basic facts regarding how the bisects were produced.

'Mr J F Owen, District Officer and Treasurer at Kuala Lipis, was responsible for keeping a stock of stamps for use at the local post office. He had indented on the State Treasury at Pekan for stamps, but owing to the indent being mislaid these did not arrive. A shortage of 2 and 3 cents stamps occurred so, in order to avoid complicating his accounts, he decided to bisect the 5 cents stamps, of which there was a fair stock, and surcharge one-half 2 cents and the other 3 cents. This was carried on until the arrival of the stock of stamps from Pekan, but he says that at the most it was only a question of two or three days.

'The stamps were first of all bisected horizontally. The top half was surcharged in manuscript "3" and initialled "JFO" in red ink. The bottom half was surcharged "2", initialled and the original figure "5" deleted by a stroke of the pen (Fig 3).

'The remainder were bisected diagonally, surcharged and initialled as above. Mr Owen says that no stamps were bisected vertically as far as he knows (Fig 4).

'Although Mr Owen initialled every half-stamp he did not in all cases write the new figures of value. Many of these were filled in by his clerk—Bloom—and these can be distinguished by the little extra stroke at the top of both the "2" and the "3". This accounts for the difference in the shade of ink used for the figures and initials.

'Mr Owen tells me that the stamps surcharged in black ink were the result of pure accident as he had both red and black ink pots in front of him and he happened to dip his pen into the wrong

pot. One of the stamps in my collection is surcharged with a mixture of red and black ink but the latter predominates.

'In the *Postage Stamp* of August 12th, 1916 (Vol. XVIII, p.238), Lady Egerton states that 780 stamps were bisected.

'Mr Leslie R Ray, writing in the *Philatelic Journal of Great Britain* of October, 1935, illustrates a cover postmarked "2 Au-97" which is the earliest date I have seen.' Fig 5.

These, then, are the main facts most of which are, indeed, unquestionable but the account does not address a number of issues raised by the bisects themselves on which Dr Wood could, perhaps, have been more enlightening if he had chosen or, more likely, if J F Owen had wished. The question of how long the shortage lasted has never been answered satisfactorily, neither has there been an explanation of why so many bisects were made and how such a big proportion of them came to be postmarked in offices other than Kuala Lipis and so long after the shortage.

### A quest for answers

Perhaps one could start on a quest for answers by quoting from a very entertaining book of colonial reminiscences written by a distinguished ex-member of the Malayan Civil Service, Andrew Gilmour, *An Eastern Cadet's Anecdote* (University Education Press, Singapore, 1974). Mr Gilmour was a stamp-collector of long-standing and amongst his philatelic yarns was the following:

'On the first of August, 1897, a peaceful day of routine was spoiled for the District Officer, Kuala Lipis, John Fortescue Owen by name, by an excited postmaster who rushed into his office and broke the news that he had run out of small denomination stamps. "What to do, man? Having only five cent stamps and legal postage rate being three cents!" The DO met the crisis calmly and efficiently. "Bring me a couple of sheets of five cent stamps, scissors and red ink." He carefully bisected each stamp and wrote "3 JFO" on one segment and "2 JFO" on the other. "That should keep you going until the next indent comes through." But alas! In no time the postmaster was back to say there had been quite an unprecedented demand for stamps that morning and his stocks needed replenishment. Next day he required more and, without a thought for the joy he was giving future generations of philatelists, J F O used black ink this time. For the final lot he let the postmaster do the cutting. He chose to cut some across diagonally instead of horizontally—yet another variety! Before the new stocks arrived thirteen sheets in all had been absorbed.

'Now in those early days, and for a full generation thereafter, a heavy share of the weight of responsibility of administering the Malay States fell on young men recruited from the Royal Irish Constabulary. The OCPD Kuala Lipis was a particularly good representative. The career of a police inspector in a backward State offered adventure and responsibility



Fig 3 (far left) Pair of horizontal bisects. The top half surcharged '3', the bottom half surcharged '2'  
Fig 4 (left) Joined pair of diagonally bisected stamps

Fig 5 A bisect on cover postmarked 2 August 1897, 'the earliest date seen'



but the emoluments and perquisites were not on a scale likely to encourage recruiting. Leave terms there were of a kind; but what was the use of leave with no money to spend? So it happened that the OCPD had been in Malaya a long spell without taking any leave. In that same first week of August he further upset the routine of Lipis by applying for and being granted the period of leave to which he was entitled. He set out for Singapore with a light purse but also a light heart, full of high hopes of the potential value of recent quite legitimate purchases made over the counter during frequent judiciously-timed visits to the post office, conveniently situated below the DO's office, where it was possible to buy stamps, a few at a time, as they dribbled down from the scissors and ink sessions upstairs.

'And what a welcome the Singapore stamp-dealers gave him! A few days later he set out on a well-earned and well enjoyed leave in Australia, whence in due course he returned set up in health and fully fortified to bear the shock of the severe reprimand administered to him for disloyalty in turning a crisis to his own advantage—a reprimand which fortunately did not prejudice future advancement in the Force, in which he later became a well-known figure.'

**Ingenuity**

No less a well-known figure than the Commissioner of Police, Federated Malay States, responsible for making the security arrangements for the visit of HRH the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, to Kuala Lumpur in 1922. He retired in November of that year and was awarded the King's Police Medal in 1925 (Fig 6). He died in Hythe, Kent, two years later, aged 57. His estate amounted to £13,216 16s. 5d., a not inconsiderable sum in 1927. The ingenuity he had apparently shown in Kuala Lipis in 1897 had obviously stood him in good stead and one wonders if the size of his estate may not have owed at least something to the generosity of the Singapore stamp dealers.

I wrote to Mr Gilmour asking him for the source of his story and he replied that as far as he knew it had never appeared in print but was a yarn that had regularly done the rounds of the clubs in Malaya and was widely accepted as true. There is, in fact, little reason to doubt it, as, just occasionally, a piece appears on the philatelic market bearing a bisect and also the name of Conlay as part of the address, so perhaps the police inspector did not sell all his bisects to dealers but did a little on his own to give the stamps (or half-stamps) the extra status of a bone fide postmark,

needed if stamp collectors are going to be asked to part with good money for a manuscript provisional, particularly a bisected one.

**Official memorandum**

The suspicion that Conlay was not the only one to take the advantage of Owen's initiative was confirmed some years ago by the appearance at auction of the item shown at Fig 7. It is a memorandum written on an official form, bearing a pair of the bisects, and written from Raub, Pahang, on 14 August 1897, just 12 days after Kuala Lipis post office was hit by the emergency and three days before, according to one version of events by Owen, it ended. At that time Raub was the nearest post office to Kuala Lipis, just 38 miles down the track leading to the railway connection in Selangor mentioned earlier, which prompts the thought that if two bisects could make the journey one way could not some 2c.

and 3c. stamps borrowed from Raub post office have made it in the opposite direction? A couple of runners could probably have done the journey in a day and solved the shortage in the simplest manner possible. But however feasible this solution seems today, it didn't happen in 1897. The memorandum runs as follows:

'My Dear James,  
Herewith a Pahang stamp which one day may be valuable. The 2 cts & 3 cts have run out and the chief magistrate J F

Owens (sic) has to manufacture them out of a 5 cts stamp. Each stamp has to be signed until the new ones, 2 cts and 3 cts, come from Singapore. I am investing (?) \$10 in these stamps. Use that \$20 in sending me a pretty Jap. tea set. You can send it by parcel post to me at Raub. Try and do so quick & I will send some more of these stamps.

Yours Norman Plant'

It is interesting to reflect that if Plant did invest \$10 in the bisects he would have been able to acquire no less than 200 of each value, assuming he bought them 'over the counter', i.e. at face.

**Entrepreneurial optimism**

This memorandum indicates just how quickly news of the bisects had travelled and how immediately some local people became aware of their commercial possibilities. Malaya in the 1890s was a hotbed of entrepreneurial opportunism by both members of the public and officialdom. Some of this opportunism not only exceeded propriety but, on occasion, went beyond the law. For example, the whole of the Kuala Lipis post office staff was dismissed in 1900 for 'irregularities' and the sub-postmaster jailed for four years, discrepancies having been discovered in the post office accounts. It would appear from this that the number of staff in the Kuala Lipis office had expanded considerably between 1897 and 1900, necessary because of a greatly increased turnover—the records showing that in 1900 over 70,000 postal articles passed in and out of Kuala Lipis. The reason for this will become apparent later.

The bisects which, by one means or another, fell into the hands of officials, members of the public and dealers must be the explanation for the enormous number which were subsequently cancelled by

.....  
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.....

**Fig 6 The Commissioner of Police, Federated Malay States**



favour not only in Kuala Lipis long after the shortage ended, but at other offices in Pahang where there could have been no conceivable shortage. Bisects are known bearing the postmarks of Raub, Pekan and Kuala Rompin, although the last are particularly suspect as this office was thought to have closed in 1894 and the use of its canceller thereafter highly irregular. Stamps and even a cover are known post-marked at a post office outside Pahang (Kuala Kubu in Selangor), and cancels have been recorded as late as 1900. It needs to be mentioned that the postmark used in Kuala Lipis at this time consisted of the words 'ULU PAHANG', *ulu* meaning 'up-country' or 'up-river', these words describing Kuala Lipis's geographical position perfectly, see Fig 5, while Pekan's was simply 'PAHANG', and these remained in use until 1899. A desire to get the stamps cancelled was understandable in view of the inevitable suspicions that surround any manuscript provisional but this philatelic activity has inevitably resulted in a scarcity of mint examples today. Also, regrettably, it has reduced interest in the bisects and devalued them in the minds of collectors to the point where some find it difficult to take them seriously. At least one eminent collector of Malaya will not have them in his albums and has expressed surprise that others are prepared to do so.

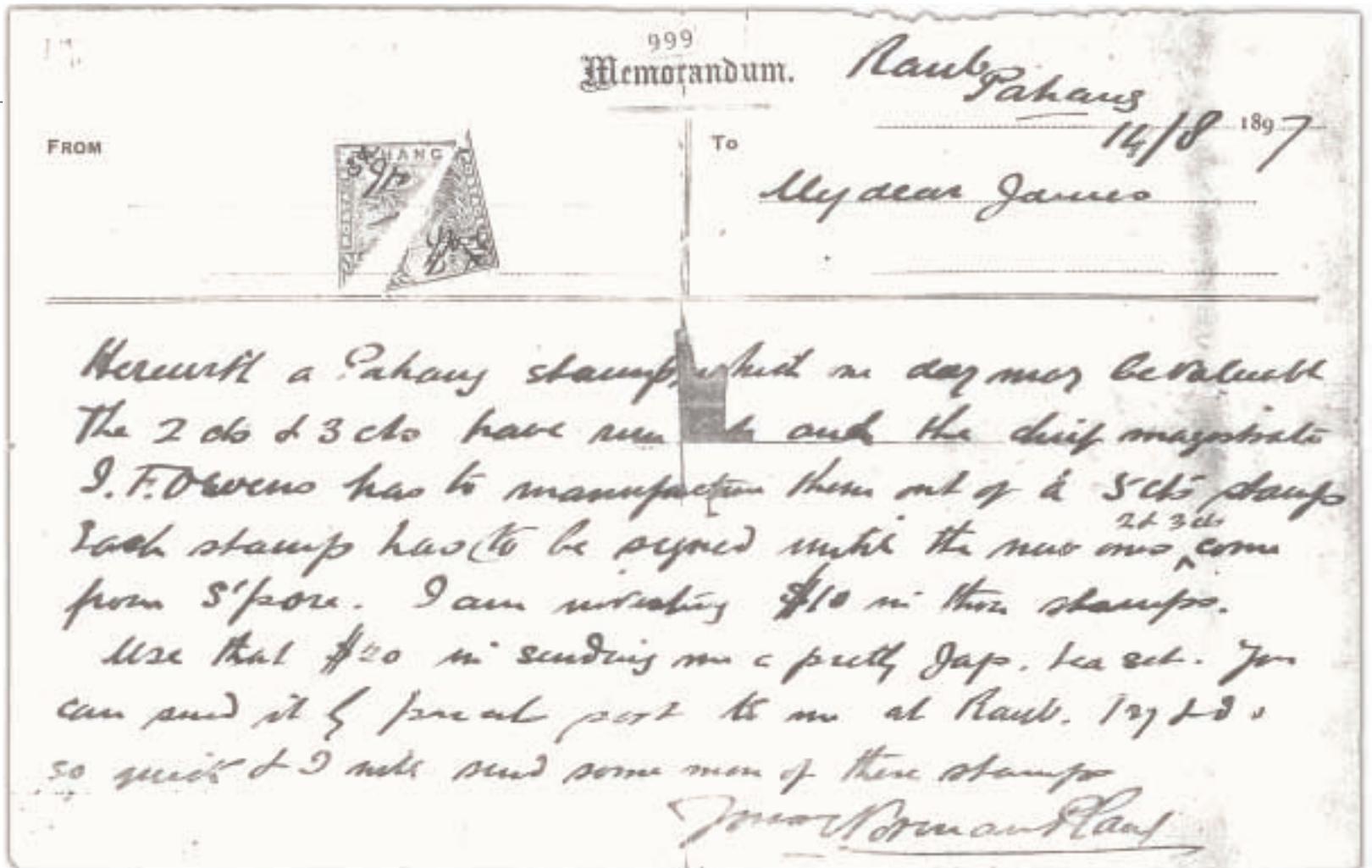
**Too much of a good thing?**

This may be a little unfair as there are grounds for thinking that some of the bisects cancelled at Kuala Lipis in early August fulfilled, in the modern phrase, a 'genuine postal need'. Dr Wood seemed to think so but others are not so sure and a suggestion has been made in a recent publication that, acting together, Owen and Conlay engineered the whole episode, even creating the original shortage by buying up the main stock of 2c. and 3c. stamps in the Kuala Lipis office. Others, also, have felt that the existence of both horizontal and diagonal bisects with both red and black surcharges are just a little too much of a good thing. At the other end of the opinion spectrum, however, Andrew Gilmour (who himself had been for many years a district officer in a remote place in Malaya before World War II, though not in Pahang) was quite convinced the bisects were above suspicion although he was prepared to accept that Owen had been taken advantage of by Inspector Conlay. To see which of these two extreme views is the more credible it is necessary to look at the events in Kuala Lipis in August 1897 a little more closely.

Andrew Gilmour's account in his memoirs contains one small error and that is the date the shortage first occurred. The first day of August 1897 was a Sunday and

post offices in the Federated Malay States closed on the Christian Sabbath. So it must be assumed that the clerk discovered the shortage on the 2nd and this is supported by Dr Wood's statement that 2 August was the earliest date he had seen on a used bisect, i.e. the one on the cover belonging to Mr Leslie Ray. (Fig 5, a cover later acquired by Dr Wood. It is worth mentioning, incidentally, that it is in Owen's handwriting and addressed to a leading emporium in Singapore. Clearly, Owen was making no attempt to conceal the bisects.) If this is the day the shortage began, when did it finish? Unfortunately, although Dr Wood was able to clear up a lot of loose ends in his 1934 article, particularly those contained in the 1907 piece by James, he was unable to discover exactly how long the shortage lasted, due, he said, to Owen being 'unable to remember after all these years, more particularly so, as the matter appeared so trivial at the time that he took little notice of it.' We have to ask, however, whether the incident was so trivial for a postmaster or, more importantly, did Owen really regard it as such? There is evidence to show that his superiors of the time did not, and the Conlay story doing the rounds of the Malayan clubs in the ensuing years should have left him in no doubt that, even if he didn't realise it at the time, bisects are not

Fig 7 Memorandum bearing two bisects and explaining the circumstances of their manufacture



philatelic bagatelle and the making of them hardly a routine event. If Wood was trying to create a smokescreen for Owen by that statement it is not very effective and an impression is left that Owen wished to be obscure on this point and for a very good reason.

**How long?**

The length of time the shortage lasted is crucial when evaluating the credibility of the number of bisects created. Bearing in mind the turnover of Pahang stamps in Kuala Lipis post office in 1897 (calculated earlier at about \$3.30 a day) the number of stamps bisected, 780 (amounting to \$39 worth of 5c. stamps) would have been sufficient to last for about 12 working days and this is assuming no other stamps, postage or revenue, were sold for any other purpose than to frank local (Malayan) letters. So, for how many days did the shortage last? It so happens,

the subject comes up again, in both Wood's 1934 article and the 1948 extract quoted earlier. After relating how Owen had made and used the bisects, Wood wrote: 'This was carried on until the arrival of the delayed supply from Pekan, but at the most it was a question of two or three days only.' Two or three days? But we thought he could not remember! Was this a slip by Owen or by Wood? If it is true and the first day of the shortage was 2 August, then it would have been over by the morning of 5 August at the latest. In which case, \$10 worth of bisects would have been more than sufficient to meet normal demand, although by the 5th it would appear that, thanks to Conlay, demand was anything but normal.

However, there is a different version of events in a letter written by Owen to the PMG Singapore, it seems in response to a demand to explain the production of the bisects. Both letter and envelope still exist. The envelope bears an 1895 3c. (presumably one from the new supply which had just arrived) and postmarks of Ulu Pahang (Kuala Lipis) '23 AUG 97', Raub '26 AUG 97', Kuala Kubu '27 AUG 97', Klang (a port on the Selangor coast) and Singapore '30 AUG 97'—a week from Kuala Lipis to Singapore. The contents run as follows:

'Kuala Lipis  
Pahang  
August 20th (1897)

Dear Johnston,

On account of some bungling in the Pekan Treasury postage stamps indented for on June 17, did not arrive here until August 17th. In the meantime the supply of 2 & 3 cent stamps ran out and the only way out of the difficulty was to cut 5 cents in half making half 2 cents and half 3 cents.

I initialled each stamp before issue. The total number of 5 cents stamps treated in this way was 780 from which were made: 780 3 cents; 780 2 cents.

You may imagine the nuisance of it.

Yours sincerely,  
(Signed) J.F. Owen'

The more cynical might feel that the last sentence smacks of what the Victorians liked to call 'humbbug' and Andrew Gilmour certainly agreed with me on that!

**'Scissor sessions'**

If the shortage did not end until 17 August, then \$39 of bisects would not have been excessive, as Owen must have known. In fact, as there were 13 working days between 2 and 17 August 1897, \$39 of bisects would hardly have been enough to cover normal demand, bearing in mind

the sales figures of \$3.30 a day, although, as pointed out earlier, other stamps for other purposes must also have been sold during this time and made up part of the turnover. Regrettably, however, the 17th cannot be relied upon as it is Owen's prepared version of events for his superior. By the 20th, when the letter was written, one suspects he knew a covering operation was required. Nothing appears to be on record stating when the Pekan Treasury did actually send the new

supply of stamps, but letters took so long to get to Kuala Lipis from Pekan—either up the Pahang River, which could have been low in August, or up the west coast via Singapore, that Owen could have claimed receipt on almost any day within reason. When I pointed out the discrepancy between 'two or three days' and '17 August' to Andrew Gilmour he said he thought Owen's 'two or three days' may have referred to the number of days he had 'scissor sessions', i.e. days when he produced the bisects. Ingenious but not very convincing. It is just about believable that Owen, in his talk with Wood, was unable to remember the dates of the shortage very accurately, especially after such a long period of time, but not the length of the shortage. It seems much more likely that, even in the 1930s, he wished to be deliberately vague on the point, from which we may draw our own conclusions. He was probably aware that the letter in which he had given 17 August as the date the shortage ended was probably still in existence. It did, in fact, end up in Wood's possession but whether he owned it at the time of the interview is not known.

.....  
**A couple of runners could probably have done the journey in a day and solved the shortage in the simplest manner possible**  
.....

**Letters**

Write to us at GSM, 7 Parkside, Ringwood, Hants, BH24 3SH or email [gsm@stanleygibbons.co.uk](mailto:gsm@stanleygibbons.co.uk)

**Gibraltar hits the jackpot**

It has just come to my notice that Gibraltar appears to have hit the jackpot with its latest Europa issue.



Am I correct in thinking this is the first ever £5 commemorative? (*Sadly, no—Ed.*)

Gibraltar has always been one of my favourite 'collecting' countries, but this no longer applies, and I for one will certainly not buy this sheet, or any other with such a ridiculously exorbitant face value—gold foil or no gold foil.

I find it difficult to believe that the Gibraltar authorities are 100 per cent responsible for this concept.

I also realise that Stanley Gibbons has to appear impartial in such matters, but I do implore you as Editor of *GSM* to condemn this issue outright, and hit the perpetrators where it hurts most. Otherwise, without your strongest disapproval being voiced, the floodgates will no doubt be opened even wider. Sadly we no longer have Ken Lake to provide this condemnation.

R Johnston,  
Ayrshire

**Union Jack Correction**

It has taken a little time for me to put pen to paper as I had thought you would have bags full of mail on the subject of the 'Union Jack/Flag'.

The Union Jack (quite rightly) is flown on Her Majesty's ships, but as far forward (fwd) as possible from the Jackstaff, not at the stern, which is where you would find the White/Blue/Red Ensign (as appropriate) being flown from the Ensign Staff.

Peter Longstaff  
Lieutenant  
Royal Naval Reserve (Ret'd)  
Darlington

**Thank you for the support**

I wrote to you some time ago about my fundraising effort selling covers on HMS *Invincible* on her last visit to the North East before being mothballed.

I have now sold all of these covers and have sent cheques totalling £436 to St Cuthbert's Hospice.

*To be concluded*

*Continued overleaf*

Thank you for publishing my previous letter that helped to sell these covers. I could not have raised the money without the generous support of your readers and those of *Navy News*.

I have sold covers all over the UK and abroad. The letters enclosed were very interesting and appreciative of my efforts. Despite this I will not be in a hurry to do this again.

Hazel Ramsay,  
Durham

### Negative attitude

I have recently started to collect again after a break or more than 20 years. One thing I wasn't expecting was Royal Mail's negative attitude towards the hobby.

I tried to purchase a presentation pack from the post office in Stevenage which is also meant to be a philatelic supplier. The lady behind the counter told me that what I had asked for 'meant nothing to her' she then rifled through a drawer and told me they had sold the last one the previous week.

She finished the conversation saying they 'didn't sell many stamps these days'.

I managed to get the pack through one of the companies that advertises in your magazine.

Another topic indicative of Royal Mail's attitude towards our hobby is the insistence

that we all use printed labels as opposed to stamps on parcels and the fact that only values from 1p to £1 are available from post offices.

I always insist on stamps on my parcels but am surprised at the reaction from counter staff which ranges from surprise to disgust—why is Royal Mail doing this?

S W Cody,  
Stevenage

### Battle of the River Plate

With reference to Mr G Moir's most interesting article on 'The Battle of the River Plate' (*GSM*, December 2005) readers might like to see this photograph of the *Graf Spee's* anchor, which I took in January 2004.

The anchor is the principal feature in a monument erected in 1964 to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Battle of the River Plate. It is situated in the port area of Montevideo.

The ship's bell of HMS *Ajose* is within the nearby Uruguayan Naval building, being more secure from would-be pilferers.

R J Maddocks,  
Shropshire



### Memories of RL

I have just read 'on line' an article by David Muscott in remembrance of Robson Lowe. I was his secretary in Pall Mall in 1965/66. Some of David's memories brought back many to me. I was devoted to the old boy even though one day I went out into Pall Mall to find press photographers wishing to find the only girl in London who was prepared to work for such a crank who refused to employ women who wore make-up.

He had a fridge in the office in which was Anjou rosé and at 5.30 p.m. sharp insisted we drank a glass—I still do! I travelled around North America and Canada with him and on his behalf with someone or other Gill's collection of rare stamps, prior to them being auctioned in Pall Mall. I was no philatelist. On flying back overnight with him from Boston he suddenly cried out for all the plane to hear 'you are the most restless girl I have ever slept with'. I was only 20 and I thought that the last word in *risque*!

Sally Barlow (then Davis),  
Domaine de vert Pre,  
Switzerland

### Courageous heresy

In a simple sentence of nine words, your correspondent Michael A Waugh, (*GSM* February 2006), answers all these letters that over recent years have complained of the quantity and/or quality of G.B. stamp issues: 'You do not have to collect every issued stamp.' This is courageous heresy and, like many heresies, it is blindingly self-evident.

In these days of prolific quantities of new stamp issues, it is time the sacred cow of 'completeness' was packed off to the abattoir. Mindlessly buying every new stamp, whether of GB or, say, New Zealand or USA, is mere consumerism.

I congratulate Mr Waugh and hope his letter may give those complaining consumers pause for thought about why they are collecting stamps and how they might better organise their collections.

Richard Wiggins  
Truro,  
Cornwall

### My excellent stamp club

I am very fortunate in being a member of my local club, the Great Yarmouth Stamp Club, as it is one of the best in the country, that is unless you know different! We had a proposal at an AGM a couple of years ago to change the name to a 'Philatelic Society', but the motion was soundly defeated. The more grandiose title, as I notice nearly all Societies are now called, would not have altered the spirit of our estimable club.

At the present time we have 48 members, not many you may opine. The club meets fortnightly throughout the year, the only recess being an inconvenient conflict of interest over the Christmas period! This results in approximately 23 or 24 meetings per annum. Our average turnout at meetings is 34 to 36 members, or 78 per cent of the membership (three of the members only take the packet, why?). Another interesting fact/useless piece of information from the club are membership age groups, 4 per cent under 20, 2 per cent under 30, 2 per cent under 40, 10 per cent under 50, 12 per cent under 60, 32 per cent under 70, 32 per cent under 80 and 6 per cent under 90. The ages run from 13 to 89 years old, with 30 per cent of the membership under 60.

The club holds all the usual meetings such as Chairman's night, President's night, a competition evening, along with two auctions per year, in conjunction with another local 'Philatelic Society'. An average of four to five visiting speakers/other 'Philatelic Societies' are invited to entertain us. From within the club, when we entertain ourselves, we sometimes have to have 'three halves' as the entries are over-subscribed. Apart from the stamp collectors, which literally cover an A to Z of countries, there is further depth in postal history, GB line-engraved to Machins, thematics, revenues, signed covers, airmails, post cards, even down to GB perfins! This being only a brief and not exhaustive list of members' interests. Most members have at least two or three other collecting interests, some more.

Some members have won medals at international and national competition level, published many pieces of literature, and are highly involved in other national philatelic organisations. We hold a bi-annual exhibition to promote awareness of the club locally, and it might even bring in from the cold the solitary stamp collector. There seem to be more outside organised philately than within, why?

Apart from the offices of President and Vice President, all other officers are elected annually, but we are fortunate that we have people willing to undertake these duties for the benefit of the other members. Not like some 'Philatelic Societies' that are desperate for someone, anyone, to take on the positions.

This is just my jaundiced and biased view of my excellent local stamp club. Anything we can do to further our hobby must be for the better.

Captain John D Marriner,  
Great Yarmouth Stamp Club