

JOHORE: THE STORY BEHIND A PUZZLING STAMP

By Susan McEwen FRPSL

In February 1940 the Malay state of Johore issued a single value depicting a new portrait of its Sultan, Sir Ibrahim. No other values using this design were ever issued, so was this a one-off commemorative or the start of a new series that would never materialise? Susan McEwen FRPSL of the Malaya Study Group investigates.

At the end of February 1940 the Malay state of Johore issued a new 8c. stamp, SG130 (*Fig 1*), printed by De La Rue in black and pale blue. It shows a new portrait of Sultan Sir Ibrahim, the previous definitive issues had used the same portrait since 1904, so a new portrait was well due. The illustration shows the registration 15c. imprint from a registration envelope with the 8c. to pay the postage. It was sent from the city of Johore Bahru in September 1940. The apex of a triangular censor mark is also visible at the left.

Was this new stamp a commemorative? If so what was it commemorating? Or was it the first of a new definitive issue? But it was the only value issued with the new portrait.

Independent Johore

Johore was an unfederated state in Malaya, like the northern unfederated states it was an independent British protectorate, and part of the Malayan Postal Union. In some ways it was independent and in some ways not; its currency was the Straits Settlements dollar. It seems that Johore's stamps were an expression of independence, being different from the rest of Malaya.

Eight cents was the all-up airmail rate (a uniform rate, regardless of destination or route) from Malaya to Great Britain and the Empire from February 1938, when the service was introduced, until September 1939, when the service closed with the outbreak of World War II. Eight cents remained the surface letter rate to Great Britain and the Empire. The Malayan inland rates were raised in April 1940 and the inland letter rate became 8c. An 8c. stamp was required, the previous 8c. had been a commemorative, issued in 1935 and printed by Waterlow (*Fig 2*); it marked the 50th anniversary of Treaty Relations



Fig 1 A 1940 8c. value, showing the revised portrait of Sultan Sir Ibrahim, used to pay the postage rate on a registered letter sent from Johore Bahru in September 1940



Fig 2 The 1935 commemorative 8c. stamp printed by Waterlow to mark the 50th anniversary of Treaty Relations with Great Britain

with Great Britain and showed Sultan Ibrahim with his then wife. But they divorced in early 1938 and he remarried in early 1940. It is unlikely that he would have wanted reprints of the 1935 stamp.

The new 8c. design

The print format of the new 8c. stamp was sheets of 50. The first despatch from De la Rue was sent 26 August 1938, subsequent despatches were sent from the printer up to January 1942, but this last batch didn't reach Malaya and probably never left the UK.

The 1939 annual report of the Posts and Telegraph Department of Johore states that no new stamps were issued in 1939 but that, 'arrangements were completed for the supply of an eight cent postage stamp of a new design'.

The British Library Philatelic Department has in the Crown Agents records die proofs and examples of this portrait on a 15c. stamp in blue, with the same design as the 1940 8c. (15c. was the UPU letter rate in 1940 for overseas and blue was the UPU colour for overseas basic letter rate). Although that stamp remained unissued it supports the idea that a new definitive series was planned, with the 8c. first, 15c. second and other values to follow as required.

Johore was one of the unfederated states. The other unfederated states were in the north and two of them, Kedah and Kelantan, had new definitive stamps in 1937. Both issues are large handsome definitives showing the Sultan Abdul Hamid Halimshah of Kedah (*Fig 3*) and Sultan Ismail of Kelantan (*Fig 4*). Both have full sets of stamps with values from 1c. to \$5.

Perhaps Johore's Sultan wanted stamps which would compare well to the Northern States; why not?

Sultan Sir Ibrahim

Sultan Sir Ibrahim (1873–1959) was a complex personality, the only son and heir to an elderly Sultan, he inherited great wealth and Johore as its absolute ruler in 1895 shortly before his 22nd birthday. He maintained Johore's independence resolutely, including blocking the formation of the Malayan Union immediately after World War II and resisting the new Malayan Federation in 1957.

During the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1942–45), some of these Johore stamps were overprinted 'DAI NIPPON 2602 6cts' and used for revenue purposes (Fig 5). 'Dai Nippon' means greater Malaya and 2602 is the Japanese calendar equivalent for 1942. Six cents was the amount for stamping a receipt. These were not authorised for postage but inevitably a few were used!

The war and the bombing of De La Rue's works in December 1940 put the thoughts of a new issue of Johore stamps on hold. But at least we have the attractive 8c. new portrait stamp and can imagine what the whole series would have been.

References

The Malayan Philatelist, journal of the Malaya Study Group, Vol 48 page 26. 'Johore Annual Report of the Posts and Telegraphs Department for the year 1939'.



Fig 3 A \$1 stamp of the unfederated state of Kedah issued in 1937 depicting Sultan Abdul Hamid Halimshah



Fig 4 A 25c. value issued for the unfederated state of Kelantan in 1937 showing Sultan Ismail



Fig 5 An example of the 1940 8c. overprinted 'DAI NIPPON 2602 6cts' used during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya for revenue use

The Malaya Study Group

The Malaya Study Group was formed in 1959, for people interested in the stamps and postal history of Malaya and has members around the world. It holds meetings several times a year in London and annually in Leicester. These are interspersed with Zoom meetings so that members world-wide can participate. The journal the *Malayan Philatelist* is issued four times per year. There is an annual auction and a circulating packet for members.

The Malaya Study Group has published a number of books about Malayan philately, the most recent is *Malaya Postal Stationery to 1936* by Len Stanway FRPSL.

For more information about the Malaya Study Group and its publications visit www.malayastudygroup.com or contact the Membership Secretary, Martin Roper, 25 King Edward Avenue, Aylesbury HP21 7JD, UK. martinsroper@gmail.com

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