

STAMP DEFINITIVES

GEORGE VI 'FESTIVAL' HIGH VALUES

Date of issue: 3 MAY 1951



The King George V £1 definitive was issued in 1913 and withdrawn four years later; apart from the special PUC £1 stamp of 1929, no further £1 stamp was proposed until 1945. In April that year the idea was examined briefly and rejected; three years later, however, a special £1 stamp was issued for the Royal Silver Wedding in April 1948. As with the PUC stamp, most sales were philatelic, although the demand for postal use, mainly by business customers in the London area, was markedly greater than with the earlier issue. Later sales figures of the Royal Silver Wedding £1 indicated monthly demand for non-philatelic use as being on the order of £6,000 to £8,000 - roughly equivalent to postal sales of the PUC £1 over ten years. It was presumably because of this that on 1 June 1948 Wilfred Paling, the Postmaster General (PMG), approved a proposal by J E Yates, the Director of Postal Services (DPS): 'That we should take the occasion of the centenary of the 1851 exhibition in 1951 to include a £1 stamp of new design in the permanent series'. A £1 stamp in the current 10s design was meanwhile to be issued as a 'stop-gap' measure - this was done the following October.

The GPO had been advised by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) during the summer of 1947 that the 1951 Festival was planned, and that a pictorial issue to mark the occasion would be welcomed; in December 1947 the Treasury urged the GPO to consider 'a fresh standard issue in 1951'. On 15 September A H Ridge, Secretary to the Post Office Board, brought suggestions from members of the public to the attention of the DPS; these had been forwarded by the office of the Lord President of the Council, Herbert Morrison, MP, under whose auspices fell arrangements for the Festival until such time as its own organising body was constituted. Yates replied the following day that the question of stamp design for the 1951 event was already under consideration - whether anything had been done beyond the decision to issue a new £1 for the occasion was not specified. Ridge was next contacted by Miss J H Lidderdale of the Lord President's office on 16 December, with a suggestion agreed by the Festival organisers at their first committee meeting 6 September, that the GPO prepare 'a new design for the normal stamp issues and possibly

commemorative stamps in 1951'. On 29 December the DPS replied to Miss Lidderdale on Ridge's behalf:

It was already in mind to mark this event by a change in design of at least some of our postage stamps, and probably by the issue of one or two special postage stamps ... It is felt that what might best be done in connection with the 1951 Exhibition would be to produce and put on sale on the opening day re-designed stamps in the 2/6d, 5/-, 10/- and £1 denominations and ... two special postage stamps, namely 2½d and 3d.

Yates explained that it would take at least a year to reissue the entire range of denominations, whereas a new issue could be accomplished in one day if confined to a limited range such as the high values and two special stamps. In addition, 'the four High Value stamps are considerably larger [than the normal size] and offer much more scope to an artist for a design worthy of the occasion'.

DISCUSSION BY PO BOARD

At the beginning of January 1949 the DPS presented the arguments in a paper for the Post Office Board; this was discussed on 4 February and the proposal agreed in general. At the meeting Yates added his own suggestion, that Stormont, Caernarvon Castle, Edinburgh Castle and Sandringham might constitute a suitable theme for the high values. Some concern was expressed as to whether pictorials were a promising line of approach, and the pitfalls of provoking the various nationalist feelings within the United Kingdom. The Director General (DG), Sir Raymond Birchall, suggested that the Government would welcome a set of pictorials drawing attention to aspects of British industry. However, the DPS was against using such a theme on a definitive issue - as he explained to Miss Lidderdale in a letter of 16 February informing of the Board's broad agreement to the proposal, 'since the 2/6d, 5/-, 10/- and £1 stamps will be of a permanent character the design will need to be suitable not only for 1951 but, in the normal way of things, for the lifetime of His Majesty The King'.

In a note to Mr Leigh-Clare of the Postal Services Department (PSD) on 18 February, F H Brent of the Supplies Department reported that the high value stamp printers, Waterlow and Sons, considered the 'long' shape as used for the George V issue most suitable for a design containing the King's head plus a picture; the 'upright' shape of the current high values could be retained if a smaller head was used. Details of the two formats were given as follows:

Issue/size	George V	(1913)	George VI	(1939)
	Across	Down	Across	Down
Overall	1.71 inches (43.5mm)	1.05 inches (26.75mm)	1.16 inches (29.5mm)	1.34 inches (34mm)

Printed surface	1.54 inches (39mm)	0.9 inches (22.75mm)	1.02 inches (26mm)	1.2 inches (30.5mm)
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Brent said that Waterlow’s normal method, like other line-engraved stamp printers, was to prepare a finished stamp-size painting from a rough sketch, plus other relevant materials such as photographs of the King’s head; once this was approved it would then be reproduced by the engraver. In the design process of the present high values during 1937-39, however, Waterlow had proceeded directly from approved finished drawings supplied by the GPO’s commissioned artists, and he recommended following the same course. On 3 March Mr Leigh-Clare advised that it had been decided to opt for the ‘George V’ dimensions.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

The general proposals on new stamps for 1951 were approved in broad outline by the King on 21 March, while discussions between the DPS and Gordon Russell and Mrs C G Tomrley of the CoID took place over the next three months. During this period instructions to artists were drafted; the guidelines set out were, that each denomination should be of a different design; the word ‘postage’ must appear; the crown could only extend into the gutter of the stamp if the King’s head was placed in the middle of the stamp; the value was to appear once only, in numerals no larger than the figures on the current half-crown coin or smaller than on the 6d stamp. Artists were discouraged from including a value figure in the initial design with the aim of saving unnecessary work, as in practice values were not allocated to particular designs until after these were chosen; in the event it was accepted that several artists preferred to include the value, simply to test the appearance of the design. There was considerable debate over themes that might usefully be suggested to artists; however, at a meeting with Mrs Tomrley on 29 April, the DPS finally decided: ‘Difficulties in this respect were so numerous and varied that it was best, as in the past, to leave the artists entirely free.’ Artists would nevertheless be encouraged to seek the GPO’s advice if they had any doubt over suitable topics.

Yates agreed that only twelve individual artists be invited, plus Waterlow and Harrison and Sons, the stamp printing firms currently under contract to the GPO (De La Rue and Bradbury Wilkinson were subsequently also invited). He proposed to invite Percy Metcalfe, Edmund Dulac, George Bellew, Joan Hassall, Mary Adshead, Abram Games and John Minton; the CoID’s own list of names, provided on 13 May, added Reynolds Stone, Milner Gray, Enid Marx, Hans Tisdall and Ralph Lavers. Invitations to artists were sent on 23 May and to the stamp printers a week later.

DESIGNS SUBMITTED

Dulac and Hassall both refused due to ill health and other commitments; Games declined, pleading: 'The subject matter is a little too decorative in theme for my particular technique. My own work seems to demand a definite theme rather than a pattern.' De La Rue also declined due to pressure of other work; finally Harrisons wrote immediately before the deadline of 31 August: 'We have not prepared any designs ... sufficiently satisfactory to submit ... Unless we have something first class it is better not to place anything before you.' The nine artists and two print firms remaining submitted a total of 38 designs for the high values. The designs were listed for discussion with the CoID, numbered as follows:

Marx (submitted on 4 August 1949) –

1, 2 and 3 - St George and dragon (two designs); floral emblems and scroll

Minton (submitted 4 August 1949) –

4 - Thames at Westminster

5 - Thames and City

6 - Buckingham Palace

Tisdall (submitted 9 August 1949) –

7 - Flags and bugles

8 - Banners and posthorns

9 - Musical and nautical symbols

Metcalf (submitted mid August 1949) –

10 - Floral and royal emblems

11 - Floral emblems and dolphins

12 - St George and dragon

13 - Royal Arms

L D Fryer (submitted 22 August 1949) –

14 - Rose and thistle

Hugo Fleury (submitted 22 August 1949) –

15 - Horseman and pillarbox

Bellew (submitted 24 August 1949) –

16 - Oak leaves

17 - Sailing ship

18 - Houses of Parliament

19 - St George and dragon

Stanley D Scott (submitted 26 August 1949) –
20 - Lion and unicorn

Stone (submitted 29 August 1949) –
21 - Ornamental 'flourishes'
22 - Lion
23 - Lion and unicorn
24 - Floral emblems

Lavers (submitted 29 August 1949) –
25, 26, 27 - Swallow; dolphins; Mercury (winged messenger)

E J Jackman (submitted 29 August 1949) –
28, 29 - Floral and heraldic emblems; St George and dragon

W S Matthews (submitted 29 August 1949) –
30 - Lion
31 - Floral emblems

Gray (submitted 31 August 1949) –
32 - Windsor Castle
33 - 'G R' cypher
34 - Lion and unicorn
35 - 'G R' cypher (Gothic script)

Adshead (submitted 31 August 1949) –
36, 37 - Tower of London; floral emblems and scroll
38 - HMS 'Victory'.

Notes

Designs 14, 15 and 20 by Fryer, Fleury and Scott were submitted on behalf of Waterlows, and 28 to 31 by Jackman and Matthews on behalf of Bradbury Wilkinson.

Only 4 to 6, 10, 11, 14 to 24, 30, 31 and 38 can definitely be identified with particular designs. The identification of 7 to 9, 12, 13 and 32 to 35 should only be regarded as probable. There is unfortunately no basis on which to identify 1 to 3, 25 to 29 and 36 and 37.

Further details of Tisdall, Fleury, Bellew and Stone's designs are extracted from their descriptions:

Hans Tisdall

'I have developed three ideas with a central motif running through them. This has been a very exciting task and I have consequently created a series with a strongly optimistic trend' [Letter to DPS, 9 August 1949].

'A', design for 5s: Banners with a fanfare of mail coach posthorns; oval medallion for King's head framed by tightly woven laurel wreath.

'B', design for 2s 6d: Flags and bugles greeting a new day represented by the circle on which the King's head would be superimposed.

'C', design for 10s: Nautical and 'martial music' symbols - drums, harp, woodwind and brass on the left, anchor, compass, trident and telescope on the right, tied together at centre by banners, olive branches and King's head.

Hugo Fleury

'My design symbolizes postal expansion from Allen's cross road scheme in Britain to postage across the world' [Letter to DPS, 22 August 1949]. Fleury referred to Ralph Allen (1694-1764), the postmaster of Bath whose proposed reforms of the internal posts of England and Wales were introduced on 16 April 1720.

George Bellew

Design 16: 'The oak leaves are intended to represent the British oak and the rugged determination of the British people' [Letter to DPS, 24 August 1949].

Design 17: Trade and commerce, represented by an 'Argosy' type merchant sailing ship.

Design 18: The Houses of Parliament, 'nerve centre' of the British Commonwealth, 'wherein is expressed the will of the people'.

Design 19: St George killing the dragon - 'an ancient allegory of the triumph of the good over evil, right over wrong, and of courage over adversity' and hopefully a symbol 'to the whole world of the character of the British people'.

Reynolds Stone

'It always seems to me that enough use is not made of the superb heraldic beasts that belong to this country, and also that they might occasionally be 'let off' as it were their job as supporters for the Royal Arms and I've tried to suggest such a design ... using the lion and the unicorn which is the one I like best ... A stamp ought not to be too high-flown but should essentially be something pretty and pleasant to handle continuously ... I intended my backgrounds (except the 'flourished' one) to be engraved in the manner of the existing 10/- and 2/6d stamps. The other one could be lightly stippled if a pure white background won't do for security reasons' [Letter to DPS, 29 August 1949].

The several common themes amongst the designs were seemingly inspired by previous stamps rather than any advice sought from the GPO. St George and the Dragon reappeared from the PUC £1 of 1929 on no fewer than five designs - two by Enid Marx and one each by Metcalfe, Bellew and Jackman. Dolphins from the George V ½d and 1½d resurfaced on

designs by Metcalfe and Lavers; the Lion, on the Wembley Exhibition stamps of 1924-25, now featured with or without the Unicorn on designs by Gray, Scott, Matthews and Metcalfe as well as the two by Stone already described. Milner Gray also produced a view of Windsor Castle reminiscent of the Silver Jubilee colonial issue of 1935, while the motif of London landmarks (more favoured by artists than by the GPO) inspired designs by Adshead and Bellew, as well as John Minton's entire set of three. Coats of arms and national floral emblems were in evidence throughout, reflecting the themes of the earlier stamps of the reign; sailing ships featured in two strikingly similar designs, Adshead's 'Victory' and Bellew's 'Argosy'.

ARTWORK SEEN BY CoID

On 10 October the designs were shown by the DPS to Lady Sempill, Harry Carter and Gerald Barry of the CoID, and Montague Brown of Waterlows. Their selection in order of merit was: design 12 by Metcalfe; 13 by Metcalfe; 38 by Adshead; 20 by Scott. Percy Metcalfe's designs depicted St George slaying the dragon, based on the coinage design by the medallist and engraver Benedetto Pistrucci (1784-1855) for the George III sovereign of 1817-20 and George IV crown of 1821-22, and the Royal Arms supported by the lion and unicorn. Adshead's design showed HMS 'Victory' in an oval frame against a stylised background of rope netting. Scott's depicted the lion and unicorn supporting a hexagonal frame, reminiscent of Dulac's early low value designs, around the King's head. The first two choices, the Metcalfe designs, were favoured strongly enough to suggest they be used for all four high values, each appearing on two separate denominations. This was not a firm decision, however, and the question of whether each value should be different in design was left. There was disappointment at the general standard of contributions, so to strengthen the available alternatives it was decided to supplement the Adshead and Scott designs with an adaptation of a design produced by William H M McLaren for the photogravure stamp printers Harrison and Sons: this was among the artwork submitted for the 1951 Festival special issue, which was also viewed at the 10 October meeting. It was decided to have fully finished versions of all five designs and bromides for the next meeting.

The Postmaster General (PMG), Wilfred Paling, and C R Hobson, the Assistant PMG, saw the artwork for both high values and special stamps on 20 October and reportedly liked the McLaren design. Harrison's was asked to adapt it accordingly – 'a complete re-drawing of the design was involved to provide for the different lettering, the re-disposition of the available space and the different printing process - intaglio instead of photogravure'. By 24 November Harrison's had completed the task and produced bromides of all five finished drawings; three copies of each bromide and the master drawings, completed as the 2s 6d denomination, were returned to the GPO. The three McLaren bromides differed in detail of lettering, background and ornamentation.

On 7 December Barry and Carter of the CoID visited the DPS and discussed the stamps, Leigh-Clare and T Shanks of PSD also present. Both the Scott and McLaren designs were firmly rejected as unsuitable. Metcalfe's 'George and Dragon' was selected for the 10s value without any alteration, and Adshead's design for the 2s 6d provided the oval frame was perfected in shape, and a patch of sky retouched where the caption 'HMS Victory' had been deleted. Metcalfe's 'Royal Arms' design was strongly favoured for the £1 value subject to recommendations that the 'E' of 'postage' should be further removed from the crown by closing up the other letters, if necessary by reducing the size of the lion between the 'S' and 'T'; the King's head might also be enlarged, and the gap between it and the crown reduced. No conclusion was reached on the 5s denomination, but the alternatives envisaged were of repeating the 10s design, or of an additional design by either Metcalfe or Adshead on the lines of the 2s 6d. The theme of the latter was left undecided; Carter suggested the 'Great Eastern' as another maritime subject, while Barry proposed Trafalgar Square to maintain the Nelsonian connotations of the 'Victory'.

FURTHER DESIGNS REQUESTED

On 12 December Yates saw Mary Adshead and commissioned another design on similar lines to that accepted for the 2s 6d. Tower Bridge and Westminster Abbey were mentioned as possible subjects, but it was agreed that the most promising would be Dover, with a view of the castle and White Cliffs. Although there is no record of a similar discussion with Metcalfe at this time, he also agreed to produce a further design. At the next meeting with the CoID on 6 January 1950, Gordon Russell, Sir Francis Meynell and Mrs Tomrley discussed all available high value and special stamp designs with the DPS and Leigh-Clare and Shanks. Mary Adshead's new design for the 5s value was not yet to hand, but Metcalfe's had been completed and was seen by the meeting - in line with Barry's suggestion of the previous month, his subject was Trafalgar Square. Sir Francis did not like it - hardly surprisingly, as it bore a close resemblance to the McLaren design dismissed at the December meeting. Both designs depicted Britannia with shield and trident against a London background - McLaren had used St Paul's Cathedral and Waterloo Bridge, while Metcalfe's backdrop of Trafalgar Square included not only Nelson's Column but also a surreal relocation of Westminster Abbey, Big Ben, and St Paul's, fronted by a grim-faced Britannia.

Sir Francis found the Metcalfe and Adshead designs provisionally approved in December acceptable, although he considered that the 2s 6d would be improved without the background of netting. On 9 January Shanks ordered new bromides of all three Metcalfe designs revised as necessary for value and improvements, including the new 5s despite the CoID's dislike. Harrisons returned four sets of these on 23 January.

By 26 January Mary Adshead's new 5s design, depicting the cliffs of Dover, was available, plus a new version of her earlier 2s 6d design revised as required; bromides were again ordered from Harrisons, and supplied on 7 February.

On 10 February the CoID, represented by Sir Francis Meynell, Mrs Tomrley and Barry and Carter, met Yates; in addition to the usual PSD officials, representatives of the Supplies Department and Waterlows were also present. The CoID suggestions on this occasion were: £1: Metcalfe's 'Royal Arms' as before, possibly with the lateral stroke of the '£1' amended from a double to a single one.

5s and 10s: Metcalfe's 'George and Dragon' was now recommended for both values.

2s 6d: Adshead's 'Cliffs of Dover', possibly to be somewhat darkened in tone, was recommended in place of 'HMS Victory' now relegated as a reserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY PMG

In his memorandum of the meeting Yates noted that both the PMG and the new DG (Sir Alexander Little, appointed 1 October 1949) expressed a liking for 'HMS Victory', and his own proposal was that this should remain the choice for the 2s 6d, 'Cliffs of Dover' for the 5s, 'George and Dragon' for the 10s and 'Royal Arms' for the £1. When the PMG made his proposals to the King's Private Secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, on 17 February, he admitted that the CoID had only felt able fully to recommend three of the four designs of which he had attached bromides; he suggested that the 2s 6d might be taken as the 'Cliffs of Dover', 10s 'George and Dragon' and £1 'Royal Arms', leaving only the question of whether the 5s should be in the same design as the 2s 6d or the 10s. His own feeling, however, was that the public would prefer separate designs for each value and that, once in colour, 'HMS Victory' 'would be attractive and very much appreciated by the public generally'; despite its reserve placing by the CoID, he therefore recommended it for the 2s 6d and the 'Cliffs of Dover' for the 5s, the 10s and £1 being as proposed. He promised 'an authoritative check of the heraldic and nautical details before proceeding' and explained that colour essays of the approved designs would be submitted once engraved before production began.

Lascelles replied on 27 February that the King approved the designs for each of the four high value denominations as proposed by the PMG, with certain reservations. He thought that the appearance of Mary Adshead's designs would be improved if the background netting was less prominent, and that the 2s 6d should feature a more modern ship, specifically HMS 'Vanguard' if the idea was agreeable to the PMG – 'Vanguard' was Britain's newest battleship, launched in 1946. On 2 March the DPS with Leigh-Clare and Wells plus Carr of Supplies met with Montague Brown of Waterlows. The points raised by Sir Alan were explained, and Brown was also warned that some delay in furnishing the designs was inevitable while they were checked for accuracy. The Metcalfe designs were to be

submitted to the College of Arms to be vetted for heraldic accuracy; as they did not require improvement in other respects they should be available shortly.

Brown replied that provided at least one of these reached the company by the end of March, it should be engraved by the end of July and the other by the end of September. Engraving of all four designs could be completed by the end of October (even if there was a delay of up to 6-8 weeks in supplying both Adshead designs) and he foresaw no problems in producing stamps for sale in early May 1951. There would be time to pull colour trials for GPO approval before colour essays were finally shown to the King. It was generally agreed that Mary Adshead be asked to make her 2s 6d and 5s values closer in style to the '2/6' and '5s' of the current issues; however, Brown said that his company's engraver could easily make the rope backgrounds less obtrusive and also match the lettering on the 5s more closely to that of the 2s 6d, and there was no need to involve the artist on these points. The day after the meeting, Leigh-Clare took the Metcalfe designs to show to Sir Algar Howard, Garter Principal King of Arms; it was confirmed on 6 March that they were heraldically in order, and master drawings and bromides of the two designs were sent to Waterlows on 13 March. On 15 March Adshead's 5s design was reported as confirmed for nautical accuracy and the drawing and bromide went to the printers on 20 March.

VANGUARD AND VICTORY

Two months elapsed before the 2s 6d was finally approved for accuracy. The delay arose because Mary Adshead had been approached about replacing 'Victory' with 'Vanguard' on the 2s 6d. On 11 March she wrote to Leigh-Clare that, having looked at drawings of 'Vanguard' by her husband, the artist Stephen Bone, 'I do not feel very hopeful about making a good oval picture'; she would try, however, to make use of photographs. On 28 March, after trying the Admiralty, Imperial War Museum, Central Office of Information and several news agencies for a photograph of the ship that would fit the oval frame, she sent Leigh-Clare a provisional sketch, adding: 'My husband has passed this, but says it would be more exciting with a tremendous bow wave!' No subsequent mention of the 'Vanguard' occurred until January 1951, when the PMG's successor noted that Wilfred Paling (replaced as PMG on 2 March 1950) had informed Sir Alan Lascelles that 'we had fully explored His Majesty's suggestion with the artist, but that it had not been found practicable to evolve a satisfactory design', and that this had been agreed.

The Naval Construction Department at the Admiralty examined Adshead's 'Victory' design, and reported on 5 April:

- (a) the dolphin striker and rigging beneath the bowsprit have been omitted
- (b) the stays between the foremast and bowsprit require to be amended
- (c) one yard on the bowsprit has been omitted

- (d) the structure of the bow as drawn is incorrect
- (e) one sail too many is carried on both the mainmast and the mizzen mast
- (f) the flag should be carried on the mainmast
- (g) a fore and aft sail is fitted on the mizzen mast but this may not appear in the drawing owing to the angle of presentation
- (h) the anchors, especially the stocks, are very prominent in photographs held in this section and it may be desirable to include these.

L J Brinton supplied a tracing highlighting these points, confirmed from official drawings, on behalf of the Construction Department, and referred PSD to the Society for Nautical Research, based at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, if further help was needed.

Mary Adshead submitted a revised drawing on 16 April, explaining that her original had been copied from a print; she had now referred to official drawings and completed as far as possible the corrections indicated by the Admiralty: 'It is very difficult to redraw the bow showing the anchor and stocks clearly for so small a scale and I have adopted a compromise between two of their drawings. I think I have complied with their requests with regard to the rigging & bowsprit & extra topsails.' The revised drawing was taken to the Admiralty for checking towards the end of April; Brinton suggested additional corrections in a letter of 28 April:

- (a) anchor - the flukes should be at right angles to the stock as shown on the sketch of the bow.
- (b) bow - this should be smaller and the main carving of bow should extend approximately one ninth of the length of the ship from the far-end.
- (c) sails - the mainsail is hardly likely to be semi-furled (as depicted) when the stunsails are rigged.
 - the stunsails should be rigged on the two lower sails on the foremast and mainmast and not on the topsails.
 - all sails appear to be still too wide, and the lower sail on the foremast appears to be too deep. Also the lower edge of this latter sail should be depicted by a single sweep.
- (d) yards - the yards on the bowsprit should be fitted underneath.

Brinton concluded: 'The points listed ... together with those mentioned in my previous communication should enable a true drawing of the Victory to be made as far as can be checked from Admiralty records.'

On 16 May Mary Adshead sent a final version of the design to Leigh-Clare at PSD, stating it had been passed by the Admiralty and adding: 'I fear the whites are rather messy but this should not affect the reproduction of the design.' The master drawing and bromide were sent to Waterlows on 22 May. Six preparatory outline sketches by Adshead that appear to

derive from her dealings with the Admiralty in April-May 1950 are held in the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA).

FIRST PROOFS COMPLETED

Philip Waterlow, the company Chairman, wrote to the Supplies Department on 1 June indicating that proofs of the 10s would be ready in July and the other values at approximately four-week intervals thereafter. On 14 July the new DPS (R H Locke, appointed on 1 April) held a meeting with Supplies and PSD representatives at which it was agreed that the higher values should 'if at all possible' be issued on 1 May 1951. A further meeting on 17 August agreed that the King's head should appear on the issued stamps in the same proportions as on the original designs - this meant preparing a head for the Adthead designs reduced in size from that already produced for the Metcalfe's. Waterlow, present at the meeting, still considered that the process of first submitting die proofs for approval of colour only by Supplies, and then plate proofs on actual production paper to be approved for issue by the King, could be completed not later than the first week of October 1950; if the King's approval was secured by the end of October supplies would be available for issue by 1 April 1951. On 28 August, however, Waterlow reported that the decision to use a smaller head on the 2s 6d and 5s meant that proofs of both values would not be available until the beginning of December, although deliveries of the stamps could still be completed during the coming April if the King's approval was given by the year end. He also reported that Metcalfe had seen a die proof of the £1 and now wished to make certain alterations to the design - this caused some alarm until Waterlow's was finally able to confirm, on 14 September, that these 'alterations' merely involved instructions to the engraver concerning the background of the design, so as to restore the tonal balance of the original.

At a meeting on 26 September Mr Carr of Supplies said that die proofs of the 10s and £1 stamps were expected the following day, to be followed by plate proofs in about three weeks if satisfactory. Die proofs and possibly plate proofs of the 2s 6d were expected by mid-November, and die proofs of the 5s by 1 December. The DPS hoped that colour essays would be ready for submission to the King by 7 December. Carr replied that Waterlow's was now only promising to have plate proofs ready by the year end, but that this would not affect the May issue date. In fact the 10s and £1 die proofs were supplied on 3 October; these were approved by Supplies and the DPS, and plate proofs requested in the same colours as the die proofs, plus a 'somewhat brighter blue' for the 10s and a 'richer brown' for the £1. A proof of the £1 stamp was shown to Sir Algar Howard and George Bellew of the College of Arms the next day - they agreed that the design was heraldically quite satisfactory though they thought that the crown over the Arms should have had 'pearls' on it. In view of the smallness of the stamp size they agreed that no change was necessary as

it would not, in any case, show. 'It was certainly not worth while asking the Artist to make a change.'

On 20 October Carr answered a query by PSD that work on the 2s 6d and 5s die proofs was still proceeding satisfactorily to schedule - Montague Brown of Waterlows pointed out, however, 'that the engraver doing this highly skilled work is inclined to be temperamental, works to his own time and cannot be rushed if skimped work is to be avoided'. The DPS finally saw the 2s 6d die proof on 6 November and approved it subject to a small piece of rope being removed from the right-hand side of the oval opposite the King's nose; Waterlows was asked to incorporate the alteration into the working plate and supply proofs in both the standard 2s 6d green and a lighter shade. At the same time the company was asked to ensure that the background on the 5s was of the same depth as the other values, and to supply die proofs in standard red and a lighter shade. Brinton of the Naval Construction Department was shown the 2s 6d proof the following day and confirmed that the Admiralty had no criticism. The 5s die proofs were approved on 17 November; next day Brinton's opinion was requested once more, regarding the nautical elements of the 'Cliffs of Dover' design, but he had no comments.

PLATE PROOFS PRODUCED

Plate proofs of the 10s in 'bright' blue and a lighter 'standard' shade, and of the £1 in 'deep' and 'standard' brown, were supplied on 12 December and shown the same day to a meeting between PSD and Supplies, at which the DPS was present. The colours generally preferred were standard blue and deep brown - the blue was chosen so that Waterlows could better maintain uniformity of colour, and since it was closer to the shade in current use. Die proofs of the 2s 6d in green and 5s in red were also seen; the '5s' value figure was criticised by Locke as indistinct, although this was attributed to the red background overrunning into the white of the value figures, a fault to which die proofs were prone. The point was also raised that the similarity in size and colour of the 5s to the Festival 2½d special stamp, due for issue at the same time, might cause confusion - it was generally agreed that this was remote, and it was too late for the 5s design to be amended.

Plate proofs of the 2s 6d and 5s were still not available, despite earlier promises that they would be ready by 1 December. Carr reported that the printers had been delayed by unforeseen problems with the 5s plate proof, but that the 2s 6d would be ready by 19 December and the 5s by 22 December. Locke said that in view of this he now thought it best to wait until early January and all four plate proofs were to hand, before submitting them for the King's approval, as a mixture of die and plate proofs would make an unfavourable impression. A new timetable was provisionally agreed whereby it was hoped that the proofs

would be approved by 15 January and that Waterlows could print enough stamps by the end of March to meet initial demands in May.

On the following day, however, Montague Brown of Waterlows informed Supplies that the unspecified setback with production of the 5s plate would now delay its supply for another 3 weeks - the earliest date that could be promised was 8 January 1951. The firm was still prepared to guarantee deliveries required for the initial supply of all values by mid-March provided it was instructed to proceed no later than 23 January. Despite this further delay, the news raised no concern at the next PSD/Supplies meeting on 19 December, possibly because the 2s 6d plate proofs were to hand as promised for that date, in blocks of four. The proofs were printed in two alternative shades of green of which the darker was preferred, both as being closer to the shade of the present 2s 6d and for showing the design to best advantage. The previous week's preference for the darker brown £1 was reiterated, for similar reasons; in the case of the 10s it was decided that despite earlier preference for the lighter blue, there was very little to choose between the two shades under daylight and the final selection should be left to the PMG without any recommendation from the meeting. A decision on the red of the 5s was reserved.

APPROVAL BY KING

Under pressure from the Supplies Department, Waterlows delivered plate proofs of the 5s in light and dark red by 8 January 1951, seen by Locke and the usual PSD and Supplies representatives the following day. The darker shade was chosen, as in the case of the other values, because it most closely approximated to that in use as well as being most advantageous to the design. Later the same day the DPS forwarded proofs in the two colours supplied for each value to the DG, recommending for the 2s 6d, 5s and £1 the dark green, dark red, and 'strong brown' shades (the last was the same as the 'deep' or 'darker' brown) respectively. Locke explained: 'These are approximately the colours of the existing stamps of those values, and in my view the darker shade in each case enhances the beauty of the design.' He conceded there was very little difference between the two shades of blue, and that his preference for the lighter blue was personal. He proposed an issue date of 3 May for the high values simultaneous with the new colour low values and special stamps, as this was the official opening day of the Festival of Britain. Neither PSD nor Supplies had previously committed themselves to an issue date for the high values. On 10 January the PMG (Ness Edwards, appointed 2 March 1950) accepted these recommendations, except that he chose the 'bright blue' for the 10s, commenting that it 'seems a better job'; proofs in the selected colours were sent to the King the same day. The King's approval was given on 12 January, the alterations to the backgrounds of the 2s 6d and 5s as first suggested by the King being especially noted. The approved colours were subsequently described simply as yellow-green, red, ultramarine and brown.

Waterlows was notified of the King's approval on 15 January and replied on 23 January that it could deliver an initial supply of the stamps by 15 March in the following quantities: 600,000 of the 2s 6d, 400,000 of the 5s, 100,000 of the 10s, 24,000 of the £1 (all in sheets of 40: four across by ten down). A reserve supply of double these quantities would follow by 30 April. It was confirmed on 22 February that printing had been completed on all stamps and that all values except the £1 were being perforated. The issue date of the high values was confirmed as 3 May in a Post Office 'Circular' on 24 January and a press release the following day. The possibility of new high values had first been mentioned publicly in answer to a Commons question on 24 October 1949; the magazine 'Stamp Collecting' in the issue of 5 November discounted 'sensational rumours' of an 'overnight change' in the stamps, but confirmed as 'fairly sure' that new designs would be issued to coincide with the 1951 Festival.

PAYMENTS TO ARTISTS

Metcalfe and Adshead were each paid 320 guineas (£352) on 16 February, under the terms originally offered to artists of 40 guineas (£42) for each submitted design up to a maximum of 120 guineas (£126) plus 160 guineas (£176) for each design actually used. Both artists, plus the others involved - Marx, Minton, Tisdall, Lavers, Bellew, Stone, Gray, Waterlows and Bradbury Wilkinson - had already been paid 120 guineas each in September 1949 for submitted designs; each had received additional payments of 40 guineas for additional designs submitted on request, Metcalfe in January 1950 for his 'Britannia' design and Adshead in February for her 'Cliffs of Dover'. Harrisons had similarly been paid 40 guineas on 19 December 1949 for the adaptation of its McLaren design. On 1 June 1950 Waterlows billed the GPO £118 each for engraving the master dies of the 2s 6d and 5s, £120 for the 10s, and £122 for the £1; on 28 August the company billed supplementary costs of £60 for engraving the smaller head for the 2s 6d and 5s values, and £26 10s (£26.50) for earlier work on the larger heads on each value.

The stamps were issued as scheduled on 3 May 1951, including the following overprints for overseas postal agencies:

	2s 6d	5s	10s	
Tangier	'Tangier'	as 2s 6d		as 2s 6d
Morocco *	'Morocco Agencies'	ditto	-	
Bahrain	'Bahrain 2 rupees'	'Bahrain 5 rupees'		'Bahrain 10 rupees'
Kuwait	'Kuwait 2 rupees'	'Kuwait 5 rupees'		'Kuwait 10 rupees'
BPAEA**	'2 rupees'	-		-
Eritrea ***	'BA Eritrea 2s 50c'	'BA Eritrea 5s'		'BA Eritrea 10s'

Tripolitania *** 'BA Tripolitania 60 l' 'BA Tripolitania 120 l' 'BA Tripolitania 240 l'

* The sole remaining British postal agency was at Tetuan, in the Spanish zone.

** British Postal Agencies in Eastern Arabia, comprising Muscat, Dubai and Qatar (Doha).

Overprints showed the value only.

*** Eritrea and Tripolitania were former Italian colonies under British control. 'BA' stood for British Administration. Overprints for Eritrea (1942-52) were in shillings and cents, those for Tripolitania (1943-51) in lire.

REACTIONS TO THE ISSUE

General reaction to the high values was rather muted, as they were inevitably overshadowed by the special Festival stamps issued the same day. The attention of collectors was also diverted, first by a controversial attack on Edmund Dulac's stamp designs in the letter columns of 'The Times' on 8 May whose after-echoes rumbled on for some months; second by the colour changes to low values, and the question of whether or not this had been a necessary exercise. 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' for June 1951 described the high values as 'the true Festival stamps' but commented:

What a fine design the St George on the 10s would have made, if he could have had a stamp of vertical format to himself, while the 'Victory' and the white cliffs of Dover would have shown up well in larger size. They do, however, prove the supremacy of line-engraving over all other methods of production, even for pictorials.

T Devonshire Jones, writing in 'Stamp Lover' for May 1951, praised the issue (with reservations) as 'good modern stamp design':

In the design of the 2s 6d value the net background is pleasingly soft behind the oval medallion. The lettering is fine, and the value figures ... clearly balance the letters of 'Postage' ... The oval shape of the medallion ... cleverly achieves this balance ... The motif of the 10s. is beautifully executed, and 'Postage' is given only the amount of importance it deserves.

However, Jones proceeded to some minor criticism of lettering and spacing, before going on to complain:

No Royal Arms can surpass those which appeared on the first King George VI 10s stamp. The shape of the new stamp does not favour such a design as much as the more attractive old shape did. Why does the £ sign have to be so fancy?

'Stamp Collecting' described the stamps on 11 May 1951 as 'most attractive'; the magazine found the 2s 6d and 5s 'a pleasant departure from our usual austere designs' and Metcalfe's design for the 10s 'a very fine picture'. For the issue of 18 May they interviewed

Edmund Dulac, whose view was that Mary Adshead's 2s 6d and 5s revealed 'a delicacy of touch and approach that could only have been done by a woman ... The only fault that he could find with Percy Metcalfe's 10s and £1 was that the St George and Dragon (10s) and Royal Arms (£1) were too large for the balance of the whole, and killed the head.' Being justly proud of his creation of the King's head as it appeared on all British stamps of the reign, Dulac was understandably critical of any design that he felt did not show it to full advantage.

VIEWS ON PICTORIALS

A certain amount of debate about pictorials was generated in the national and specialist press alike, both before and after the issue of the stamps. The columnist Ian Mackay wrote in the 'News Chronicle' on 8 March: 'There is a deadly dullness about British stamps which must be a bit monotonous even to the passionate philatelist ... Why should there not be stamps showing some of our famous sights like the Abbey?' Charles A Lusted wrote in 'Stamp Collecting' on 31 August: 'I would like to see a series of stamps showing something of the great wealth of scenic and historic beauty we have to offer in our small country.' A sternly contrary view was given by T Devonshire Jones in his 'Stamp Lover' article already quoted: 'The insets of the 2s 6d and 5s values ... are an attempt, and I sincerely hope an abortive one, to make Britain's stamps pictorial ... Any kind of Beautiful Britain issue which some people have in mind would be a fiasco.' There seems to have been an overall feeling that while Adshead's designs were charming, and Metcalfe's 'George and Dragon' impressive, the set fell short of the fully pictorial series that many still hoped to see.

Later opinion of the stamps remained mixed - John Woolford writing in 'Stamp Magazine' in July 1984 found kind words to say ('Waterlows' workmanship was still extremely good, and these stamps ... make an attractive display') but Stuart Rose dismissed the issue in his book 'Royal Mail Stamps', published in 1980, as merely 'a half-hearted concession to the unified set concept'. Opinion has been particularly divided over the two Metcalfe stamps; it has been pointed out at least twice that Metcalfe's £1 design is basically a treatment in horizontal format of Dulac's design for the high values of 1939, but P A Warren ('Stamp Collecting', 20 June 1974) thought Metcalfe's 'probably more pleasing to the heraldic purist [than Dulac's] while the philatelist may have other views', while W Aubrey Witham ('British Philatelic Bulletin', February 1974) found it a distinct improvement on the Dulac in terms of balance. Metcalfe's spacing of the letters in 'Postage' on his two designs has also been singled out, both for especial criticism (in Jones' 'Stamp Lover' article) and for particular praise (by James Watson in the February 1974 'British Philatelic Bulletin'). Watson also found Metcalfe's designs refreshingly 'modern' due to the absence of formal borders, while John Woolford was similarly captivated but saw their symbolism as a throwback to the Seahorses of 1913.

Despite the care taken to check technical details with the Admiralty and College of Arms, some quibbles were still raised over the strict accuracy of the stamps. 'Stamp Collecting' twice (11 May 1951, and in an article in 1952) stated that the Arms on the £1 stamp were incorrectly depicted in terms of 'tricking', the conventions of shading whereby the colours of heraldry are represented in monochrome. The magazine also quoted a reader as reporting that the Victory's foremast was shown without supporting ropes, while on 18 July 1951 Leslie I Carrington wrote to the PMG that the craft depicted in Dover Harbour on the 5s included a large fishing smack in full sail but 'apparently about to set off on its journey unmanned'. Carrington helpfully suggested that the stamp should be withdrawn, corrected and reissued. When approached for comments Mary Adshead pointed out by reference to the photograph she had used as a source that the 'fishing smack' was a Thames sailing barge and seen from an angle where the helmsman was concealed from view by the sail.

SALES OF THE HIGH VALUES

On 21 March 1950, the Earl of Mansfield had stated in the House of Lords that £1 stamps had 'no postal use', while Ian Mackay in the 'News Chronicle' a year later dismissed all four high values as merely expensive 'prestige stamps ... What [they] will be used for I can't say.' By the summer of 1951, however, the high value denominations were selling in greater quantities than had ever previously been experienced, partly due to the gradual introduction of air parcel rates from 1950 onwards, and also to the general increase in overseas parcel rates on 1 June 1951. Sales of the 2s 6d were particularly high, total 1951 sales of the value being 25 per cent up over 1950; subsequently 1952 sales were 21 per cent up on 1951, and 1953 by a similar amount on 1952. It was actually proposed at least twice during the 1950s that the 2s 6d was now selling in such quantities that it could no longer be regarded as a 'high' value, but should be transferred to the low value Wilding series and produced in the small size by photogravure. General increases in high value stamp sales for the five-month period May to September were also examined: in 1950 £1 sales were up 24 per cent on the previous year, and in 1951 by 108 per cent. In May-September 1951, 2s 6d sales were 21 per cent up on the previous year, 5s sales by 16 per cent, and 10s by 89 per cent. Stocks of the previous high values were being sold out rather than withdrawn; at the end of September 1951 it was reported that stocks of the former 2s 6d had been exhausted by the end of August, of the 5s by the end of June, and of the 10s by early June. Only the former £1 was still being sold (in greater quantities than its replacement). The 'Festival' high values of 1951, as they were to become known, were themselves replaced by the 'Castles' series in September 1955; final sales figures for the 'Festival' stamps were recorded as 40,723,192 of the 2s 6d, 22,141,445 of the 5s, 10,122,720 of the 10s, and 2,383,720 of the £1.

THE ARTISTS

MARY ADSHEAD was born on 15 February 1904 and learnt watercolour painting from her father, a professor of civic design and town planning at London and Liverpool Universities. Her mother taught her a love of flowers, which she later expressed in much of her work. She enrolled at the age of 17 in the Slade School of Fine Art, and from the late 1920s devoted the bulk of her career to murals, in restaurants, museums, churches and elsewhere; in 1937 her work was seen in the British Pavilion at the Paris Exhibition and on posters for London Transport. Her first stamp design came when commissioned by the GPO to work on the UPU issue of 1949, when her knowledge of philatelic art was limited to what she could glean from her teenaged son's stamp collection. As well as her success with the UPU 2½d and 1951 high values, her work was also featured on the 8d to 11d definitives of 1953-54 and the World Scout Jubilee 2½d of 1957. She remained involved in stamp design for the GPO until 1963, and her last important mural was completed in 1982, although her occasional exhibitions of watercolours were acclaimed as late as 1992. She died in September 1995.

PERCY METCALFE was born on 14 January 1895. He studied at the Royal College of Art and was to become an Associate of the College and a liveried member of the Goldsmiths' Company. He designed coins for Ireland, Turkey, Egypt, New Zealand, Fiji, Greece and Bulgaria; in 1928 he designed the Great Seal of the Realm, later followed by Coronation medals and the Great Seals of Ireland and South Africa. His work on stamps was confined to the brief period that saw his issued designs on the Olympic Games 2½d of 1948, the following year's UPU 3d, and the 1951 high values. Describing himself in 'Who's Who' as simply a 'sculptor and medallist', he died on 9 October 1970.

GILES ALLEN
29 March 1996

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