

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST REGIONAL STAMPS ISSUED

## 1958

The idea of definitive stamps for the six 'regional' parts of Great Britain - Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man - can be traced back to Guernsey's request for a stamp of special local interest to mark the King George V's Silver Jubilee year of 1935. A design was submitted to the GPO, but the idea was rejected. In 1937 the Ministry of Commerce for Northern Ireland proposed its own regional stamp to the GPO, and was similarly refused. Yet another proposal came from the Isle of Man in 1939, when a design was submitted based on the 1931 Gibraltar 1d stamp, with the Manx coat of arms replacing the Rock: once more the request was turned down.

In the years immediately after the Second World War the idea of regional stamps was discussed in great detail by the GPO. By 1947 it had been rejected for a variety of inter-related reasons, but led to the issue of two pictorial stamps in the Channel Islands. No doubt encouraged by this, the Isle of Man asked in 1949 if a regional issue could be made to celebrate the Festival of Britain in 1951; the Governor, Air Vice Marshal Sir Geoffrey Bromet, visited GPO Headquarters for discussions on the proposal, but had to report back to the Tynwald, the island's parliament, that his efforts had been unsuccessful.

However, on 21 November 1951, Hector Hughes QC, the Labour MP for Aberdeen North, asked the Assistant Postmaster General, L D Gammans, through a Parliamentary Question, whether he would 'consider the issue of special and individual designs in postage stamps for Scotland'. This received the reply 'No, Sir!' Undeterred, Hughes pressed on, suggesting 'this could be done with great benefit to the trade and industry of Scotland, and with considerable profit'. Gammans replied there had been no previous request for this and it would present many difficulties, pointing out that the existing stamps gave Scotland pride of place by the thistle in the top right hand corner.

A Memorandum circulated in September 1952 outlined the more serious objections to special stamps for Scotland. It was felt that the issue could not be limited to Scotland and would have to be extended to Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands, and England. Having to produce and sell up to six instead of one design for each denomination would result in increased expenditure and complications in stocking and issuing the additional stamp. It was also said that Scottish stamps had been rejected in the past by the Home Office on the grounds that it 'would encourage separatist tendencies'. Further points against such an issue were:

Under International postal practice, the issue of stamps of a distinctive design in any territory normally indicates the existence of a separate postal administration; By tradition, stamps of the United Kingdom have the head of the reigning sovereign as the main feature of the design and do not show the name of the country. But the lower denomination stamps in the permanent series do have incorporated in the design symbols of the four main constituent parts of the United Kingdom - the Scottish thistle, the English rose, the Welsh Daffodil, and the Irish shamrock.

On 30 January 1956 D P Wratten of Postal Headquarters wrote to the Postmaster General, Dr Charles Hill, asking him to consider at the next Board Meeting special stamps for Scotland, specifically for sale in Scotland, possibly in three denominations - 2½d, 6d and 1s. Wratten felt the idea would be extremely popular in Scotland, providing variety whilst adding to postal revenue in a 'dignified manner'. He suggested that 'far from encouraging local nationalism, the policy of meeting such aspirations half way in matters of symbolism is always prudent'.

The Deputy Director General, S D Sargent, became involved and sought further information from the Director Postal Services (DPS), R H Locke. On 2 February the DPS replied that Hector Hughes MP had raised the question of stamps for Scotland in 1951 and attached a copy of the original reply. The DPS raised the further objection that it would be impracticable to introduce an emblem for Scotland whilst maintaining the Queen's head on a stamp at the present size.

In the following two weeks H N Pickering, Postal Services Department (PSD), wrote to A J Ryan, Regional Director, London Postal Region, J Owen, Regional Director, Home Counties Region, and R J Lewis, Controller, Supplies Department. Pickering said that the Postmaster General (PMG), Charles Hill, was considering the possibility of one or more 'National' low denomination stamps for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

On 16 February J Ryan sent a comprehensive reply covering the points asked of him, plus other general points that had subsequently occurred to him. He considered it a strong possibility that 'national' communities (Scots, Welsh and Irish) in England would wish to purchase the respective stamps at post offices in England. Although he thought this was likely to be limited to London and the larger cities, if post offices were to stock the full range of National stamps in addition to the 'standard' stamps it could lead to the following problems:

- accommodation of additional items in main stocks;
- additional stocks to be held at counters;
- some delay in completing counter transactions;
- additional time required for balancing sub-stocks;
- reprint of postage stamp stock books, requisition forms, counter balance forms, etc.

Ryan felt that although these did not appear to be major obstacles, prevailing conditions some were likely to have a serious effect on the standard of counter service. The counters were not without criticism at that time. During and since the war much additional work had been taken on from other Government Departments with customers having to queue for longer periods. This, according to Ryan, was compounded as there was a 'shortage of experienced counter staff and the quality of recruits is of a lower standard than pre-war'.

J Owen wrote on 17 February as a Regional Director and also a philatelist that 'the proposal, quite definitely, would not be welcomed in philatelic circles' adding 'Great Britain has always been noted for the simplicity and dignity of its stamps'. He pointed out that it was not possible to put much detail in the space available on the present low value stamps, but added that larger stamps were not the answer as these were objected to by business.

Owen suggested that 'Although too many commemorative issues are to be deprecated, if there is behind the present suggestion some desire to meet national sentiment, it would in my opinion, be much better to issue a few commemorative stamps, eg, Burns bi-centenary, Shakespeare, etc, rather than to issue anything of a permanent nature.'

He concluded that, with the current pressure and multiplicity of work on the counters, any additional complication, however slight, was to be deplored.

R J Lewis wrote, also on 17 February, that as far as the Supplies Department was concerned the introduction of additional stamps would involve problems of production, handling, storage, issuing and accounting. The degree of the problems would, he said, be dependent on the number of denominations. There would be no insuperable difficulty for the Supplies Department or the printers if the new stamps were issued in one or two values, in sheets only. Special problems would arise if it were proposed to issue the new stamps in books or in rolls.

A meeting held by the PMG on 21 February 1956 discussed stamp policy. The Assistant Postmaster General, C J M Alport, put forward a proposal that stamps in 2½d, 6d and 1s denominations be issued in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These would only be on sale in the countries and, he suggested, they be about 1½ times the size of the standard stamp, incorporating the Sovereign's portrait and a pictorial design. He argued that this would provide a variety of design without abandoning completely the Post Office's conservative policy. There would be a financial gain, possibly some £250,000 from a complete issue. Detailed discussion followed during which several points were raised. Political demands for such stamps did not appear to be coming from nationalist parties in the respective countries, but it was thought 'there might be merit in anticipating demand and weakening nationalist claims by the concession of a symbol'. However, the Home

Office suggested eight years earlier that such stamps might actually foster nationalist aspirations. There were added complications in that demand for 'English', 'Isle of Man' and 'Channel Islands' stamps would be hard to resist. The APMG urged that the proposal would help to eliminate any subsequent difficulties that might arise if or when Malta, which had its own postal administration, became integrated with the United Kingdom. It was agreed that a paper should be drafted for submission to the Home Affairs Committee setting out the possibilities of providing for National stamps of standard size, differentiated by some symbolic decoration. Stamps larger than standard size had already been dismissed as causing too many problems for business users and in stamp books and stamp vending machines.

A paper was subsequently drafted by Locke, the PMG and APMG both making revisions. On 16 March the PMG wrote to Major Gwilym Lloyd-George, Home Secretary and Welsh Affairs, and to James Gray Stuart, Secretary of State for Scotland. Attaching a copy of the proposal, the PMG said he believed it would 'take the wind out of the nationalist sails', would also create widespread interest, and the Post Office would make money from it.

The DPS had also drafted a letter to the Home Office. Following a conversation with the DDG this letter, addressed to Sir Austin Strutt, Assistant Under-Secretary of State, was not sent. The reasons appear to be that it was too early to pursue at an official level, plus the PMG had the matter in hand. On 19 March the DPS sent a copy of the letter to the DDG together with a memorandum outlining the DPS's personal views. The memorandum defined the proposal as:

2½d stamps of the same size as the present stamp but of a distinctive design for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and  
4d and 1s 3d stamps of 1½ times the size of the present stamps, also with the distinctive designs for the three countries.

The DPS said that the proposal had 'the seeds of its own destruction'. He stressed that the GPO had no right to issue stamps for use in the international post without the name of the country of issue. The acceptance by other administrations of the Monarch's head as a sufficiently distinguishing feature had been aided by the simplicity of the ordinary stamp design and the relative infrequency of special issues. This would become less acceptable with a permanent issue of four different 2½d, 4d and 1s 3d stamps. If seriously challenged there were no good reasons for maintaining the practice. The DPS suggested the addition of the words Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland alone would not solve the problem as these countries had no separate postal administration, and it would be inappropriate to use the words United Kingdom on stamps specifically issued to mark the nationality of the country concerned.

The DPS wrote at some length on the complications that were likely to arise. He could see no grounds for refusing the issue of similar stamps for England, in which case if the present unified designs were not retained there would be no United Kingdom stamps of these denominations. In the offices bordering the various countries there would probably be a need to sell both the National and the United Kingdom stamp, which would involve additional work.

The size of the 4d and 1s 3d stamps was also raised. If larger pictorial stamps were issued for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland it might be difficult to refuse similar larger stamps in the permanent series, possibly encouraging demands for a similar treatment of other denominations. An important point against such a move was that these larger stamps were more expensive, not only to produce in that twice the amount of paper would be used, but also there would be a need for increased storage space. Further, although the 4d and 1s 3d values were at that time most used for postage overseas, changes in the tariff structure may reduce their importance. Once committed to larger stamps for these values it might be hard to revert and the new denominations, taking the place of the 4d and 1s 3d stamps, would have to be issued in the larger size.

Other practical issues raised included the design selection process. Despite relatively simple stamp designs it was already a complicated and difficult task. At present there was one Advisory Panel but if each region were to have its own panel there would be further complications. Obviously the PMG would have final responsibility, but in the interest of appeasing national sentiment there would be a need, for example in the case of Scotland, to involve the Secretary of State for Scotland. The additional work involved and the associated need for additional staff, all added costs.

On 24 March James Stuart replied to the PMG thanking him for the draft paper. Stuart stated he had great interest in the proposal but asked for clarification on a few points. He asked for an indication of how Scotland was to be symbolised while retaining the Queen's head as the dominant feature. He was also interested to know how the new issue would result in a financial gain of £½m and whether this was to be derived from the sale of stamps to collectors. The PMG had stated, in favour of the proposal, that Scotland already had its own bank notes and at least one denomination in the United Kingdom coinage. He had suggested that if and when Malta became integrated with the United Kingdom, the island would presumably retain its separate stamp issue. Comparisons might become 'embarrassing as well as odious'. Stuart respectfully pointed out that Scotland did not, as such, have its own bank notes: 'The Scottish banks each issue their own notes; there is no Government or Bank of England issue with separate Scottish features.' Further, the coin mentioned was not exclusively a Scottish coin but one issued by the Mint for general use with a Scottish symbol on the reverse.

The PMG replied on 29 March and said he did not know how Scotland was to be symbolised. He appreciated the points about the bank notes and coinage and he would amend his paper accordingly. He still thought, however, that there was a useful parallel to be drawn between the characteristics of notes issued by Scottish banks and the issue of a National stamp – ‘even though the letter would be accepted without demur for postage anywhere in the Kingdom’. He considered it right, as well as convenient, to limit the sale of a Scottish stamp to Scotland, but welcomed views on this. The PMG added he saw an ‘essential difference between a stamp which is used only by the person to whom it is first issued and a coin which inevitably circulates all over Great Britain’.

Regarding the estimated financial gain, the PMG acknowledged this was necessarily a rough figure and was, as supposed by Stuart, the revenue expected from selling the stamps to collectors. The maximum figures attained by the GPO so far from special issues had been between £300,000 and £400,000. Providing the proposed stamps were of ‘really striking design’ then the national appeal might generate additional sales.

On 3 April Major Lloyd-George’s Private Secretary, R Martin, wrote to the PMG in reply to the letter of 16 March. He said that Lloyd-George welcomed the proposal with regards to Wales, but for Northern Ireland it was, he considered, always undesirable to take any action that might separate it from the rest of the United Kingdom. He could, however, see no objection to having a separate stamp with a special Northern Ireland design, provided that the sale of the stamps was not confined to post offices in Northern Ireland. Further, it seemed to him that the best route to take was to issue separate series of stamps with the emblems of the different countries on them, all on sale at any post office in the United Kingdom. This would also avoid any possible comparison of sales designed to show that one country was contributing more revenue than another.

The letter drew attention to the fact that the no mention was made of special issues for Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. It was suggested that there might be a case for issuing stamps for the islands as ‘it would give them pleasure and could do no harm’.

The PMG replied to Lloyd-George on 17 April thanking him for his comments. The PMG explained that he had recently been in Belfast where the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Lord Brookeborough, received the idea favourably. The PMG doubted whether nationalist opinion could manipulate the situation since the other 18 denominations of postage stamps issued by the Northern Ireland Post Office would continue to be those issued in the United Kingdom. But to make all stamps equally available at all post offices would lead to serious administrative complications.

The PMG agreed that the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man should be included. This could be done by allocating one denomination, possibly 2½d, to each, taking the Channel Islands

as a single area. He felt that doing this might reduce any tendency to assume that regional stamps had been issued as a concession to nationalism.

The question of regional stamps was subsequently re-examined from a Post Office point of view taking into consideration the comments made by the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland. The draft paper was re-titled to include the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The proposal was to issue new stamps in the 2½d, 4d and 1s 3d denominations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a 2½d stamp each for the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man. The sale of each series was to be confined to post offices in the respective areas, with all stamps being valid for postage and revenue anywhere in the United Kingdom. The stamps were to 'conform to the general pattern of existing stamps, with the head of the Sovereign as the dominant feature'.

On 5 March Pickering informed the Supplies Department of the changes to the proposals. Lewis was asked what extra work would be created and what would be the effect of stocking rolls of stamps and incorporating the new stamps in stamp books. He was also asked to provide an estimate of the additional cost and staff that would be needed if these changes were made.

In addition Pickering asked what the effect would be if Supplies Department had to stock 'A' and 'C' envelopes and letter-cards with a stamp of a different design for each country, and the effect of having air letter forms with a stamp of a different design for each country.

Before Lewis could investigate the matter Pickering wrote again. The letter, dated 23 March, explained that a minute about National stamps had been sent to all Regional Directors. Lewis was asked to make comments on the points raised and to include them in his reply.

On 11 April Lewis replied to the Postal Services Department, having made a preliminary examination. He felt the main problem was likely to be one of storage, but a new stamp depot was in the current building programme and was scheduled for completion in 1958. Until this was completed it would be difficult to provide the necessary security storage facilities for all the new items in the present stamp depots. It would therefore be impracticable to introduce anything like the full range of items proposed.

Lewis saw no serious objection to the four items of stamped stationery. Building work for extra storage had just started at the printers in Wolverton, anticipated to take about twelve months to complete.

A first rough estimate of costs, not including artists' fees, was enclosed.

Initial costs:

Developing charges (Stamps) @ £200 each design = £3,600

Printing cylinders (Stamps) @ £110 each (including spares) = £7,260  
Dandy roll for Scottish paper = £400

Air letter forms:

Six primary cylinders from drawings = £600

Nine spare cylinders = £270

Lettercards:

Six master dies (excluding Head) (working dies provided by Royal Mint) = £600

'A' and 'C' envelopes:

Six master dies (excluding Head) (working dies provided by Royal Mint) = £900

Total = £13,630.

Continuing Costs (yearly):

Supplementary costs over present payments, where, because of short production runs, higher rates would be payable (approx) = £3,500

Additional handling, accounting, storage = £1,500

Total = £5,000

Note: If double size stamps were introduced for any denominations additional costs would be involved.

On 18 April S D Sargent sent a Minute to the PMG providing an update. The Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland had replied favourably in principle. The Regional Directors, apart from those in Scotland and Wales, were against the idea on practical grounds: it was argued that their introduction would complicate the process of producing and selling stamps at a time when the Post Office was trying to increase productivity and conserve manpower.

On 20 April the PMG put his proposal to the Home Affairs Committee asking whether he would have its support in submitting such a proposal for the Queen's approval.

The Committee did not reach a decision on the proposal at a meeting on 27 April. The Lord Privy Seal said that points raised in the discussion justified approaching the proposal with some hesitation. The Committee wished to discuss the matter further when the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland were present. In the resumed discussions, held in mid June, the Committee agreed that the proposal had some merit and was unlikely to arouse nationalist sentiment. However, the Lord Privy Seal said that the



Prime Minister had expressed misgivings. He proposed to report to the Prime Minister the general views of the Committee, adding that it would have further discussions if directed by the Prime Minister.

On 30 June Lord Brookeborough, having consulted his colleagues, wrote to the PMG. The general view appeared to be that, whilst happy with the existing arrangements which emphasised the unity of the United Kingdom, they did not want to be the 'odd man out' if Scotland and Wales had their own special issues. He said it was difficult to give a more definite opinion without having a better idea of the actual designs. The PMG replied on 4 July that the first stage was to seek the Queen's approval of the principle. Then he proposed to invite representative of cultural and artistic interests in the countries concerned to advise on the designs submitted. He undertook to consult Lord Brookeborough on the representatives on the advisory committee for Northern Ireland and to submit to him the design and the committee's recommendations for approval before putting any proposed design for Northern Ireland to the Queen.

On 6 July the PMG wrote to the Queen's Private Secretary, Sir Michael Adeane. The PMG explained that it was proposed to issue new stamps in the 2½d, 4d and 1s 3d denominations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and a 2½d stamp each for Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The PMG continued:

The modifications proposed are modest and limited to the surround and border. The basic design, as well as the size and colour, of the stamps would remain unchanged. The Head of Her Majesty would continue to be the dominant feature. The border, and only the border, would bear symbols or designs appropriate to the country or area concerned in place of the present symbols. Thus the dominance of the Sovereign's Head on all stamps would symbolise the unity, combined with diversity, which provides the continuing strength of the British tradition.

The sale of each of these stamps was to be confined to post offices in the area represented by the stamp and would be valid for postage and revenue purposes anywhere in the United Kingdom.

The PMG was informed on 7 July that the Queen was pleased to give informal approval to the proposal and looked forward to seeing the designs proposed.

On the 18 July the PMG was asked by Garner-Evans, as a Parliamentary Question, if consideration had been given to issuing distinctive stamps for the different parts of the United Kingdom. The PMG explained that the Queen had graciously approved such a scheme. He added that there would be no separate stamps for England and that post offices in England would continue to sell the existing stamps only. The PMG gave an outline of the proposal, as put before the Queen.

That same day the PMG held a conference at the House of Commons with the lobby correspondents. The proposal was seen by the PMG, and the Post Office, as a new departure in policy. Having always taken a conservative attitude on stamps, the intention was not to reverse that policy, but 'to make a quite important modification of it'. The primary reason for this change was to recognise the 'ancient status of the countries and islands concerned ... [and] give pleasure to their people who, whilst proud of their common allegiance, cherish their national identity'. The files contain a list of questions and answers prepared for the conference. The first question asked if the new stamps were to be pictorial; the answer was 'no'.

There was continuing interest in the matter of pictorial stamps. On 17 May Viscount Elibank put a motion to the Government asking if it would consider issuing small British pictorial stamps in low values. Fifteen pages of 'Hansard' reported the arguments for and against. The Viscount had first raised the matter in 1953 and again in 1954 and 1955, and now suggested the stamps bear the Queen's head and 'portray to the world in extensive fashion some of the scenic beauties and historical monuments of the British Isles', thus attracting tourists to the United Kingdom. The Viscount went to the trouble of producing trial photographic designs, at current stamp size, prepared by a well-known firm of philatelists. However, Lord Chesham, representing the Government, was not swayed and the motion was defeated.

The second question, which bears a pencil annotation 'not used', asked whether Lord Elibank's proposal for pictorial stamps had been rejected. The reply stated, 'If the question means are we going to have castles, beaches and the like on these low value stamps, we are not.' The remainder of the 13 questions covered mostly dealt with matters of availability. One question asked when the stamps would be available, the response being: Experience shows that to get good designs and well produced stamps takes time. This is a venture in a new field and one cannot say how long the job will take - the best answer might be 'as early as possible next year'.

On 24 July, in the House of Lords, Viscount Elibank once more asked about low value pictorial stamps. During the debate on stamp policy Lord Saltoun asked Lord Chesham, answering questions on the PMG's behalf, whether the special stamps for Scotland, referred to in the PMG's reply to Garner-Evans, would be contrary to the Act of Union. Lord Chesham was unable to answer this so advice was sought from the Solicitors Department. The next day the Solicitors Department informed PSD that it had been unable to find anything in the Act of Union of 1706 which had any bearing on the proposal to issue special stamps for Scotland. PSD sought the views of the Scottish Office. The reply was sent on 27 July:

It could be argued (as was suggested in the penultimate paragraph of the Secretary of State's letter to the Postmaster General dated 25 April) that the issue of stamps for all parts of the United Kingdom except England implies there is some difference between the status of England, and it is indeed inconsistent with the conception of one United Kingdom. It might also be argued that it is wrong to equate the position of Scotland, which voluntarily entered into an incorporating Union with England, with that of Wales, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

The Scottish Office suggested that, to avoid raising a debate on constitutional issues, the PMG's reply should simply be that he is unaware of any provision of the Act of Union that precludes the proposed issue in Scotland of a National stamp.

Viscount Elibank had a further question for answer on 1 August, asking the Government to 'name the Statutory Authority under which they propose to issue stamps for sale only in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man'. The reply, by Lord Chesham, cited the Authorities as the Stamp Duties Management Act 1891, the Finance Act 1911, the Post Office (Powers and Duties) Order 1914 and the Post Office Act 1953. It was under these general powers that the government proposed to issue stamps for sale only in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. It was said that there was nothing in these provisions that prohibited the sale of stamps of different designs in different places.

On receiving this reply Viscount Elibank thanked Lord Chesham and asked if it was the considered opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown that the Government did have these powers. Lord Chesham simply replied 'Yes, my Lords.' However, following this the Attorney General wrote to Lord Chesham putting it on record that the Law Officers had not in fact given their opinion and that, even if they had, it was contrary to the accepted practice for Lord Chesham to have disclosed the fact in the House. The error was not corrected in the House and the point was not raised again.

On 19 July the Dame of Sark wrote to the PMG asking that a special stamp be issued for Sark. The PMG replied on 2 August that he was well aware that Sark was in many ways unique and that it enjoyed a measure of constitutional independence from the other islands. It was not possible, however, to provide a separate stamp for Sark without making similar recognition to Alderney, with its considerably larger population. The PMG had consulted the Home Secretary on the matter and decided that since both Sark and Alderney were within the Bailiwick of Guernsey and the population of the Bailiwick of Guernsey was comparable with that of Jersey and the Isle of Man, it was right to provide a separate stamp for each of the two Bailiwicks, rather than provide one stamp for all the Channel Islands. The PMG was sorry but he could not agree to a further division of the new stamp issues.

On 22 July Sir David Lidbury, former Assistant Director-General, GPO (1941-47) and Vice President Executive Commission of the Universal Postal Union (1947-52), wrote to Sir Thomas Gardiner, a former Director General of the Post Office (1936-1945). Sir David asked Sir Thomas for his views on the proposal, adding that he 'feared the GPO had taken a false step'.

Sir Thomas wrote to the Director Postal Services, R H Locke, enclosing the letter from Sir David. Locke showed the letter to the Director General, Sir Gordon Radley, who thought he ought to reply.

Radley was sorry to hear that both Sir Thomas and Sir David felt so disturbed by the announcement, but he assured them that the Post Office had no intention of doing anything contrary to the Universal Postal Convention. By being valid for payment of postage anywhere in the United Kingdom, the stamps fulfilled the requirement of the Convention.

Regarding colours, the Convention no longer prescribed the colours to be used by countries for the various denominations, abandoned without opposition in 1952.

In conclusion the Director General quoted the PMG that the intention was 'to symbolise the unity which, combined with diversity, provides the continuing strength of the British tradition'. He hoped they now felt that nothing essential in the tradition of the past had been lost.

Public and press reaction to the PMG's announcement of 18 July was mixed - for the most part national and provincial newspapers gave a cautious welcome, while many philatelists and the specialist press opposed the idea vigorously, with amazement at the 'revolutionary' reversal of the GPO's former policy. There was widespread regret that the GPO still declined to contemplate low value pictorials; opinions differed as to whether these should show 'famous places and buildings in the United Kingdom' ('Southern Daily Echo', Southampton) or 'British industry, invention, or other achievement' ('The Scotsman', Edinburgh).

Some were alarmed that the new policy might undermine the dignity of the British postage stamp tradition, despite the fact that the element of visible change involved was elsewhere derided as 'infinitesimal'. 'The Times' declared: Her Majesty's stamps are rather noble things. They deserve better than to be cheapened ... down to the level of 'Souvenir from Brighton' or 'Blackpool rock'. On 3 August 'Stamp Collecting' included letters attacking the PMG's proposals by James M B Ruffle ('The Postmaster-General has at one blow shattered the very high reputation and the finest traditions that this country has held in the philatelic world') and H B Macmillan ('It would do much towards bringing us down to the level of certain Central American countries'). There was some comment that no 'English' stamp was

apparently envisaged - Anthony Smith-Masters, another 'Stamp Collecting' correspondent, put his thoughts into verse:

There'll be thistles, leeks and shamrocks - every blessed flower that grows,  
But banned from all our letters is the wearing of the Rose.

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## PROVISIONAL TIMETABLES

R H Locke (DPS) wrote to Sargent (DDG) on 23 August 1956 with details of the likely times required for the various stages in the design and printing of the stamps. Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, in discussion with the Supplies Department, had advised that the best times the company could offer were:

for the preparation of essays - two weeks for the first design and one week for each subsequent design;

for final printing - six weeks for the first design and one week for each subsequent design.

Bearing in mind these constraints, five plans had been devised by the DPS. The one to follow was largely dependent on the number of different designs to be introduced in the initial issue, as the time required for the design and printing process is mainly determined by how many designs are to be adopted.

It was currently proposed that 2½d, 4d and 1s 3d denominations be introduced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with a single 2½d introduced in Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man. This would give a total of twelve designs if a separate design were employed for each denomination in the three major regions. The DPS suggested an alternative arrangement would be to have a common design for the 2½d and 4d stamps. This would be in line with the current issue and reduce the total to nine.

The five plans were:

The issue of a single stamp (2½d) in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only (A).

The issue of a single stamp (2½d) in each of the six Regions (B).

The issue of 2½d and 4d stamps in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with a common design in each country, and 2½d stamps in Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man (C).

As above but with the addition of a 1s 3d stamp with a separate design in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (D).

The issue of 2½d, 4d, and 1s 3d stamps in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (with separate designs in each case) and a 2½d stamp in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man (E).

In estimating the time required allowance had been made for some degree of choice in design when essays were submitted to the Queen, as was customary. PSD had assumed

that, for each Region, at least one more design than actually needed would be submitted. The time allowed for each stage had been cut to the minimum, guided by past experience, with only three weeks allowed for artists to prepare their designs, although the Council of Industrial Design had previously asked that the artists be given three months to prepare designs. Total times for the five plans as above, after the committees had been set up, were:

- A – 28 weeks
- B – 38 weeks
- C – 41 weeks
- D – 47 weeks
- E – 50 weeks.

It was thought unlikely that the committees could be set up before the middle of September. The time to the end of March 1957 was 28 weeks, the minimum required for the three 2½d stamps. With little chance of making even the minimum issue of new stamps before the end of the financial year, it was suggested that method (C) be adopted: A and B were thought likely to provoke criticism from the public as being half-hearted in an effort to quickly gain revenue in 1956/57; C was seen as preferable to D and E in that the smaller number of designs would give a reduction in production time. Having a common design for the 2½d and 4d would fit with current practice and ease the difficulty of obtaining good designs from the restricted choice of artists with an acceptable 'regional' background.

The forecast for method C had been 41 weeks, from mid September to the beginning of July 1957. This would result in only a short interval before the Boy Scout Jubilee Jamboree taking place between 1 and 12 August, for which the Post Office was committed to a commemorative issue of three stamps. Although a longer interval between the two issues was preferred, Supplies Department had advised it was possible, providing there was not excessive overlapping in the printing of the two issues, and that the two types of stamps could be stocked almost simultaneously. The public, it was thought, would not be likely to complain of two issues so close as the Regionals were in no way commemorative. There was a slight risk of complaint at the 'Jamboree' issue being given preference for sale at counters, as was normal practice with commemorative issues.

In conclusion R H Locke recommended that the best course of action was to aim at completing method C by the beginning of July, with a common design for the 2½d and 4d denominations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Sargent discussed the matter with the Postmaster General before replying to Locke five days later on 28 August. The PMG had accepted a proposal by Sargent that the Post Office should concentrate on issuing 2½d stamps only for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,

which would take a minimum of 28 weeks. The PMG added that he felt it desirable to have separate designs for the 2½d, 4d and 1s 3d stamps in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

R H Locke circulated a memo on 16 January 1957 explaining that the APMG had said every effort should be made to issue the 2½d regional stamps for Jersey and Guernsey on the day of the Queen's visit to the Channel Islands, planned for the end of July. The APMG seemed adamant on this point despite being informed by Locke that it might not be practicable as the Boy Scouts Jamboree stamps had to be ready by the beginning of June to be issued on 1 August. The APMG added that he did not feel there was a problem issuing the Channel Island stamps before the other regions.

A timetable was drawn up to examine the possibility of issuing the 2½d regional stamps for Jersey and Guernsey to coincide with the Queen's visit. It was also known that the Queen was to visit the RAF Station at Leuchars, Fife on 4 June and so the possibility of issuing the Scottish 2½d stamp by then was also examined.

Channel Islands –

Date for submission by artists of preliminary rough sketches: 1 March

HMB\* to obtain bromides; sketches to be forwarded to appropriate RD/DPO\*; meeting of committee to be arranged; committee to recommend sketches to be bought to completion (3 weeks): 22 March

HMB to advise artists of committee's recommendations (1 week): 29 March

Artists to modify and complete designs (4 weeks): 26 April

Selection of finished drawings - HMB to obtain new bromides; designs to be forwarded to appropriate RD/DPO; meeting of committee to be arranged; committee to recommend designs to be accepted. Designs to be returned to HQ; Harrisons to be consulted; PMG to make final decision (4 weeks): 24 May

Preparation of colour essays (5 weeks): 28 June

Royal approval (2 weeks): 12 July

Printing (6 weeks): 23 August

Distribution (3 weeks): 13 September

Total: Channel Islands = 28 weeks from receipt of preliminary rough sketch drawings

Scottish 2½d stamp –

Date for submission by artists of preliminary rough sketches: 31 January

HMB\* to obtain bromides; sketches to be forwarded to appropriate RD/DPO\*; meeting of committee to be arranged; committee to recommend sketches to be bought to completion (3 weeks): 22 February

HMB to advise artists of committee's recommendations (1 week): 1 March

Artists to modify and complete designs (4 weeks): 29 March

Selection of finished drawings - HMB to obtain new bromides; designs to be forwarded to appropriate RD/DPO; meeting of committee to be arranged; committee to recommend

designs to be accepted. Designs to be returned to HQ; Harrisons to be consulted; PMG to make final decision (4 weeks): 26 April

Preparation of colour essays (3 weeks): 17 May

Royal approval (2 weeks): 31 May

Printing (6 weeks): 12 July

Distribution (3 weeks): 2 August

Total: Scotland = 26 weeks from receipt of preliminary rough sketch drawings.

\* HMB = Home Mails Branch, RD = Regional Director, DPO = Director of Postal Operations

The timetable indicated the earliest estimated date by which the stamps could be available, suggesting it was impossible to have the stamps ready for the Queen's visits. The dates had allowed for no margin, but experience had shown that some margin of time was essential to allow for various delays.

Discussions on the timetable continued throughout February and March. By this stage the earliest possible dates for the issue of the stamps were thought to be:

Scotland – 26 September 1957

Northern Ireland – 31 October 1957

Wales – 2 January 1958

Jersey – 24 October 1957

Guernsey – 7 November 1957

Isle of Man – 26 December 1957.

Having seen the proposed timetable, B T Coulton, Director of Harrisons, wrote to the Supplies Department on 2 April expressing concern over the time allowed for the essay stage. There was insufficient time allowed for more than one set of essays of each denomination. This could cause problems, suggested Coulton, if the committees through inexperience in minuscule design, were too ambitious in the amount of detail to be included. They might well be disappointed once the essays were produced. He pointed out that the company was committed to a very heavy work load already and stressed that to produce security work to a rushed programme causes both loss of quality and security.

The letter was subsequently shown to the DPS. The response was that the timetable to which Coulton referred was tentative and had been produced to gain an idea of how the programme might work out. It was regarded as provisional, and although it was hoped not more than one set of essays would be needed, it was realised that if this were not the case it would inevitably put back the timetable.



## AMENDMENTS TO THE STAMP PROGRAMME

All previous programmes for the issue of Regional stamps were abandoned in July. There had been delays in setting up the Regional committees and negotiations about the designs were taking far longer than anticipated, and there was more work to be completed before the designs could be sent to the printers for the preparation of colour essays.

On 2 September 1957 Miss Knight, PSD, wrote to the DPS giving an update on progress. All completed drawings for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Jersey and Guernsey had been received. These had been examined by Sir Francis Meynell, Chairman of the United Kingdom Stamp Advisory Committee, and since returned to the artists for alterations of the denominations from 2½d to 3d and from 4d to 6d. It was hoped that, if carried out promptly, the bromides would be ready by the middle of September. In the case of Wales and the Isle of Man, the artists of the approved designs would be given final instructions that week to complete the rough designs. The new programme allowed for:

- (a) four weeks for the artists to complete their drawings,
- (b) two weeks for the preparation of bromides and the printer's comments, and
- (c) two weeks for PSD to summarise the comments and give directions to the committees.

It was not considered possible to show the finished Welsh and Isle of Man drawings to the respective committees before the end of October or early November. Once the drawings were shown to the committees those for which essays should be prepared would be selected. The number of essays to be prepared was 18: four each for the three countries having three stamps and two each for the three islands. It was unlikely that preparation of essays would begin before October as it was quite possible the committees would request modifications to the designs.

Preparing essays was a slow process: Harrisons took two weeks for each essay, dealing with no more than two at any one time, so that the 18 required would take 19 weeks. This was the shortest time possible for Harrisons as the company also had to prepare an essay for the International Geophysical Year stamp, while the period just before Christmas was the peak for outside commercial work.

Once the designs were chosen the printing and distribution could be organised depending on the order in which it was decided to issue the stamps. There was a choice between issuing all 12 stamps on the same day, or issuing the 3d denominations first and the 6d and 1s 3d denominations later. The latter option was favoured mainly because there might be a loss of philatelic goodwill. The Empire Games stamps were also planned for issue and it would possibly prove difficult to put the Regional stamps into reserve whilst these were sold.

An additional reason against the simultaneous issue of all the stamps was that a first day cover with 12 stamps would look unattractive and be an inconvenient arrangement. This had to be balanced with the desire to sell as many first day covers as possible: this was thought more likely in two stages.

The earliest realistic date of issue now seemed to be the end of May or the beginning of June 1958. It was becoming increasingly important to put an end to uncertainty and speculation of when the stamps might be issued. It was suggested this could best be done by announcing the target date. However, it was not until 16 July 1958 that the APMG, K P Thompson announced in the Commons that new 3d stamps for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Monmouthshire, Jersey, Guernsey, and the Isle of Man would be issued on Monday, 18 August 1958. These would be followed by new 6d and 1s 3d stamps for Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales and Monmouthshire on Monday, 29 September. A Press and Broadcast Notice was issued the day of the announcement; a lengthier account was given at a press conference and in a set of more detailed Notices on 31 July.

Initial response to the Regionals was again mixed, as it had been to Dr Hill's original announcement two years earlier; 'Philatelic Magazine' acknowledged that the stamps were 'certainly a welcome change from the humdrum', but also considered: 'Broadly speaking, the designs are far too fussy; too much is crammed into too little.' 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' for September 1958 summed up the stamps as something of a hotchpotch, with some better than others, adding that to describe these designs as 'obscure symbolism' is no exaggeration. 'Stamp Collecting', however, thought that 'on the whole, people like the new stamps', while the September issue of 'The Philatelist' had no reservations on the matter: The designs are simple and easily understood, the Royal Portrait is charming, the colours are pleasing and do not clash, and the whole issue produced by Harrison's provide a perfect example of a utilitarian issue which is of artistic merit.

Andy Pendlebury  
February 1996

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