

"Chalo Delhi"

The real story

by Richard Warren

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A re-examination of the origins of the "Chalo Delhi" stamps in Burma in 1944, together with the mystery of Tom Broomhead's stolen master die, the Sengupta imitations, the status of the reprints, the vexed question of which of the two basic types is the original, and the errors and assumptions made by many previous commentators

Introduction

“The Chalo Delhi stamps were a real racket and no one now knows which are genuine and which duds.”
[Gerald Davis]¹

“My two 1p values obviously come from different plates. Gibbons useless as usual ...”
[Jeremy Pilcher]²

“With variations reported in colours, perforations, printing and size, the ‘Chalo Delhi’ stamps obviously are difficult to guarantee. This author must admit to total bewilderment.”
[Herbert A Friedman]³

“The information on hand about the Chalo Delhi emissions is highly contradictory. In fact, it is in shambles! ... It seems as though one author just copied the errors and misinformation of former writers.”
[Felix D Bertalanffy]⁴

“It’s a puzzlement.”
[Alan Meech]⁵

These exasperated comments pretty well sum up the longstanding state of confusion about the “Chalo Delhi” labels, or unissued stamps. These appear to have been produced in Rangoon in 1944 for use in Indian territory occupied by the Azad Hind Fauj, or Indian National Army, of Subhas Chandra Bose, previous to the retreat of Japanese and INA forces from the India border.

More recently Andrew Freeston has attempted to clarify the picture in his very useful 1999 booklet, *The Azad Hind and Chalo Delhi Stamps*, but I believe that the conclusions he draws in one important respect, regarding the vexed question of “originals” and “forgeries”, are entirely mistaken. But to demonstrate this we first need to re-trace the maze of assertions and judgements that have been made over the years about these two mysterious little stamps. If the evidence is to make sense, we also have to deconstruct the accumulated misinformation. It is not easy to set out the facts in a logical order, but I have done my best to keep this account readable and coherent. My analysis is lengthy, but it needs to be. Impatient readers should skip to the “Conclusions” [page 13] now!

In tackling this, I have made use of on the papers left by the late Gerald Davis, which include copies of a number of early magazine articles that mention these stamps. I have also been greatly helped by the recollections of the late U Aung Myint (Lim Peng Hong), as passed on to his son, Dr Kyaw Win. Ironically, neither of these veteran Burma collectors seems to have had much regard for “these Indian things”, as U Aung Myint was inclined to call them. However, the origin of these stamps has too often been considered as a purely Indian mystery, while in fact it can only be properly understood within the context of the philately of the occupation and reoccupation of Burma, where the stamps were produced.



Pair acquired by Lim Peng Hong, August 1945

¹ Letter to Dr. S Chowdhury, 1991

² Letter to Gerald Davis, 1983

³ Herbert A Friedman, *“Azad Hind” and “Chalo Delhi” Stamps*, Jal Cooper, Bombay, 1972, p 14.

⁴ Felix D Bertalanffy, “The Indian National Army Azad Hind – ‘Chalo Delhi’ Emissions,” *The Burma Peacock*, Vol 6, No 3, p 61.

⁵ Personal communication!

The origins and emergence of the “Chalo Delhi” stamps

At the June 1942 Bangkok Conference, the Indian Independence League adopted resolutions demanding that the Japanese government clearly, explicitly and publicly recognise India as an independent nation. Subhas Chandra Bose of the Indian National Army was adamant that his Indian forces should be the first to cross the frontier in order to establish an independent India. His Provisional Government of Azad Hind (Arzi Hukumate Azad Hind) claimed authority over Indian territory under Japanese occupation, though in practice (e.g. in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands) this was nominal.

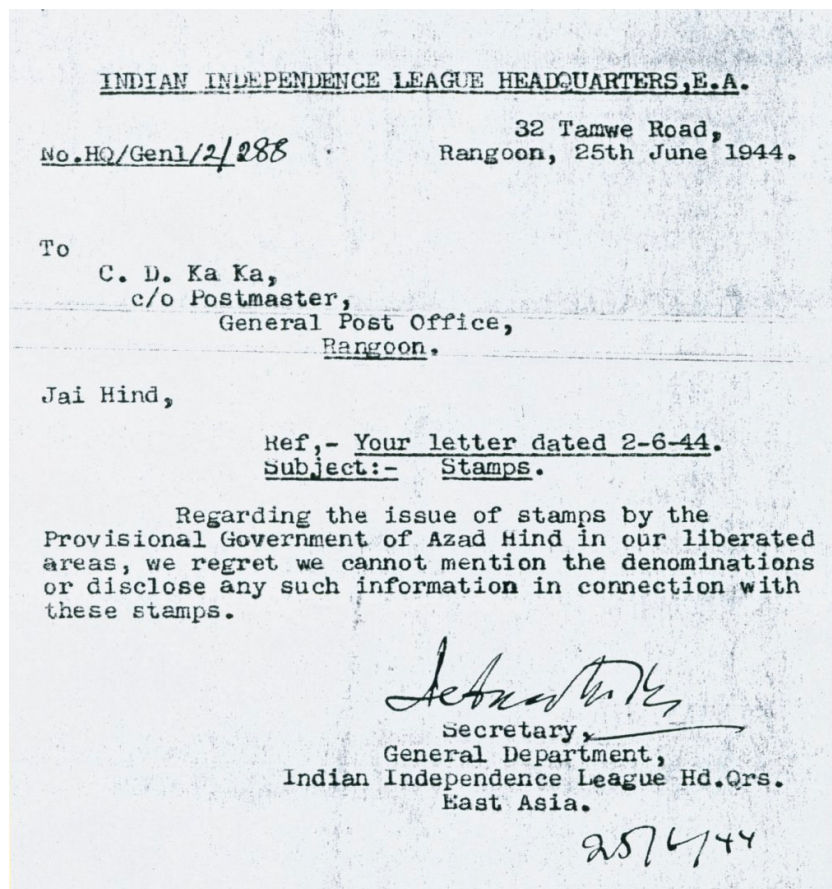
With the assaults of the Japanese and Indian National armies on Imphal and Kohima in April and May of 1944, it was natural that the Provisional Government and the Indian Independence League in Rangoon, their nearest HQ, should have busied themselves with preparations for the administration of this liberated territory, including the production of postage stamps as symbols of national sovereignty.

Ka Ka

The earliest reference I have found to the stamps is in a letter to Cassim D Ka Ka of 25 June 1944, from the Secretary at the Indian Independence League HQ, Rangoon. Ka Ka was a collector, working at Rangoon GPO, and became a well known dealer in 1945, though he died in 1946 or shortly after. He could have been an IIL member.

“Regarding the issue of stamps by the Provisional Government of Azad Hind in our liberated areas, we regret we cannot mention the denominations or disclose any such information in connection with these stamps.”⁶

This was sent in reply to Ka Ka’s enquiry of 2 June, indicating that the stamps were believed to exist by collectors by that date. Though the existence of the stamps is not explicitly denied, it is not clear whether the otherwise unhelpful tone of this answer was for some reason of secrecy, or whether the IIL Secretary was himself in the dark.



⁶ Photocopy, Gerald Davis papers.

Lim Peng Hong

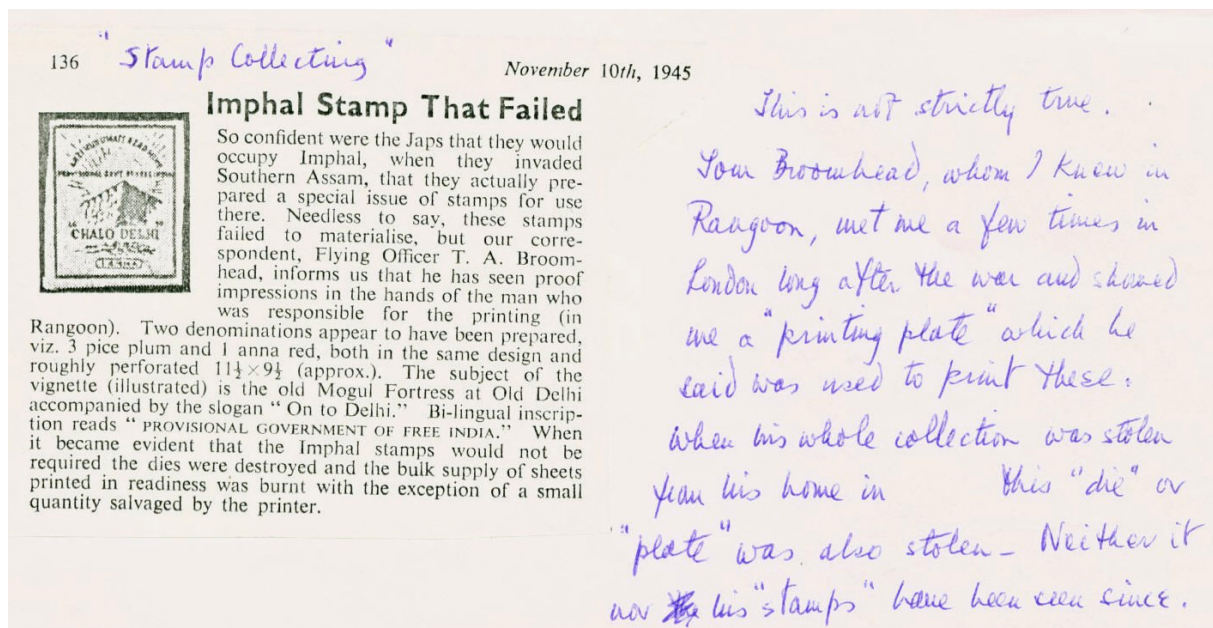
Lim Peng Hong, who later took the Burmese name of U Aung Myint, was an active and much respected collector during the Occupation, and over the following decades.⁷ He died in 2003, but not before passing on his wisdom to his son, Dr Kyaw Win. At one point he prepared an article on the "Chalo Delhi" stamps, but in the event this was not sent for publication, and has not survived.

According to his oral account,⁸ Lim Peng Hong obtained examples of the stamps in Rangoon in August 1945 from an acquaintance who was a member of the Indian Independence League. (This is consistent with the Ka Ka letter cited above.) He managed to obtain a block of four, a pair and a single of each value, all perforated, and an imperf single of each. He was not able to purchase more than these, and the supply appears to have been limited. He afterwards lost contact with this source, who seems to have disappeared before the end of the year. The stamps purchased from this source survive on his album page.

Later, in the early 'seventies, U Aung Myint purchased about fifteen full sheets of "Chalo Delhi" stamps from the dealer U Khin Maung Than, who at that time had a quantity for sale, which he had in turn obtained from a previous source. These sheets, which appear to be the same as the sheets of 100 mentioned below as sold in the 1964 De Roemer sale, will be discussed later.

Broomhead and Smythies

The earliest published references do not appear until November 1945, by which time a good number of collectors serving in reoccupied Burma had long been scouring Rangoon and environs for every variety of stamp. In *Stamp Collecting* for 10 November, a short report on the "Imphal Stamp That Failed" appeared courtesy of "our correspondent" Flying Officer Tom A Broomhead, accompanied by an illustration of a single stamp that must have come from the same source.⁹ Flight Lieutenant Broomhead, in partnership with Flt. Lt. G Mawer, had been actively collecting in Rangoon for some months by this time. He had contributed articles on the Burma Occupation to the same periodical for 14 July and 22 September that year, but had not mentioned the "Chalo Delhi" stamps. We can safely assume that he did not know of them during that period.



Broomhead's *Stamp Collecting* report of November 1945, annotated by Gerald Davis

⁷ See "Lim Peng Hong – philatelist" in *The Burma Fantail* Vol 3 No 3.

⁸ Recollections of U Aung Myint, as told to Dr Kyaw Win, and transcribed by U Kyaw Myint Maung.

⁹ As Felix Bertalanffy pointed out in his article cited above, Broomhead's report was quoted as evidence in the postwar trial of INA officers in India. Was the defence counsel, a Mr B Desai, related to the prominent Indian philatelist of that name?

The short article does not attribute the production of the stamps to any specific source beyond “the Japs”, but it does assert that Broomhead

“... has seen proof impressions in the hands of the man who was responsible for the printing (in Rangoon) ... When it became evident that the Imphal stamps would not be required the dies were destroyed and the bulk supply of sheets printed in readiness was burnt with the exception of a small quantity salvaged by the printer.”

The statement that the “dies” were destroyed was not correct, as we shall see. Simultaneously, a report in “Burma Notes” by the distinguished philatelist Evelyn A Smythies appeared in the *Philatelic Journal of India* for November 1945. Smythies would later co-author with Col. G L Roberts the definitive work on the Occupation stamps of Burma, to which he contributed the section on peacock overprints. At this time he was working for the India Forestry Service in Nepal. His source on Burmese matters was his son, Lt. Bertram (Bill) E Smythies of the Forestry Division CAS(Burma), who had been in Rangoon since May and was sending his father all the stamps and documents he could amass.¹⁰ According to Smythies, the stamps were

“prepared by the Japanese to be issued when Imphal was captured! ... The two stamps were apparently designed and prepared in Rangoon, and are crudely printed like the Farmer and Independence types ... So far as is known, only a few proofs or trial prints were made, and no bulk supplies.”

The reference to the Burma “Farmer” and Independence stamps may be significant, and we shall return to it later. Broomhead and Mawer were probably Smythies’ informants, perhaps via his son, for as an afterthought to his report, he added a crucial footnote that “Lt. Mawer has the master block from which these were prepared.”

Broomhead’s master die

In 1945 Lim Peng Hong was in contact with Mawer, among others, and a “wants list” from Mawer survives among his documents. However, there is no suggestion that Lim Peng Hong was involved in Mawer’s purchase of this “master block”, though the two men met regularly during this period. This item was afterwards sold by Mawer to Broomhead,¹¹ and later became the subject of some controversy.

In his booklet, Andrew Freeston dismisses Broomhead’s statement that he owned this die as “simply untrue” and asserts that it was “unseen by others”. This allegation is unfair to Broomhead and unfounded. Gerald Davis noted that

“Tom Broomhead, whom I knew in Rangoon, met me a few times in London long after the war and showed me a “printing plate” which he said was used to print these. When his whole collection was stolen from his home ... this “die” or “plate” was also stolen. Neither it nor his “stamps” have been seen since.”¹²

“Tom Broomhead had blocks of [the stamps] and the chop from which they were printed, so could always tell [which were genuine]. When his collection was stolen from his house in Cheshire the only positive reference went with it. His whole collection was worth so much that its loss made him terribly ill and eventually this killed him.”¹³

We can take these eye witness accounts as entirely reliable. Before the theft took place, apparently circa 1968, Broomhead had described the “master die” as follows, according to the 1972 account given by Herbert Friedman:

“A Mr Broomhead of Great Britain stated a few years back that he had obtained the master die of the Chalo Delhi pair, purchased in Rangoon in 1945. The die measures 34 x 42 millimeters and contains both the 1p and 1a value tablets ... Apparently the two vignettes are very close together on this die.”¹⁴

Unfortunately, Gerald Davis left no independent description of Broomhead’s die, but he would have been familiar with Friedman’s account, if only through later sources, and he does not seem to have chosen to contradict it. It seems clear that the die existed, and – unless Broomhead was reported incorrectly – in the form described. (As will

¹⁰ As it happens, Bertram Smythies was a naturalist and the author of *Birds of Burma*, 1940, from which the designs of the Burma 1964 and 1968 Burma definitives were derived.

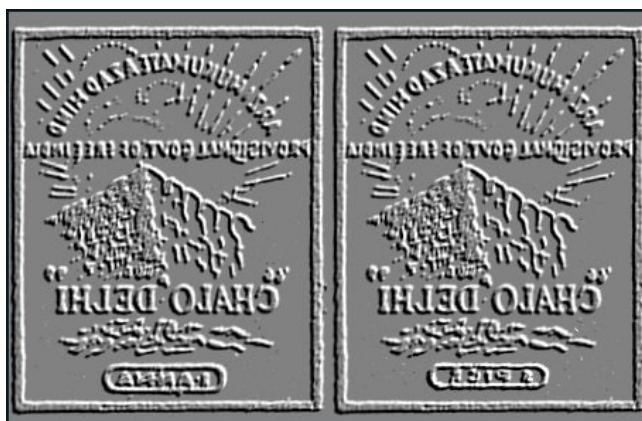
¹¹ Note by Gerald Davis on his copy of Smythies’ article.

¹² Note by Gerald Davis on his copy of Broomhead’s report in *Stamp Collecting*.

¹³ Letter to Dr. S Chowdhury, 1991

¹⁴ Friedman’s citation, in his booklet published by Jal Cooper, is not referenced, and it is not clear whether he is quoting a published source or a letter from Broomhead – probably the latter, given the apparent error in the figure for the width of the die, which may have been hand written. Mr Friedman’s original material is now lost, and he cannot recall his source.

be explained below, the size of the Sengupta prints is itself evidence for the existence of such a die.) However, the second measurement in the account above seems wrong: the printed stamp is just under 23 mm high, and a pair put closely side by side and enlarged to something short of 34 mm in height would fit a width of 52 mm, but not 42. With this proviso, we can reconstruct the general appearance of this die:



Reconstruction of Broomhead's master die, from descriptions

In his 1984 article, Felix Bertalanffy made the assumption that the stamps must have been produced in Rangoon at a "print shop ... an older, smaller print or even souvenir shop," and asked rather optimistically if interested collectors on the spot could try to locate it. At the time U Kyaw Myint Maung, in response to this request, made extensive enquiries among the Indian-owned small presses in the 30th, 31st and Bo Soon Pat Streets area of Pabedan, but without success.¹⁵

There is in fact no particular reason to assume that the anonymous "printer" of the early reports was any kind of small commercial concern. U Aung Myint believed that the "Chalo Delhi" stamps were probably produced under the direction of U Tun Tin, the Director of the Postal Service during the Occupation, in circumstances similar to those in which Burma stamps were printed by the Postal Service. This seems logical, and Smythies' remark that they were "crudely printed like the Farmer and Independence types" lends it some weight. The later emergence of full sheets of 100 also supports this conclusion, as we shall see in due course. It is highly probable that Mawer purchased the die from U Tun Tin, as "the man who was responsible for the printing (in Rangoon)", just as Colonel Roberts acquired the die for the 1942 Henzada peacock overprint from him.¹⁶

As Broomhead's die consisted of two adjacent vignettes, one of each value, it was certainly not the block from which the stamps were printed, as pairs and blocks of four of each value were purchased in August by Lim Peng Hong. It is described in the two primary published sources as a "master block" or "master die". In the process of typography, the term "master die" is used to indicate the single initial image from which multiple blocks are replicated by technical means such as stereotyping or electrotyping. According to Roberts¹⁷, relief blocks for the Burma stamps of 1942-3 were made by a simple photo etching process, which would require only a photographic negative of an original drawn design. The "Chalo Delhi" design does look as if it may have been generated from a drawing, but it is perfectly conceivable that in this case the printing plates were produced by some means from just such a master die. (The question of exactly how the plates were made up will be discussed later, in the context of the sheets of 100.)

In short, there is nothing inherently improbable in Broomhead's account of his die. Loose talk of "dies", "blocks" and "plates", using the terms interchangeably, has not helped our understanding here.

A third early report of the stamps appeared as "The Imphal Stamp" in *Stamp Magazine* for 31 May 1946. Here the informant was the celebrated Bombay dealer Jal Cooper, who revealed that

"a few stray covers were used by troops on the march, and these were brought to India by I.N.A. troops who fell into Allied hands before or after the Japanese surrender ... It was printed in Rangoon, and it is said that the original drawings and die still exist in the possession of a printer there. The design, strangely enough, appears on both sides."

¹⁵ Communication from U Kyaw Myint Maung

¹⁶ The Henzada die was donated to the Royal Philatelic Society, London.

¹⁷ Col G L Roberts & E A Smythies, *The Japanese Occupation Stamps of Burma 1942-1945*, Philatelic Society of India, 1946, p 26, footnote 38.

The last sentence here seems important, but its sense is not clear. (It seems to be the single origin of the curious assertion by Capt. Walter H Adgey-Edgar, to whose account we shall return, that the stamps were “printed on both sides” – a statement that is clearly wrong.) But on what does the design appear “on both sides”? The stamps, or the die? I would suggest the latter, and that this remark is simply a garbled description of a die on which the designs for the two values both appear, “one on each side”, as described by Broomhead and shown above.

The statement that “the die still exist[s]” seems to contradict other reports that it had already been sold to Mawer and Broomhead. However, this is not necessarily a problem. Cooper was clearly working from hearsay in this respect, and there may well have been a delay of a few months between the moment when his informant (or his informant’s informant) saw the die and the eventual publication of his report.

As for the covers described by Cooper, none have ever surfaced, and, as Bertalanffy pointed out, mail sent by Japanese forces was unstamped in any case. This is the only report to mention the survival of original drawings, and it is not clear who Cooper’s source may have been.

The Sengupta prints

Coincidentally, just as Cooper’s report appeared in *Stamp Magazine*, another item by Smythies, among his “Burma Notes” in the *Philatelic Journal of India* for May 1946, seemed to introduce yet another confusion about the printing die:

“CHALO DELHI. Mr Sengupta kindly showed me some prints of the two values of this unissued stamp or essay, printed from the master die in various fancy colours, sets of which I understand he is selling at some small sum for charity. An interesting curiosity for Burma specialists.”



Sengupta’s labels on a later fdc

Sengupta is previously referred to in the same article as “Mr Sengupta of Calcutta”, and was presumably a dealer. This report is not as problematical as has sometimes been alleged. By early 1946, Tom Broomhead would have been de-mobbed, and would have passed through India on his way home. In Calcutta, he would naturally have visited stamp dealers, either to buy or to sell. As he took the die with him back to Britain, he perhaps only supplied Sengupta with a print from it, from which the latter may have generated his reproductions.¹⁸ These are still found today, perforated and in various colours. They measure about 25 x 32 mm, which fits nicely with Broomhead’s statement that the die was 34 mm high overall.

Unfortunately, this report was misunderstood at the time, as can be seen in Adgey-Edgar’s 1946 *Catalogue of Imperial Japanese Overprints and Issues in Occupied British Territories*. Adgey-Edgar was a careful expertiser, but a good many statements in his publication are hasty or unreliable. He cements his misunderstanding of Smythies into the historical record by stating baldly that:

“Unfortunately, the two original plates are in the possession of a dealer in Calcutta who has been producing coloured prints from them for his friends.”

Philatelists are still puzzled today because of this misunderstanding. Adgey-Edgar also repeated and embroidered Cooper’s account in other respects, claiming that the stamps were to be used both for postage and as currency in liberated India, that they were issued to INA troops who used them on covers during the campaign, that they were found in the possession of prisoners, and that “large quantities” of the stamps were destroyed by the FPO of an Indian Division in “justifiable anger”. None of this can presently be substantiated.

After Adgey-Edgar’s account, there seems to have been a long silence, until Robert P Alexander surveyed the evidence, alongside the “Azad Hind” labels, in *Japanese Philately* in 1956, noting that a pair of the 1 pice, signed

¹⁸ If Sengupta’s labels had all been printed directly from this die, they would not show such generous margins, given that, according to Friedman’s report, “the two vignettes are very close together” on the die.

by Adgey-Edgar, had recently been sold by Robson Lowe. In the 1964 Harmer Rooke sale of the Martin C De Roemer collection, sheets of 100 of each value were offered perforated, and large blocks imperf.¹⁹

Two versions: the current consensus

It is well known that two versions of the “Chalo Delhi” stamps exist, one inscribed “PROVISIONAL GOVT. OF FREE INDIA” and the other “PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF FREE INDIA”. (Even so, some prominent commentators have managed to overlook this fairly obvious anomaly.) The two versions differ slightly in other details and in size: the “GOVERNMENT” type lacks the detail of clouds and sunrays, particularly at the upper left corner, and has a thinner frame line. It measures about 18 x 21.5 mm. The “GOVT.” type measures about 17.5 x 22.75 mm. In recent years, a kind of informal consensus has evolved, under which the “GOVERNMENT” type is held to be the original, and the “GOVT.” version is denounced as a forgery. Prices can differ accordingly – and significantly too.



This judgement seems to have been fostered by the late Felix Bertalanffy in his 1984 article in *The Burma Peacock*. Bertalanffy illustrates three stamps in his own collection which, though he does not point this out, are all of the “GOVERNMENT” type. He declares these genuine, on the grounds that they were obtained “from a dealer ... whose honesty and philatelic knowledge are without reproach. Therefore these three stamps ... have to be regarded as genuine.” This is backed by a reference to two similar blocks of four sold in 1983 by another dealer whose auctions, “as is common knowledge throughout the philatelic community ... belong with the most reliable Far East specialized auctions.” The dealers concerned are without doubt paragons of virtue, but to make a judgement on the basis of this criterion alone seems a little naïve. Honest dealers often sell doubtful items in ignorance.

In response to this article, U Kyaw Myint Maung promptly showed Bertalanffy two blocks of four of the “GOVT.” type, bought from U Khin Maung Than in the early ‘seventies, but was told unequivocally that these must be forgeries.²⁰

In his 1999 booklet, which aims to “give collectors a firm footing in collecting these rare stamps”, Andrew Freeston acknowledges his debt to Bertalanffy, and states baldly that the “GOVT.” stamps were “forged at the end of the war” from “forged dies produced by persons unknown in Rangoon”. He ascribes the printing of these forgeries to the “dealer in Calcutta” mentioned by Adgey-Edgar (i.e. Sengupta), but it has been shown above that Sengupta’s reproductions were another beast entirely, and that this cannot be so.

These assertions have influenced the “authorities”. The Gibbons listing now denounces “GOVT.” as a forgery and declares the “GOVERNMENT” type genuine, pricing it at £65 upwards. Expertisers routinely certify “GOVERNMENT” copies as genuine, and JSCA illustrates this type. But does the evidence support them? Dr Kyaw Win recalls his father saying several times “It should be reverse ... reverse!” I believe that U Aung Myint was right.

The earliest evidence: “GOVERNMENT” or “GOVT.”?

The earliest testimony, as we have seen, is sparse, but it does support the case for the “GOVT.” type as the original. Firstly, the stamps acquired by Lim Peng Hong in August 1945 are all of the “GOVT.” type. There is no

¹⁹ Sale catalogue, lots 264 & 265. These fetched £12.10s and £10.10s respectively, against estimates of £10 each.

²⁰ Communication from U Kyaw Myint Maung.

documentary evidence to corroborate their provenance, but there is no reason to doubt the word of anyone concerned.



The stamp shown in Broomhead's report of Nov. 1945

The November 1945 report by Broomhead gives the text of the stamp as including the word "GOVERNMENT" in full, but – crucially – Broomhead's illustration clearly shows a "GOVT." type. This discrepancy seems a little odd, but we can only assume that Broomhead spelt out the word in full in order to make the sense of the inscription clear to his readers. Likewise, he translates the slogan "CHALO DELHI" as "On to Delhi" in the same report, without giving the original wording.

The Sengupta prints were derived from Broomhead's master die. They are of the "GOVT." type.

The first report by Smythies gives "GOVERNMENT" in its description, but – unhelpfully - has no illustration.

Oddly, the habit of showing the "GOVT." type while spelling the word in full passed on to Adgey-Edgar, who illustrated his 1946 listing with a block of six "GOVT.", of slightly damaged appearance, and probably printer's waste.

In the collection of Alan Meech is a copy of the "GOVT." type 1 pice in a vermilion shade of red, accompanied by a London dealer's receipt dated 31 Jan 1948, with the statement:

"I hereby guarantee that this copy of the 1 pice 'Chalo Delhi' is genuine in all respects. This was one of [diagram of block of four] bought from Capt [Adgey-]Edgar. Edgar still has [diagram of horizontal pair], the remaining single is owned by [Vernon] Rowe."²¹

The pair of 1 pice sold by Robson Lowe in 1956, and mentioned by Alexander as signed by Adgey-Edgar, were also apparently of this type, though apparently of a different colour to the pair mentioned above.

The dimensions given in the reports by Broomhead and Adgey-Edgar all match the size of the "GOVT." type. The measurements given by Smythies (18 x 22 mm) are inconclusive.

So, the indication is clearly that the earliest reports are virtually all of the "GOVT." type, even when the vagaries of transcription give the word in full. No early report illustrates the "GOVERNMENT" version. This does not in itself prove that the "GOVERNMENT" type did not exist at an early date - it may or may not be what is described by Smythies - but the evidence does vindicate the "GOVT." type, and undermines the current consensus that all such examples are forgeries.

One, two or three pice?

All sources give the anna value as one, and this is clear on the stamps. Most sources give the pice value as one, though Broomhead's first report gives "3 pice", and a June 2005 Cavendish auction offered a block of "2 pice". The number is very small, and unclear on some copies, but most positions on the reprinted sheet show "1" legibly. A pice is a quarter of an anna, as opposed to a pie which is a twelfth of an anna, 3 pies thus making 1 pice.

The "GOVT." reprint sheets

No early report mentions large multiples or sheets of the "GOVT." type. In fact, the overwhelming impression is that copies were at first hard to obtain, certainly in any quantity. Lim Peng Hong could buy only a few stamps from the ILL, in blocks of four at most, which supports Broomhead's and Smythies' early reports of "no bulk supplies", with "a small quantity" apparently in the hands of U Tun Tin. And yet by 1964 sheets of 100 had, as we have seen, appeared in the De Roemer collection, and during the same period were available in Rangoon. From where did these latecomers emerge?

The unlikely appearance of such quantities after the initial scarcity has probably coloured judgements about the status of these sheets, which in turn may have prejudiced collectors against all copies of the "GOVT." type. However, the full sheets are certainly printed from the same plates as the originals, as the blocks of four purchased by Lim Peng Hong in 1945 can be plated against the full sheets. So the full sheets are not forgeries; they are reprints.

²¹ Communication from Alan Meech.

In the immediate aftermath of the reoccupation of Burma, reprints of the stamps produced by the Burma Postal Service began to appear, in response to the demand by collectors. The plates for the “State Crest”, “Farmer” and “Independence” stamps of 1942-3 were all retained by the postal officials responsible for their original production, and reprints of all these issues appeared post-war on different papers with different perforations. (Though this is common knowledge, these reprints are not acknowledged in the catalogues.)

The paper on which the reprints are printed is a thin off-white wove paper, which shows a visible, but patchy, mesh when held to the light. It is the same type of paper that was used for some of the post war reprints of the Burma “Farmer” and Independence stamps from plates still in the keeping of postal officials. (The “Farmers” on this paper first appeared in 1947. Gerald Davis dated the Independence imperfs on this paper to the 1950’s or 1960’s.)



1 pice block bought by Lim Peng Hong in 1945, cols 5/6, rows 5/6 [left], matched with the same positions from the full sheet of reprints [right] – note relative positions of frame lines. Small plate flaws and idiosyncrasies also match.



1 anna block bought by Lim Peng Hong in 1945, cols 5/6, rows 7/8 [left], matched with the same positions from the full sheet of reprints [right] – note matching plate flaws such as dot above second “A” of “ANNA” in top left stamp, mark above first “E” of “FREE” in lower right stamp, etc.

This in itself indicates that the “Chalo Delhi” plates were in the keeping of the same people, which in turn indicates that these stamps were originally printed by the Burma Postal Service on behalf of the Indian Independence League or the Provisional Government of Azad Hind. U Khin Maung Than, who sold some of the reprint sheets to

Lim Peng Hong, has stated said his source was U Kyaw (U Boon Khin, Khoo Boon Khin) and that U Kyaw was responsible for selling stamps on behalf of U Tun Tin.²² There can be no doubt that the reprints originated with U Tun Tin, that the plates were in his possession, and that he had been responsible for the original printing.

How were the plates produced?

The sheets reprinted from the original plates provide important evidence for this, and the most likely scenario is as follows. The stamp design has the appearance of being reproduced from a drawing, and Jal Cooper, for what his account is worth, does mention the survival of drawings. From the original drawing(s), the master die was produced by photo-etching. Each vignette was about 23 x 31 mm, and the whole die about 48 (not 42) x 34 mm overall.

One hundred prints were made from this die. The 1 pice halves of the prints were used to make up two half sheets – upper and lower - of fifty stamps, in ten columns of five rows each. These two half sheets were then photo-etched onto a single plate, and in the process the size was reduced by about 25%. The next logical step would have been to repeat the entire process with the prints for the 1 anna value, but this was not done for some reason. Instead the “1 ANNA” value tablets were cut and pasted by hand onto the 1 pice half sheets, and the 1 anna plate was made from these, with the same reduction.



The “jump” between the upper and lower halves of the plate make-up, easily visible at the left margin between rows 5 & 6.

It is clear that the second plate was generated from the first in this way because in each half of each sheet the slightly inconsistent spacings between individual stamps are precisely the same for each value, which could not be the case if the sheets had been made up individually.²³ Some small plate flaws appear consistently on both values, which proves the case.

The spaces between stamps in each row are fractionally wider in the upper five rows than in the lower half, so that the left and right frame lines “jump” visibly between rows five and six on each plate. This suggests that each pane of five rows was made up separately. It is clear that the upper five rows were etched onto each plate separately from the lower five rows because, although all the other spacings match perfectly, the margin between rows five and six is fractionally wider on the 1 anna, and the position of the lower half of the sheet is fractionally further to the left.

It is clear that the 1 pice sheet was made up first because the position of the value tablet within each stamp is virtually 100% consistent. The position of each value tablet on the 1 anna plate is visibly very variable, both relative to the lower frame line and in terms of left-right centering. This indicates that the 1 anna value tablets were added by hand onto the two half plate mock-ups for the 1 pice.



Typical variations in the positioning of the value tablets on the 1 anna plate, indicating that they were pasted in by hand.

²² Communication from Dr Kyaw Win

²³ Similar small variations in inter-stamp margins are observable on the sheets of the Burma 1943 Independence issue, for instance, for which the plates were probably made up in a similar manner.

So is the “GOVERNMENT” type a forgery?

If the original “GOVT.” type is not a forgery after all, what is the “GOVERNMENT” type, which the current consensus maintains is the genuine, and rather highly priced, original? It does not follow automatically that the position must be reversed, and that it must by definition be forged. However, this seems likely to me, on the following grounds.

No early report definitely describes or illustrates this type, and there is nothing to tie it to the origins of the stamp in Rangoon. Andrew Freeston drives home his case against the “GOVT.” type with the observation that “the forger didn’t have the skill to produce the plates exactly as the original, and therefore they have ‘Govt’ instead of ‘Government’.” This is far too easy an assumption, though to be fair the discrepancy does call for an explanation.

The other most obvious difference in the “GOVERNMENT” type, apart from the size, is the absence of the sun rays at the upper left of the design, and the dotted line detail of the clouds. We have to ask: if the “GOVT.” type is the forgery, why would the forger invent and add significant detail that is clearly not there in the original? That would be so pointless as to be highly unlikely.

On the other hand, a forger working from a poor print or illustration of the “GOVT.” stamp, in which these details were not clearly visible, would not know to put them in. Likewise, an image in which the tiny word “GOVT.” was not clearly readable could mislead the forger into producing the “GOVERNMENT” version, prompted by one of the helpful reports that clarified things by spelling out the word in full. Conversely, the fort, “CHALO DELHI” lettering and foreground foliage are all very closely copied, perhaps photographically, though all a little larger in proportion than in the original. So our hypothetical forger would also need an image in which these elements were clear. Putting all this together, can we find such an example from which the “GOVERNMENT” version could have been generated?



Illustration of “GOVT.” type with weak details in upper design, from Adgey-Edgar

Adgey-Edgar provides us with an ideal case. Page 68 of his catalogue shows his own photo of a block of six imperf “GOVT.” 1 anna, in which the upper detail is largely missing in the top row, apparently from a weak print of the top part of the stamp. The small lettering after “PROVISIONAL” is also barely legible. This illustration is too grainily screened to be the actual source of the “GOVERNMENT” stamp, but it does serve to demonstrate precisely how such an inaccurate forgery might have been created.

In short, no evidence indicates that the “GOVERNMENT” type might be the original, though it may have existed at an early date. Examples of this type in the Lim Peng Hong collection were obtained from an Indian collector in the early 1950’s.²⁴ All the circumstantial evidence points to it being a forgery.



Other forgeries

Not surprisingly, other more recent forgeries have appeared. Rather crude copies of the “GOVT.” type exist perforated on white paper [left]. They have a hand drawn look.

Andrew Freeston’s book notes a reproduction of the “GOVERNMENT” type on yellowish paper, in which some of the rays above the fort are missing. He suggests that this was produced in India. (This appears to be illustrated imperf on his facing page, though it is captioned as “genuine”.)

²⁴ Communication from Dr Kyaw Win

Conclusions

To summarise:

- ❑ The "GOVT." type is certainly the original, and was printed by the Burma Postal service in Rangoon in 1944. Few copies survived.
- ❑ From original drawings, an enlarged master die of the two values was produced, which was sold to Mawer, then to Broomhead, and has not been seen since c. 1968. This was used to generate the Sengupta prints in 1946.
- ❑ From the master die, the 1 pice sheet plate was made up. From the 1 pice sheet, the 1 anna sheet plate was made up.
- ❑ The original typographic plates of 100 of each value were retained by postal officials and were later used to reprint full sheets. The originals are platable against the reprint sheets.
- ❑ The "GOVERNMENT" type is probably a forgery.
- ❑ Other forgeries of both types exist.
- ❑ The catalogues need revision!

The stamps

These stamps – in any version – are not often found, and some items are mentioned here that I have seen only in scans or photocopies. Reports of perf sizes vary, and may not be reliable. (Terms used for colours can also be confusing. What is sometimes described as "plum" seems about violet on the Gibbons colour key. "Maroon", which is properly a brownish shade of crimson, must be more distinctly red. "Magenta" seems to describe a more vivid shade of crimson.) Because of these factors, I have not attempted to make a comprehensive or details listing of all types known, but in conclusion it may be worth summarising the earliest reports and documented copies, which apparently are all of the "GOVT." type, as follows:

Lim Peng Hong, August 1945

1 pice violet	perf / imperf
1 anna violet	perf / imperf

Broomhead, November 1945

1 pice plum	perf
1 anna red	perf / imperf

Smythies, November 1945, & Adgey-Edgar, 1946

1 pice maroon	perf
1 anna green	perf

Expertised by Adgey-Edgar, and documented in 1948 & 1956:

1 pice red	?
1 pice magenta	perf

Reprints from the original plates

1 pice violet	perf / imperf
1 anna green	perf / imperf