



New Zealand's 1949 Royal Visit & 3d HMS Vanguard Stamps

The ninth HMS Vanguard was a fast battleship launched in the final days of World War II and commissioned shortly after. She was the only one of her class and was the biggest, fastest and last of the Royal Navy battleships. On 30 November 1944, the ship was launched by Her Royal Highness the Princess Elizabeth. Strenuous efforts were made to complete the fitting out in time for the final assault on Japan, but the unexpectedly sudden surrender of the Eastern enemy deprived her of this action. Some compensation accrued, however, as the final few months of her fitting out was less rushed and some relaxation had been possible in the austerity following the war.

She was commissioned for trials on 25 April 1946 under the command of Captain W. G. Agnew, C.B., C.V.O., and D.S.O. The first few months of the newly commissioned HMS Vanguard were very quiet until it was announced that the ship would be used to take the Royal Family to South Africa in early 1947. As the HMS Vanguard was to be used as a *Royal Yacht*, considerable alterations to the accommodation for the Royal Family and their retinue was required. This was the first time that the King's daughter Elizabeth, then a princess had left Britain.



Figure 1

For the HMS Vanguard South African Royal Tour six stamps were issued; 1d, 2d and 3d (see figure 1) inscribed in English or in Afrikaans. The ship took 17 days to reach South Africa, and the visit was a complete success. On the return voyage, a visit was made to the island of St. Helena and a stop was made just off the coast of Ascension Island.

In the summer of 1948 it was announced that another Royal Tour would be made using HMS Vanguard from January to July 1949; this time to Australia and New Zealand. After spending some time in the Mediterranean, HMS Vanguard returned home to Plymouth to prepare for the journey and in November 1948 shortly after her arrival news was received that in view of the King's health the proposed tour had been cancelled (ref 1).

As with the 1947 South African Royal Tour a set of stamps had been prepared for the New Zealand Post Office by the English printers Waterlow & Sons.

The 3d HMS Vanguard stamps described in this article are from a set of four prepared for the planned Royal Visit to New Zealand. Waterlow & Sons of London printed 39 million stamps in denominations of 2d, 3d, 5d and 6d. All four values were shipped to New Zealand in 10 cases from London. When the Royal Visit was cancelled, the stamps were ordered to be destroyed.

If they were destroyed, then how do several the 3d HMS Vanguard stamps exist today? Two possible answers to that question have surfaced over the past 30 years or so. The finder of the first 3d HMS Vanguard, Geoff Grattan, asked this very question to The Principal, Stamps Branch, P.O. Headquarters in Wellington.



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Explanation number 1:

The 16 January 1979 reply from the New Zealand Post Office suggested: “One explanation of how the [3d HMS Vanguard] stamp was released is that initially complete sets of the stamps may have been issued for publicity and afterwards were not retrieved by the Post Office” (ref 2). Grattan continued: “It is interesting to note the word *may*. Obviously, the Post Office’s records are incomplete. Also, publicity is usually initiated from the die proofs”.

“The Post Office’s theory that the sets of the stamps could have been issued for publicity and not retrieved has little to commend it. Only the 3d HMS Vanguard stamp has turned up and all four of the set were certainly received in New Zealand”. Grattan received many telephone call about his find and two of them related to the story of their survival.

Explanation number 2:

The telephone callers’ information led Grattan to believe their explanations. “The story is that the stamps were being burnt at a furnace in Wellington when one of the men employed noticed a few stamps had been caught in the furnace door after it had been slammed shut. The man pulled these away and put them in his pocket. He later gave one or two away and kept one for himself. One of my (Grattan’s) informants added that the example he had had in his possession for years was given to him by a man as security for £1 borrowed during a game of poker”.

“The story of such a rescue from the furnace seems plausible and would account for the condition of the known surviving stamps [at the time of Grattan’s publication in 1980 – author’s words]; - one crushed or crumpled, one with a corner torn off, one with no damage”.

This writer believes that the correct explanation to the earlier question is the second – the earlier one does not explain the condition of the stamps. All the known examples of the New Zealand 3d HMS Vanguard stamps have faults and these faults are likely to have been caused from being rescued for the furnace.

HMS Vanguard number 1



Figure 2

In late 1978 a Wellington part time dealer, Geoff Grattan, was asked by an 88-year-old collector to sell his collection. Grattan visited another trade colleague, John Mowbray, and sold him the album for \$1,100. For his troubles, Grattan wanted only one stamp as his commission on the sale. Mowbray agreed and Grattan extracted the stamp which turned out to be the first 3d HMS Vanguard seen since the late 1940s (see figure 2).

Despite scepticism at the time from the New Zealand philatelic fraternity, with dogged persistence, Grattan set about proving that his somewhat crumpled stamp had escaped the furnace and was one of the unissued 1949 Royal Visit stamps. In mid-1980 a complete sheet of 120 of the 3d HMS Vanguard stamps was displayed at *Zeapex'80* – courtesy of the New Zealand Post Office, for the 125th anniversary of New Zealand’s first stamps. The NZPO/New Zealand Post archives now held in Wellington’s Te Papa museum also contains imperforate and perforate sheets of all four values (ref 3). By January 1981 Geoff Grattan’s 3d HMS Vanguard stamp had been sold to a Queensland sapphire miner, C. D. Hainsworth, for NZ \$14,000 (ref 2).

Perhaps the next sight the markets had of the Grattan 3d HMS Vanguard was in March 1999 when at *Australia 99* Stanley Gibbons Australia offered it for sale as lot 86 at the Melbourne world stamp exhibition. At the time, it was one of only three known. The catalogue description: “876 ** 1949 Royal Visit – prepared for use but not issued – 3d ‘H.M.S. VANGUARD’ creases/soiling as usual with this item. One of only three known copies, this being the one discovered by Mr Geoff Grattan c1980 and sold for NZ \$14,000. *Stanley Gibbons Melbourne sold another example of this variety in the June 1993 sale and realised (A) \$10,120 inc buyer’s premium of 10%*” (ref 4).



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The successful purchaser of lot 876 - the late John Gluyas – paid A \$9,625 (about NZ \$12,000) for it and included it in his collection. Gluyas commented on his album page: “but we in Christchurch know that one in Christchurch has been lost presumably burnt with rubbish”.

In mid-2009 whilst preparing for his 7 November 2009 public auction John Mowbray, managing director of John Mowbray International, succeeded in acquiring the original (Grattan) 3d HMS Vanguard for sale and offered it as lot 727 with an NZ \$25,000 estimate. This stamp was described as: “727* 1949 3d Royal Visit HMS Vanguard - prepared for use but unissued due to King's deteriorating health that resulted in the cancellation of the 1949 Royal Tour. MUH. Some creasing from being crumpled. Nonetheless this is a very rare stamp of which 4 (1 being badly damaged) are known to us. This is the 2nd that we have handled. Ex Grattan, Gluyas” (ref 5). This was sold for \$31,050 including buyer's premium, to an overseas based buyer.

On the rear of Grattan's 16-page booklet (ref 2) published in 1980 two other known HMS Vanguard stamps were illustrated in black and white. In a little over 12 months the numbers known of the 3d HMS Vanguard held in private hands increased from one to three and this number was believed to be correct for another 25 or so years.

HMS Vanguard number 2



Figure 3

Grattan stated: “Vanguard No.2 Owned by Mrs Lorna Drummond of Lower Hutt, N.Z. Valued at \$10,000. Mrs Drummond was given the stamp as a child by the man who purloined it, and has had it ever since”. This stamp (see figure 3) has the upper left corner missing and is off centre and was offered for sale by Ashford Stamps Ltd. in 2007.

HMS Vanguard number 3

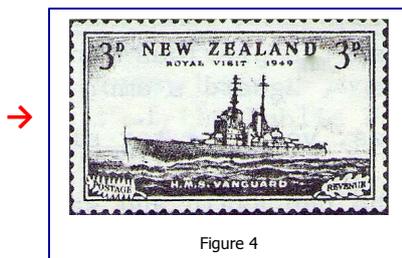


Figure 4

Grattan stated: “Vanguard No. 3 Owned in Australia. Name of owner not known. Valued at A \$14,000. The owner is thought to have acquired it from her father, who took it in lieu of a £1 poker debt in the 1950's” (see figure 4). “Both the above stamps have been offered at auction once, but in neither case, did bidding reach the reserve”. Note the position of the arrows: to the left of the stamp indicating a small spot just inside the frame, and that beneath the stamp indicating a printing flaw.

These were the only three New Zealand 3d HMS Vanguard stamps believed to exist in 1980. In the intervening years, another four have materialised and are described later.

At the time (November 1978) of Grattan making his 3d HMS Vanguard discovery public only two were known: “Somehow, two **sets** of the four stamps were *liberated* and today one **set** is owned by a Khandallah collector. The other **set** has disappeared” (ref 6). Maybe the newspaper reporter mistakenly reported the 3d HMS Vanguard stamp as being a set?

During 2009 an estate from a renowned English collector of New Zealand stamps was sent to Mowbrays for auctioning. In this there were a few pages devoted to the stamps prepared for use but not issued for both the 1949 and 1952 cancelled Royal Tours to New Zealand. The collector had included several die proofs on these pages but he only had a couple of colour photos of two 3d HMS Vanguard stamps (see figures 2 and 6) with the annotation: “only three known to exist”.



Figure 5

The earlier reference to the SG Melbourne sale of 26 June 1993 prompted a quick search for this auction catalogue (ref 7). The 3d HMS Vanguard mentioned in 1999 was featured as lot 984 in colour on the front of the 26 June 1993 auction catalogue cover. When Grattan’s illustration of HMS Vanguard number 3 is compared to that illustrated in the 1993 auction catalogue (see figure 5) it was determined to be at least the second appearance of this stamp in auction.

The catalogue description: “**984*** 1949 Royal Visit – the unissued 3d H.M.S. Vanguard. Light gum toning – the finest of the three recorded examples. See note after SG 697, and for the full story refer Vol II of *The Postage stamps of New Zealand*”. As will be seen in figure 5 just inside the inner frame line about half way up is a small tone spot. Similarly, careful study of the lower frame just beneath the **R** in REVENUE shows a small plate flaw, proving that the 3d H.M.S. Vanguard stamps featured in figures 4 and 5 are the same stamp.

This is the best centred of the various 3d HMS Vanguards discussed here; which suggests that this originated from a different sheet, as might be expected if the stamps were rescued from sheets protruding from a furnace door. This stamp was offered for sale by public auction by John Mowbray International as lot 54 on 11 March 2017 (ref 8) with an estimate of NZ \$25,000. It was sold to an overseas buyer and realised NZ \$67,850, including buyer’s premium.

HMS Vanguard number 4



Figure 6

1999 seemed to be a bumper year for the 3d HMS Vanguard as another was offered for sale later that year! As lot 602 (see figure 6) it featured on the front cover of Stanley Gibbons New Zealand (now John Mowbray International) 6 November 1999 public stamp auction catalogue. Another lengthy description included: “**602 M** Small grease stain at top right does not unduly detract. Mint” (ref 9). Against an NZ \$12,500 estimate lot 602 sold for \$22,250 including buyer’s premium & GST.

HMS Vanguard number 5



Figure 7

In Ashford Stamps' 13 November 2003, postal auction catalogue number 34, another 3d HMS Vanguard (see figure 7) was offered as lot 1490. The lengthy description included: "1949 Royal visit 3d HMS Vanguard mint no gum ... legend has it that the corner of a sheet of 3d stamps was souvenired by a worker after it was caught in the furnace door during the destruction process. They were not generally known until the 1970s when three examples of the 3d surfaced. One creased example was sold at the time for \$14,000 ... and has a little creasing that has flattened out. An outstanding rarity in New Zealand stamps" (ref 10).

Lot 1490 was sold for NZ \$18,500 against a \$20,000 estimate and was reported thus: "The unissued New Zealand 3-penny violet HMS Vanguard stamp shown was sold in 2003 at auction for the equivalent of US \$11,655" (ref 11).

In 2007 New Zealand's leading catalogue compiler, Campbell Paterson Ltd., included a new section in their loose leaf specialised catalogue, viz: **stamps prepared for use but not officially issued**. In it both the 1949 3d HMS Vanguard and the 2006 Kapa Haka stamps are illustrated and detailed, but are not priced.

HMS Vanguard number 6



Figure 8

Thanks to Ashford Stamps Ltd. for the illustration of a sixth 3d HMS Vanguard (see figure 8). It is very badly damaged as one can see. This is believed to be still in the possession of the North Island owner and it cannot be the same as that shown in figure 3.

HMS Vanguard number 7



Figure 9

Universal Philatelic Auctions' postal auction of 2 October 2012 (ref 12) offered the 7th known (to this writer) New Zealand 3d HMS Vanguard stamp. As lot 20002 it had an estimate of £15,000. Like all the other known examples this had some damage as evidenced from the illustration above in figure 9, at left. However, unlike all the other 6 known examples the 7th example also bore a complete offset of the ship on the gum – shown in figure 9, at right.

Thanks to Andrew McGavin of Universal Philatelic Auctions for supplying the above images. Rest assured that the purchaser who paid £12,000 for the stamp (which roughly equated to NZ \$24,000) received a bargain considering that this is the first such 3d HMS Vanguard known with an offset.

HMS Vanguard Summary:

In late 1948 the 1949 Royal Tour to Australia and New Zealand was cancelled thus New Zealand's printed Royal Visit stamps were ordered to be destroyed. Apart from those retained for the New Zealand Post Office's archives there were supposed to none in private hands, and until late 1978 none were known to be. Geoff Grattan came across one badly creased unhinged mint New Zealand 3d Vanguard stamp in a stamp album and eventually proved that it was one of the stamps prepared for the 1949 Royal Tour.

After doing some research Grattan came across two more examples of the 3d HMS Vanguard stamp which in 1980 made a total of three known. That was the number believed to exist until November 2003. It has been determined that at least seven examples are known to exist. There may be another one or two lurking unnoticed in an old album; and until they are discovered the total known to be in private hands is no more than seven examples.

The seven New Zealand 3d HMS Vanguard stamps all have some degree of damage caused by their rescue from the furnace and not being well looked after at the time. Only one is known to be unhinged mint (Vanguard number 1); two are known to be mint (numbers 3 and 4); one has no gum (number 5); two are badly damaged (numbers 2 and 6) and one shows a delightful offset (number 7). Given the nature of the centring of the 3rd Vanguard and the offset on the 7th it appears that parts of different sheets were salvaged from the furnace. Gluyas thought that another example existed and was destroyed, but other than his album page annotation no reference, let alone any illustration of it was mentioned.

Postscript:

The HMS Vanguard was sold for scrap for £560,000 and on 4 August 1960 made her final departure from Portsmouth. Five days later she arrived at Faslane to be broken down and by the spring of 1962 the HMS Vanguard ceased to exist. At least that was thought to be the situation until the late 1970s when Geoff Grattan became involved!

Acknowledgements:

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4. *Stanley Gibbons Australia "Australia 99"* Thursday 18 March 1999 catalogue.
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