

British Empire Exhibition

Date of issue: 23 APRIL 1924 and 9 MAY 1925



The British Empire Exhibition at Wembley was publicised and commemorated by two stamps issued on the opening day, 23 April 1924, the first commemorative stamps from the British Post Office. The design, identical for both stamps, featured the King's portrait, a lion (later known as the 'Wembley Lion') and a rising sun, with the inscription 'British Empire Exhibition 1924'. The stamps, 1d red and 1½d brown were initially available only from the exhibition; however, after 1 July 1924 they were available by post from the London Chief Office. The stamps were valid throughout Great Britain or Northern Ireland.

The British Empire Exhibition reopened in 1925 and the stamps were reissued in the same design, but with '1925' instead of '1924', on 9 May 1925.

In addition to the stamps, the following stationery, impressed with stamps of the same design, was also produced with restricted availability:

- 'A' Postage Envelopes – 1½d
- Letter cards – 1½d
- Stout postcards, single – 1d
- International postcard, single – 1½d.

REASON FOR ISSUE

Until 1890 no commemorative item had been released by the British Post Office. For the Jubilee of the Penny Postage in May 1890 specially prepared envelopes and cards were put on sale: the 1d definitive design was used for both envelope and card, printed in blue on

the envelope instead of red. Nothing further had since appeared. Requests for special issues were refused, mainly on the grounds that the Post Office already had a sufficient number of articles to stock and sell (overcome in 1924 by restricting sales to the exhibition).

(The Postal Convention of Washington in 1897 excluded commemorative postage stamps of temporary validity from international circulation; this was retained at the Rome Convention of 1906, but not at the Madrid Convention of 1920.)

On 26 April 1923 E A Francis, the Post Office Assistant Secretary, submitted to the Secretary, Sir Evelyn Murray, an idea of a commemorative stamped envelope and postcard to mark the exhibition.

Sir Evelyn Murray replied that the following might be produced:

(1) Stamped Postcards, Stamped Envelopes and possibly Letter Cards, available for postage inland or within the British Empire, to be placed on sale at the Exhibition Post Office. No special adhesive stamp to be issued.

(2) The special Cards and Envelopes not to be on sale elsewhere (but stamp dealers could obtain them).

(3) A special datestamp for the Exhibition Post Office, used for both the special items, plus items bearing ordinary stamps, posted at that office.

(4) The exhibition authorities to be allowed to print Pictorial Postcards, etc, and to send them to the Post Office to be stamped, the Post Office charging the face value of the stamp.

(5) The special Cards, etc, to be available for postage from any other post office, but would not of course receive the special exhibition postmark.

(6) The printed 'stamp' to be larger than an ordinary postage stamp and to include, besides the King's head, an illustration characteristic of the Dominions.'

Murray also asked 'Is it advisable to exclude adhesive stamps?' A memorandum written by Brig Gen F H Williamson, Director of Postal Services, on 8 May 1923 reads: 'The stamped stationery to be sold will consist of postcards with the 1d and 1½d stamp and envelopes and letter-cards with the 1½d stamp. If there is no special difficulty in obtaining supplies, adhesive stamps of the values 1d and 1½d will also be issued.'

This is the first mention of the possibility of issuing adhesive stamps. The memorandum concluded: 'The size of the new stamps both pressed and adhesive should be approximately that of the existing 2s 6d and 5s stamps; and it will be necessary to take steps to obtain a suitable design.'

On 9 June 1923, a letter was sent to Brig Gen Williamson (sender unknown) with the view 'no doubt there will be a great rush on the stamps at the beginning, but when has worn off the steady sale is not likely to be very large. One can do nothing but guess, but I think that we should be well on the safe side if we printed 1,000,000 stamps of each denomination.' Several stamp-size designs were enclosed, referred to in a 'PS' as 'prepared by Mr Howard's (*) daughter', but these were unsolicited and never considered for use (* - Mr Howard was possibly an official in the Secretary's Department).

On 17 November 1923 Murray wrote to Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, Vice Chairman of the British Institute of Industrial Art: 'Subject to the King's approval, it is proposed to issue two new postage stamps (value 1d and 1½d) in connection with the British Empire Exhibition next year.' Murray continued there might be a special committee, but the advice of experts in artistic design was desirable and the Council of the British Institute of Industrial Art was invited to either undertake the duty or nominate two or three people ready to do it.

Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith was subsequently asked by Murray in a letter of 22 November to 'invite the Council of the British Institute of Industrial Art to appoint a small committee to advise, in the first instance, upon the procedure to be adopted in obtaining designs for the new stamps, and as to the artists who should be asked to compete, if it be decided to obtain alternative designs'. It was also suggested that it might act as a Selection Committee at a later stage whereupon a representative of the Post Office and of the King might be added.

On 29 November 1923 Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith wrote to Murray with the following recommendations by the sub-committee:

'In view of the commemorative nature of the stamps it would be an advantage if the terms of reference were enlarged so that the designs need not necessarily include a portrait head which it is thought may unduly restrict the opportunity of obtaining a fine result.

'That there shall be a separate design for each stamp.

'That the preliminary competition for the two designs shall be arranged not by inviting one or two artists, but by open competition.

'That from amongst the designs obtained the Selection Committee shall recommend not more than six designs for each stamp for further consideration.

'That the artist of each design so recommended shall receive a payment of £10 10s.'

Also on 29 November a letter was written to Murray from the Treasury Chambers in Whitehall reminding him that the Deputy Master of the Mint had a committee to advise on matters of the designing of coins, medals and decorations. The letter pointed out that as

the Mint would make the printing plates it would naturally like its committee, or some of its members, to participate in advising on any question of design.

On 10 December 1923 Sir Warren Fisher of the Treasury Chambers wrote further to Murray that he felt the King's Standing Committee - reinforced by a Post Office representative - would be the appropriate body to consider the question of design. Fisher enclosed an extract from a letter recently received from Mr Ponsonby, His Majesty's Private Secretary, giving the King's views:

'The King has heard of the proposal to issue a commemorative stamp at the British Empire Exhibition and although His Majesty is not very much in favour of stamps of this sort, because the whole idea is un-English and is copied from America, the King thinks that if it is to be done at all, it should be done properly. Assuming therefore that the Post Office has approved of the general idea, His Majesty hopes that a really competent Committee will be appointed to assist the Master of the Mint with the designs. The King is of the opinion that it is a waste of time to put people on the Committee who do not know anything about stamps or designs, and trusts that you will see that a thoroughly good Committee is appointed. His Majesty would like Mr E D Bacon, CVO, [representing] Buckingham Palace, put on the Committee in the interests of the Philatelists' Society [now The Royal Philatelic Society London].'

On 20 December 1923 Murray replied to Fisher saying that the Postmaster General (PMG) was in agreement that a special committee be formed with the King's representative, Mr Bacon, a member. Murray felt this would meet with the King's views, especially 'that the designs should not be settled by persons who have no philatelic experience'.

ESTABLISHMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE

On 28 December 1923 Murray wrote to Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith that a special Committee would be appointed to advise on the instructions to the artists and the selection of the designs. The PMG was anxious that Sir Cecil serve on the Committee. Murray requested suggestions of one or two suitable individuals connected with the British Institute of Industrial Art. On 31 December Sir Cecil Smith replied that he would be happy to serve and suggested three others:

- F V Burridge, Principal of the LCC Central School of Arts and Crafts;
- Martin Hardie, Keeper of Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum;
- Professor Anning Bell, Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art.

On 11 January 1924 Sir Cecil Smith sent Sir Murray a list of artists who might be considered: George Kruger Gray, F C Herrick, F Richards RE, McKnight Kauffer, Noel Rooke ARE, J D Batte, and E W Tristram. A further list provided more names in case required: George T Friend, Eric Gill, Macdonald Gill, Harold Nelson, Captain Shepherd and J R Sutherland.

On 16 January 1924 the committee held its first meeting. Those present were:

- Sir GE Murray, KCB (Chairman), Secretary GPO;
- The Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, KT, Trustee National Portrait Gallery and British Museum;
- Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, CVO, LLD, Victoria and Albert Museum;
- F V. Burridge, LCC Central School of Arts and Crafts;
- Professor Anning Bell, Royal College of Art;
- E D Bacon, CVO, Custodian of His Majesty's stamps;
- Brig Gen F H Williamson, CB, CBE, Director of Postal Services;
- Captain D O Lumley, OBE (Secretary), Private Secretary to Sir Evelyn Murray.

The Committee members received the draft instructions to the artists which stated that two special 1d and 1½d postage stamps were to be produced in the same colour as the existing 1d and 1½d stamps. The PMG would decide whether to use the same design for both stamps, or separate designs.

The artists were invited to submit one or more finished drawings on or before 9 February. Every design was to include space for a portrait of The King, either a circle 12.5 millimetres in diameter, or an oval 12.5 millimetres by 10 millimetres. The actual portrait would be provided by the Post Office separately, identical to that on the 2s 6d postage stamp.

The denomination (1½d or 1d) was to be shown either once or twice in bold numerals and at least as large as on the existing 1d postage stamp. The value could also be given in words but this was not essential. The words 'postage' and 'revenue' were essential although could be in smaller lettering; 'British Empire Exhibition 1924' had to appear. The design was to be symbolic of the British Empire.

After discussing the draft instructions the Committee agreed that an honorarium of 10 guineas be paid to each of the selected artists who submitted designs, whether accepted or not. It was also agreed that 90 guineas be paid in addition for any design that was accepted. The latest date by which designs could be received was revised to Monday, 18 February. On 16 January 1924 a letter with full instructions, together with a set of diagrams, was sent to the following artists:

- George Kruger Gray;

- F C Herrick;
 - F Richards RE;
 - E W Tristram;
 - Noel Rooke ARE;
 - J D Batten;
 - Eric Gill;
 - Harold Nelson.
-

ARTWORK SUBMITTED

On 31 January 1924 Eric Gill submitted four designs in two sets, each of a 1d and 1½d stamp.

Set 'a' was headed 'The British Empire as a business proposition'. Gill described the 1d stamp as 'An agricultural labourer of a more or less colonial type stands facing a mechanic in ordinary mechanic's oversuit. The sea below suggests that it is overseas trade that concerns them - ie, home manufacturing in exchange for overseas food.' The 1½d stamp was similar but the symbols were shown in discs. On the left various mechanical implements were shown and on the right a sheaf of corn. These symbols were connected by a telegraph, referred to by Gill as a symbol of 'business'.

Set 'b' was headed 'The Empire viewed historically'. Gill described the 1d: 'The Empire is a family. A mother and her children are shown symbolising the mother country and the dominions and colonies, in various stages of dependence and independence.' The 1½d was described: 'The Empire is a thing fought for and to be fought for. The British Lion is an attitude of defiance.'

Gill explained that he believed 'elaborate pictorial designs were untrue to the notion of a postage stamp. A postage stamp, as the name implies, is primarily a stamp. A pictorial stamp is an absurdity - especially when it is remembered that it will often be obliterated by the postmark or disfigured by dirt.' This view was similar to mainstream opinion at the time that, as with bank notes and coins, postage stamps were issued in Britain strictly for practical reasons.

On 15 February John Batten submitted one design which he described: 'Britannia, wearing the Naval crown, is represented as having laid a foundation stone inscribed with the words British Empire Exhibition 1924.' Batten explained that his eyesight did not allow him make a drawing within the given measurements. He had therefore drawn the design larger hoping that somebody else, with the assistance of a photograph, would be able to

copy it at the required size. Unfortunately the copy had failed so he enclosed the photograph hoping it would be accepted.

On 16 February E Tristram submitted three sketches, no descriptions being included.

On 17 February Noel Rooke submitted one designs: 'A field of waved lines, for the seas in which the parts of the Empire lie, and by which they are both separated and united.' The designs included eight compartments:

TOP ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) -

Maple leaf, for Canada, the device used by the Imperial War Graves Commission;

Rose, for England;

Thistle, for Scotland;

Springbok, for South Africa, the symbol used by the Imperial War Graves Commission.

BOTTOM ROW (LEFT TO RIGHT) -

Fronde of Tree Fern used by Imperial War Graves Commission and recommended by High Commission of New Zealand as symbolic of New Zealand;

Shamrock, for Ireland;

Lotus for India, used in the collars of the Orders of the Star of India and the Indian Empire, and recommended as symbolic of India by Secretary of State for India;

Australian Wattle Acacia Pyranantha, the national flower, for Australia.

'The eight compartments bound together by endless ties and bonds which unite round the Person and Crown of His Majesty, the centre of the Empire. An attempt has been made to embody in modern form some of the characteristics of the magnificent early Victorian Stamps of both British and Colonial issues.'

There are no records when Harold Nelson's designs were received nor any descriptions.

CONSIDERATIONS BY STAMP COMMITTEE

On 19 February the Committee held its second meeting and was informed that five of the eight artists had submitted designs: J Batten, Noel Rooke ARE, Eric Gill, E W Tristam, Harold Nelson.

The Committee was shown bromides of each design (photographic copies reduced to the size of a finished stamp). After consultation with Mr Rose of Waterlow and Sons Ltd, the company that would engrave and print the stamps, the Committee decided to recommend the following two designs:

British lion (subject to a few slight alterations) by Harold Nelson for the 1d stamp; Mechanical implements, sheaf of corn and telegraph (providing the artist was willing to carry out certain adjustments in his design) by Eric Gill for the 1½d.

A letter was sent to Harold Nelson asking him to contact Professor R Anning Bell regarding the modifications: on 21 February, having made the amendments, Nelson returned his designs to the GPO.

On 26 February Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith wrote to Sir Evelyn Murray 'in accordance with the Committee's instructions, our Subcommittee met Eric Gill on 19 February and discussed his stamp design'. Subsequently Gill spent much time addressing the problem but, while unable to make any substantial changes, did manage to make some slight alterations based on the suggestions. For example, he turned the telegraph wires downward out of the horizontal, and improved the weight of colour both to the lettering and in the hatching, in order to help when reduced for printing. Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith recommended that the altered design should stand: 'After all we felt, and I think the Committee in general felt, that the real charm of Gill's design lies not so much in the composition of the fields as in the beautiful lettering which surrounds it.'

DESIGNS APPROVED BY PALACE

On 28 February 1924 Lord Stamfordham of Buckingham Palace wrote to Murray with His Majesty's views on the designs. His Majesty very much liked the 1½d design by Harold Nelson; however, he did not approve the recommendation of Mr Gill's 1½d design. His Majesty also rather liked the design of Harold Nelson's 1d stamp, St George and the Dragon; but, as this would give both designs to one artist, the King was in favour of using Mr Nelson's 1½d design for both the 1d and 1½d, with different colours for the two stamps.

The letter mentioned a suggestion by the King that the stamps might be sold not at their face value but possibly 1s and 1s 6d respectively, and the proceeds given to King Edward's Hospital Fund for London. The King cited 1890 as a precedent when on the occasion of the Jubilee of the Penny Post, a considerable sum of money was raised for the Rowland Hill Benevolent Fund. The GPO sought advice and on 12 March 1924 Sir Otto Niemeyer, on behalf of the Treasury, wrote to Murray saying 'The precedent of 1890 seems to me to have been wholly illegal, and I cannot believe that Parliament, through the Public Accounts Committee, would accept it in modern conditions ... The principle of trustee collections [by the GPO on behalf of a charity] is wholly unsound and likely to lead to considerable abuse.'

On 14 March Lord Stamfordham wrote to Sir Murray that His Majesty was anxious to learn of progress concerning the stamps and whether a decision had been reached regarding

the proposed sale for the benefit of King Edward's hospital. On 17 March Murray replied that it was proposed to carry out His Majesty's suggestion and adopt the 'Lion' design for both 1d and 1½d stamps. Instructions had been given to proceed with the engraving and a proof for the King's approval would be sent as soon as available.

On 22 March Murray wrote to Lord Stamfordham regarding the King's suggestion of charging more than the face value of the stamp. Murray said 'it is quite true that the practice of charging more than the face value is not uncommon in foreign countries but, even if it is within the powers of the Postmaster General to do so here, which is open to question, the PMG doubts whether it would be regarded by the British public generally as a proper or dignified proceeding. But if a fancy price were charged there would be more serious obstacles in the way of handing over the proceeds to King Edward's Hospital Fund.' Murray concluded, 'The PMG has consulted the Chancellor of the Exchequer who agrees, and he hopes therefore that His Majesty may see his way not to press the point further.' On 24 March 1924 Lord Stamfordham replied 'The King does not wish further to press the suggestion of selling the Empire Exhibition stamps at a fancy price with a view of raising money for King Edward's Hospital Fund.'

On 15 March 1924 Sir Evelyn Murray wrote to Noel Rooke, J D Batten, E W Tristram and Eric Gill, thanking them for their designs but after careful consideration by a selection committee, the PMG regretted to say they had not been accepted. The four artists each received the agreed payment of ten guineas.

On 17 March Eric Gill wrote to Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith saying he had received the formal letter from Sir Evelyn Murray. Gill thought this would be the most likely outcome and was extremely surprised his designs had come so near to acceptance. He felt, however, that as the Selection Committee had accepted one of his designs, on which he was asked to make modifications, he should be reimbursed for the extra work, suggesting £3 14s.

Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith forwarded the letter to Sir Evelyn Murray, who replied on 25 March: 'When Gill was invited to modify his designs, so far as I am aware, he made no suggestion that any extra payment should be made and he presumably attended because he thought the chance of his designs being accepted were thereby improved. Incidentally, the modifications which he actually made were relatively trivial and his letter which accompanied the revised designs practically amounted to an admission that he could not materially alter them.'

Murray believed that 10 guineas for unsuccessful designs was generous and was not a payment for work done but an honorarium and as such was a fixed amount irrespective of the amount of time the artist devoted to the work: 'I do not see how in these

circumstances a reasonable case could possibly be made out to put to the Treasury, and I must confess I should blush to make the application.'

On 7 March Murray instructed Waterlow and Sons Ltd. to proceed with the engraving of the original die. The company was also requested to submit its lowest quotation to supply the plates and the initial order of 1 million 1d and ½ million 1½d stamps. On 11 March G W Rose of Waterlows showed H Sparkes, Controller of the GPO Stores Department, 'a sketch of the slight modifications which we considered necessary to improve the general appearance of the stamp'. Sparkes was satisfied with these, which amounted to a reduction in size of the wording 'ONE PENNY'. The following day Rose confirmed in a letter to W M Cook of Stores that the engraved work was to be 30mm wide by 25mm deep, with gutters of 4.5mm, so that the full size of each stamp would be 34.5mm by 29.5mm. The sheets would comprise six stamps across by ten down. Rose said that the firm would try to keep wastage down to 5% but that it would be advisable to allow for 7½%.

On 15 March an order for 60 reams of stamp paper in sheets was placed with the GPO's suppliers, Wm Joynson & Son of St Mary Cray, Kent. This quantity was arrived at by adding 7½% as advised by Waterlows for the 1.5 million stamps required and doubling the result to provide a reserve for a second print, enough for 53,750 sheets of 60; this was then rounded up to the equivalent of 60,000 sheets, or 60 reams. The paper should bear the 'block cypher' watermark of low value stamps, but otherwise be identical to that supplied for the high values; following a discussion on 6 March, it should also be made somewhat more ink-resistant than the norm. The first sheets were delivered to Waterlows on 26 March: a further 60 reams were ordered from Joynson on 15 April.

Waterlows' formal quotation, sent on 17 March, was as follows:

- for engraving original die and supplying printing plates for 1d and 1½d stamps = £130;
- for the supply of 1,000,000 of the 1d stamps = £120 16s 8d (equivalent to 2s 5d per 1,000);
- for the supply of 500,000 of the 1½d stamps = £62 10s (equivalent to 2s 6d per 1,000);
- subsequent orders of not less than 1,000,000 of one value = £116 13s 4d (equivalent to 2s 4d per 1,000);
- subsequent orders of not less than 500,000 of one value = £62 10s (equivalent to 2s 6d per 1,000).

The Mint's informal quotation for the die and plates was £125.

The work was allocated to Waterlow and Sons Ltd under clause 21 of their contract for adhesive stamp printing and was regarded as supplementary to that contract. The

contract prices for 1d and 1½d stamps were 12s 10d per ream (50 sheets of 240 stamps each = 120,000 stamps, ie, £5 7s for 1,000,000 stamps). These stamps were letterpress printed and therefore a comparison with the cost of recess printing was considered unreasonable. For letterpress printing dry paper was used with 960 stamps being printed with each revolution of the press, whereas for recess the paper had to be wetted and the plate cleaned at each revolution printing only 120 stamps. Although the quantities required were very small compared with those under contract, which extended over a period of 10 years, the preparations were proportionately very costly for this relatively small temporary job.

The prices were said, however, to compare reasonably favourably with the prices quoted for the high value stamps in 1918. The price paid to Bradbury Wilkinson for the recess printed high value stamps (2s 6d, 5s and 10s) under a contract made in 1918 was £1 12s 6d per ream (500 x 40 stamps), equivalent to £81 5s per 1,000,000. The contract in this case was large and continuing and the Post Office gained an advantage with this fixed contract in that wages had since risen. Waterlow and Sons had tendered for this contract at £2 5s a ream, equal to £112 per 1,000,000 stamps.

STAMPED POSTAL STATIONERY

The task of producing the stamped stationery was allotted to McCorquodale and Company under clause 2 of their contract, being regarded as supplementary to that contract.

All the special stationery was supplied at contract prices, with the exception of the 'A' envelopes, for which 6s 8d per 1,000 was charged. This was an increase of 1s 3d per 1,000 envelopes as a result of a different method of production. Ordinary 'A' envelopes were embossed with stamps, gummed, folded and completed on a specially designed machine. The Exhibition envelopes, however, bore 'printed' stamps and it was not possible to adapt the special machine for this work. The extra cost of providing a separate machine reduced the net profit on the sale of the envelopes from 40% to 21.3%. The net profit on letter-cards was, however, 112.2% and on stout postcards 93.4%. For the purposes of accounting and other unstated reasons the GPO felt it right that the charges for this stationery be the same as those otherwise sold.

In March McCorquodales' quoted the following approximate prices for the production of dies for the printing of stamped postal stationery:

- Cutting, engraving and making two complete original dies for 1d and 1½d stamps respectively = £25;
- 24 working dies @ 4/6 each = £5 8s;
- Total approx £30.

The quotation, when compared to the Mint's informal estimate of £50, was considered reasonable.

The two master dies were engraved by Mr MacDonald of Thomas MacDonald & Sons. The working dies were prepared for McCorquodales by the Nickeloid Electrotype Company.

THE KING'S APPROVAL

On 27 March Sir Murray submitted to Buckingham Palace proofs of the stamps. The enclosed letter stated: 'The red stamp will ultimately be a penny, the figures and lettering being altered accordingly. The present proof is merely printed from the 1½d die.' On 31 March Buckingham Palace returned the proofs approved by the King.

On 9 April 1924 two 1½d proof sheets in black were received by the Post Office, numbered 1 and 2, of 120 stamps each. After examination the following seven defects were found:

RIGHT PANEL

Row 6, stamp 1 from right - spots in front of lion's nose

Row 6, stamp 6 from right - black spots on tint lines behind head

Row 8, stamp 4 from right - scratch from top of tablet to lion's head

LEFT PANEL

Row 3, stamp 2 from right - black spot in 'r' of Empire

Row 5, stamp 2 from right - spots in front of lion's head

Row 5, stamp 3 from right - spots between 9 and 2

Row 6, stamp 3 from right - spots on tint lines

On 11 April Waterlow and Sons sent two further proofs in black, this time numbered 3 and 4. After examination the following defects were found:

RIGHT PANEL

Row 3, stamp 6 from right - black lines in front of lion's nose

Row 5, stamp 1 from right - black lines in front of lion's nose

Row 6, stamp 1 from right - black lines in front of lion's nose

LEFT PANEL

Row 9, stamp 5 from right - black spot in front of lion's nose

In April the Post Office Stores Department sent the Private Secretary of the GPO blocks of four of both stamps for The King and also one of each for the Secretary's collection. The latter were usually sent to the Home Mails Branch but it was thought on this occasion the

Secretary might be interested. On 22 April Sir Evelyn Murray, Secretary, sent examples of the stamps to:

Rt Hon the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres KT

Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith CVO LLD

F V Burridge

Professor Anning Bell

E D Bacon CVO

Brigadier Williamson.

The recipients were asked to consider the stamps as confidential until the exhibition opened.

During April the Post Office Stores Department sent Sir Evelyn Murray two mounted proofs of the 1d and 1½d on unwatermarked paper. It was understood that Sir Evelyn wished to send one set to the artist and he might wish to retain the other for himself.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 120 in two panes (10 rows of six stamps per row for each pane). The panes were separated before the stamps were delivered to Post Office counters. Waterlows delivered the following stamps during 1924:

1d

Good = 8,143,620

Waste = 1,096,380

Total = 9,240,000

1½d

Good = 6,046,200

Waste = 433,800

Total = 6,480,00

Grand total = 15,720,000

RESTRICTION OF SALE

Initially the stamps were on sale only at the Exhibition Post Office but valid for postage anywhere in Great Britain or Northern Ireland.

Lieutenant General Sir Travers Clarke wrote to Murray on behalf of the exhibition organisers on 2 July 1923, asking if sales at the exhibition could be retail only. They hoped that the stamps would attract a large number of visitors wanting to buy them, and this would be lost if dealers could go to the exhibition post office and buy wholesale supplies

for resale. This view was not shared by the GPO and, once the stamps were issued, arrangements were made for stamp dealers to obtain supplies from the Secretary, GPO, London EC1. A cheque was required made payable to the PMG plus a fee of ¼ per cent with a minimum order of 10s.

These restrictions met with little general approval and Sir Harry Brittain put the following question to the PMG in the House of Commons on 20 May 1924: 'What special effort, if any, is being made to induce the public requiring postage stamps to purchase those of the special issue?' The PMG replied that it was immaterial to the Post Office whether the public use the special issue or ordinary postage stamps. The PMG did not feel it necessary to push the sale of these stamps.

On 27 May Sir Harry Brittain further questioned the PMG, this time asking 'whether seeing that one of the main objects of the special issue of British Empire Exhibition postage stamps is to advertise the British Empire Exhibition, he will give instructions for these stamps to be on sale at all post offices'. The PMG replied that the exhibition organisers did not want to extend the sale to advertise the exhibition.

On 27 May Mr Howard of the Secretary's office, GPO, wrote semi-officially to the exhibition authorities that the GPO was not 'altogether happy about refusing to send stamps by post from the exhibition to persons who apply for them by letter'. He added that the Post Office had 'no desire to put the stamps on sale at any post office outside Wembley'.

Around 300 postal applications had already been refused and the following extracts indicate how these refusals were received:

We suppose the exhibition needs no advertising! It seems a strange business that you can not sell by post what you sell over the counter [from Huddersfield, 1 May 1924];

I believe that apart from the firm I represent there are a great number of consumers in this country, who would willingly co-operate in further advertising the exhibition by using special edition stamps on their mail [from London, 12 May 1924];

There must be several millions of people who will not be able to call at the exhibition ... it does seem to me ... that it is foolish policy to fling my Treasury Note contemptuously back in my face. I don't propose to make personal application. I was going to get a few stamps to send to correspondents on the continent ... but I shall now let the whole thing slide [from Deal, 5 May 1924].

On 30 May Mr Hannon asked the PMG, in the House of Commons, whether he would consider putting the stamps on sale at all post offices. He was referred by the PMG to the reply given on 27 May. On 10 June the exhibition authorities replied to Mr Howard. Having possibly misunderstood the position of the GPO they wrote 'the desire of the Post Office authorities to secure a wide sale is recognised'. Mr Howard felt this was unwarranted as

his letter had been explicit in stating there was no such desire. The exhibition authorities went on to say 'If it is in accordance with the views of your department to postpone general sale until July 1st, that arrangement would suit the Board of the British Empire Exhibition.' The Post Office felt that putting the stamps on general sale was undesirable as it involved duplication of stocks and special accounting arrangements.

The letter raised the further point of providing British Empire Exhibition stamps in higher denominations for 1925. Many letters had been received by the exhibition organisers asking for such stamps. They suggested that if it was impracticable to issue a different design then possibly the present stamps could be surcharged. This was put to General Williamson, Director of Postal Services, who commented that as 'two denominations now on sale provide for inland letters, postcards and newspapers, also for foreign and colonial letters and postcards and for printed paper above 2kg for all destinations, then all reasonable requirements were met'.

The question of postal applications for the stamps was raised again in the House of Commons on 17 June. This time Brigadier General Makins asked 'the exact reason why the postal authorities at the British Empire Exhibition refuse to send British Empire Exhibition stamps to correspondents who enclose the money for them'.

In reply the PMG stated that the exhibition authorities felt 'the utility of the stamps as an advertisement would be impaired rather than increased if they could be obtained otherwise than by personal application'. It was not intended that the restriction remain throughout the Exhibition and it had been agreed with the Exhibition authorities to lift the restriction at the end of the month.

On 1 May 1924 an article appeared in the DAILY TELEGRAPH written by Fred J Melville, an influential figure in the philatelic world who wrote a weekly column in the paper that appeared for more than 20 years, and was considered by many as philately's greatest propaganda medium. He wrote of the confusion supposedly caused by the restricted sale of these stamps. It was said the confusion spread to postal employees who refused to 'accept letters for registration franked with these stamps at post offices outside of the exhibition'. The article also included an extract from a reader from Perthshire who thought that if they are sold only at Wembley then they are the first 'English' rather than 'British', and if used on mail posted in Perth they will become 'English used abroad'.

Melville went on that although he found the design 'appropriate and pleasing' he was critical of the way the lion appeared to balance the King's portrait on the tip of its tail. He did acknowledge, however, that the printing and engraving were superior to that used for the ordinary 1d and 1½d stamps.

NUMBERED SHEETS

It was not until the stamps were on sale it was discovered Waterlows had numbered the sheets. Waterlows had been in the habit of numbering sheets of stamps produced for the Colonies. These numbers, at the top right hand corner, were in addition to the control letter and number that had always been at the bottom of the sheet. It is possible that the Post Office Stores, possibly unaware of Colonial practice, did not think to tell Waterlows not to print such numbers on this issue.

On discovering this, Stores immediately asked Waterlows not to number sheets. Such sheets were removed from sale; however, dealers were among the initial customers, buying complete sheets which had numbers at the top, as of course did anyone who bought whole sheets.

London Chief Office returned to the Stores the following stamps and stamped postal stationery for retention:

ADHESIVE STAMPS

1d	1,335 sheets of 60
1½d	1,250 sheets of 60

STAMPED STATIONERY

Letter cards	90 singles
Inland postal cards	160 singles
International postcards	200 singles

Of the stamps returned, only 835 sheets of 1d stamps bore a number in the top right hand corner.

On 8 July 1924 Lloyds Bank wrote to the PMG asking if the stamps could be accepted for other than postage purposes; although the stamps bore the legend 'Postage 1d' there was no 'revenue' as on the ordinary issue. Consulting the Inland Revenue, the GPO was told that the special stamps might be used as receipts despite the absence of the word 'revenue'. It was pointed out, 'under clause 101(2) of the Stamp Act the duty upon a receipt may be denoted by an adhesive stamp, and that a postage stamp was therefore valid for the purpose'.

A Stores Department memorandum on 3 June noted that another 75 to 80 reams of the special paper should be ordered from Joynsons in addition to that already supplied:

unfortunately these requirements are not recorded in fuller detail. It was noticed on 27 May and again on 8 October that the watermark was shallower on later 'makings' of the paper, this being attributed to the excessive calender. However, the paper was found satisfactory in overall quality throughout. The last batch of 1d stamps printed, in September, was reported on 3 October as unsatisfactory: although the matter was pursued, the reasons for this fall in standards remained unspecified.

1925 REISSUE

On 22 December 1924 Sir Travers Clarke wrote to Sir Evelyn Murray to ask for a 1925 Exhibition stamp. Further he urged that a fuller range of stamps be provided, suggesting ½d, 1d, 1½d and 2½d would lead to considerable sales, adding that people from foreign countries were very anxious to get 2½d stamps. On 9 February Sir Evelyn Murray, having submitted the suggestions to the PMG, replied. The PMG had agreed to 1d and 1½d stamps being issued as before, but did not think it necessary to include ½d and 2½d. The reason was that the ½d would only be used for advertisements, and the 2½d for letters to foreign countries other than the United States. (At that time postage for letters to United States and the British Empire was 1½d.) Murray felt that, as the sales the previous year of the 1d and 1½d were relatively small, it seemed probable that sales of ½d and 2½d would be insignificant. The limited number who wished to write to foreign countries using the exhibition stamps could use a combination of 1d and 1½d. Comparative sales of ordinary and Exhibition postage stamps and stationery during the period of 1 May to 31 October 1924 were reported as:

ADHESIVE STAMPS

	Ordinary	Exhibition
1d	458,644,000	7,250,000
1½d	1,057,676,000	5,692,000

POSTAL STATIONERY

	Ordinary	Exhibition
'A' Postage Envelopes	2,734,000	75,000
Letter cards	6,639,000	50,000
International Postcards	Nil	12,000
Inland Postcard (stout)	1,405,500	100,000
Inland Postcard (thin)	25,190,660	Not printed

Sir Murray added that it was proposed to reissue the stamps of the previous year, altering the date in the design from 1924 to 1925. He had been informed unofficially that the King

approved this proposal. (When the 1925 stamps came to be issued, however, there was widespread public disappointment at no fresh designs.)

Having amended the dies from 1924 to 1925, two proofs of each denomination in black and two of each in the colours approved for the 1924 issue were submitted to the Secretary, Sir Evelyn Murray. It was pointed out to Sir Evelyn that the cost of the exhibition stamps was about 12 times that of the ordinary letterpress printed stamps. On 4 March Sir Evelyn approved the design and acknowledged that the additional costs was a strong argument against general distribution. On 6 March Waterlow and Sons was asked to begin production of the printing plates. Proofs in black of each denomination were requested as early as possible. On 17 March the company was informed that the black proofs of the 1½d stamp had been approved. A warrant dated 18 March 1925 for 27,000 sheets of 1½d stamps was issued, 17 reams of the paper to be collected on receipt of the warrant, and the remainder to be made available a few days later. Twelve sheets were requested for approval of colour before the main printing began.

Having examined the black proofs of the 1d stamp plate, approval to proceed was given subject to correcting the following defects:

RIGHT PANEL

First row, first stamp from right - black scratches around 1925.

LEFT PANEL

Eighth row, first stamp from right - black scratches around 25.

On 20 March 1925 Post Office Stores Department informed Waterlow and Sons Ltd that its quotation for supplying adhesive stamps was accepted as follows:
altering the dates in the dies and supplying printing plates for 1d and 1½d denominations - £50;
printing stamps in quantities of not less than 1,500,000 of one value - 2s per 1,000.

The sheets were to be comb perforated and the spoilage of watermarked paper not to exceed 7½%. The printing plates and all other reproductions of the design would become the property of the PMG.

Soon after the order for 27 reams of paper for 27,000 sheets of 1½d described above, Joynsons received another order to supply Waterlows with 54 reams for 54,000 sheets of 1d. They replied on 31 March that they were only able to supply 68 reams and 362 sheets in total.

STAMP ROLLS FOR MACHINES

By 9 February 1924, when the Controller of Stores, H Sparkes, was sent a memorandum on the matter by the Secretary's Office, the provision of stamp vending machines [SVMs] at the exhibition was being considered. It was still uncertain whether the special stamps would be 22.5mm across by 38.75mm down, 30mm across by 25mm down, or 25mm across by 30mm down, whether the 1d and 1½d would be the same size, and how many stamps there would be to a sheet. Whatever size was chosen, however, would clearly be different from the definitives dispensed by standard SVMs. Special SVMs were ordered from the British Stamp & Ticket Automatic Delivery Company [BSTAD]. In the meantime, however, Sparkes was to enquire into the practicability and costs of producing the stamps in roll form.

After initial discussion with Waterlow & Sons, W M Cook of the Stores Department sent the company 50 sheets of royal cipher watermarked paper (the paper normally used for the high values) on 16 February so that dummy rolls could be produced. On 4 March seven dummies were returned, comprising two rolls each of 480, 720 and 960, and one of 198. In his reply on 8 March requesting a costing Cook was able to specify that the stamps would be in sheets of 60 (six wide and ten deep) and that the rolls should be gum side outward, as were the stamps in Kermode rolls of the standard pattern. By mid-March the printers knew the correct stamp size (printed surface 30mm across by 25mm down; 34.5mm by 29.5mm perforation to perforation) and were able to estimate prices. After some negotiation and revision the following figures were presented to the Secretary on 29 March:

Cost per roll (in pence):

Sideways delivery

Number of rolls	Size		
	480	720	960
100	4.95	6.51	8.25
1,000	3.48	5.12	6.94
5,000 to 10,000	2.73	3.54	4.30
over 10,000	2.64	3.38	4.14

Endways (vertical delivery)

Number of rolls	Size		
	480	720	960
100	4.68	6.00	7.32
1,000	3.00	4.29	5.58
5,000 to 10,000	2.66	3.77	4.89
over 10,000	2.33	3.27	4.21

£60 had to be added for the cost of a special reeling machine needed for the work. Sparkes considered that these prices, four or five times those of ordinary stamp rolls, were too high and suggested that 'unless there is a strong reason for supplying rolls, the Secretary will probably be disposed not to go on with the matter'.

PROBLEMS WITH PERFORATION

On 25 March Waterlows had supplied 12 dummy sheets of unwatermarked paper perforated to the size of the special stamps, so that the Engineer in Chief's Office [ECO] could study their suitability for reeling into rolls or coils. The firm advised that 'owing to these stamps being printed direct from plate on wet paper there will be a small variation due to contraction [or expansion] but this we think will be a negligible quantity and need not be seriously considered'. The ECO however found the irregularity of perforation even on the unprinted dummy sheets made them 'of no practical use'. Regular perforation in stamp rolls was needed so that the perforations could properly engage with the pins in the SVMs and the mechanism could properly dispense the stamps.

Because it seemed questionable whether the idea of producing the special stamps in roll form would be pursued any further, no action was taken until 9 April. It was seemingly decided at that point to proceed with vending rolls of the special stamps due to a pressing request from the organisers of the Canadian stand at the exhibition. Ten specimen sheets of watermarked paper were supplied to Waterlows requesting they be perforated 'as accurately as possible'. These were returned two days later as 20 half-size sheets; Waterlows warned that special care had been taken with the perforating which it would not be practicable to fully reproduce with actual stamps under working conditions. All but two half-sheets were forwarded for testing to F McClarence in the Design Section of the ECO.

On 9 May Cook explained the problem of the perforations in a memorandum to H J Howard in the Secretary's Office: 'Stamps of the ordinary pattern are comb perforated and the distance between each pair of perforations is practically the same. The accuracy of the work is obtained by the regular beat of the perforating machine. British Empire Exhibition stamps are line perforated. [In] this method, which is generally used for small quantities of recess printed stamps ... the sheets are fed into the machine by hand and the position of the perforation depends not only on the care with which the operator places the sheet in position ... but also on variation in the relative position of the gutters due to irregular expansion or contraction of the paper after printing ... Such small variations ... are for these reasons unavoidable where wet processes and line perforation are employed.'

COMB VERSUS LINE

At a meeting with Waterlows on 13 May, McClarence and Fanshawe of Stores were told that feeding the sheets one instead of three at a time, for an extra cost of 2½d per 1,000, would ensure greater, but not perfect, accuracy. When this was not found acceptable, the company's manager indicated that the only alternative was to produce 'comb' perforated stamps necessitating purchasing a special perforating box. It was generally apparent that the perforation was 'not up to our usual standard', while both post offices on site at the exhibition were pressing for the provision of SVMs to relieve pressure on the counters - 400,000 stamps on average were being sold each week and this was anticipated to increase during the summer. On 19 May Waterlows quoted their equipment suppliers, Grover & Co, as offering a special 'Punch Box' for £40 which could be supplied in two weeks and would enable them to reduce their charge to the GPO by 1¼d per 1000. Grovers' Technical Director, F B Woolford, subsequently advised that to ensure satisfactory perforation a 'split box' was needed, which would cost £63 and take three weeks to make: Waterlows asked them to proceed with the latter. The GPO had meanwhile agreed the lower price, but finally agreed to the purchase of the split box on 30 May. A memorandum of 29 May by Mr Cook of Stores explained: 'The split box can be adjusted and is designed to overcome the exceptional difficulties due to the abnormal expansion and contraction of the paper in the recess printing process. Messrs Waterlow are prepared to guarantee that its use will result in the stamps being perforated evenly and at perfectly regular intervals.'

Grovers was able to supply Stores with specimens of the new comb perforations on 7 June, which C Peacock of the ECO confirmed as satisfactory on 14 June. It was agreed on 19 June that Waterlows and the GPO should halve the additional cost of the split box between them, although the printers were not able to think of a future use for it. From mid-June onward the Exhibition stamps were printed at Waterlows' Finsbury premises and comb perforated at their Watford plant for supply to GPO Stores.

1924 ROLLS PRODUCED BY BSTAD

Once it had been decided in early April to produce rolls of the stamps, the problem of Waterlows' high estimates had to be addressed. On 22 April it was decided that an offer by BSTAD should be considered. The company was supplied for test purposes with five cancelled sheets of each value of the stamps, plus a further 40 sheets of each on 2 May. It was apparently not agreed with BSTAD that they would do the work until after comb perforated stamps became available. The earliest indication of such agreement was on 10 July when Stores supplied them with 20 specimen sheets of the 1d stamps, for 'experimental purposes'; another 20 cancelled sheets of the value were supplied as late as 30 July for 'further experiments'. The first rolls were despatched to the exhibition post

offices on 1 August for immediate use, although it appears that the SVMs did not go into operation until 4 August. The rolls, of 1,200 stamps each, were vertically delivered and joined at every tenth stamp.

As forecast, weekly stamp sales at the exhibition were now in the order of 600,000 (figures of 5,000 to 6,000 1d sheets and 4,000 to 5,000 1½d sheets were cited on 30 July). As it was hoped the SVMs would relieve pressure on GPO counters on the site, there was some anxiety at the slowness with which supplies of the rolls came to hand. A telephone call to BSTAD on 8 August elicited a 'very off-hand' explanation that since the firm had lost its former contract for the supply of Kermode rolls it had dismissed those personnel regularly employed on the reeling machinery; staff were now making the rolls up as and when they could be spared from other work. Mr Fanshawe of Stores also wrote a note to Mr Howard of the Secretary's Office on 8 August, pointing out that the definitive stamp sheets were 12 wide, and hence 12 rolls could be reeled off in one operation, whereas the exhibition sheets were only six wide. Harrison & Sons had routinely produced 12 rolls of definitives at once when they had the contract, whereas from conversations with BSTAD he gathered that they fell short of reeling as many as six coils simultaneously that was achievable with the Exhibition stamps. BSTAD subsequently claimed that their difficulties had been such as to entail actual financial loss: they enlarged on this in a letter of 28 August: 'The Exhibition stamps being much larger than ordinary stamps has necessitated changing our rolling machinery. Further, the sheets of Exhibition stamps contain only half the number of stamps in the ordinary stamp sheets and this has involved double handling. As this Company does not undertake reeling stamps in the ordinary course, no staff is kept for this purpose and the work entailed with the Exhibition stamps has been found to be much more costly than was anticipated.'

BSTAD nevertheless processed the following totals of stamps between the end of July and beginning of October:

Stamps from GPO (in sheets of 60)			Returned to GPO (in rolls of 1200)		
1d	1½d	Date	1d	1½d	Date
24,000	24,000	31/7	12,000	12,000	1/8
			<u>12,000</u>	<u>12,000</u>	6/8
(24,000)	(24,000)		<u>24,000</u>	<u>24,000</u>	
48,000	36,000	6/8	18,000	8,400	9/8
			12,000	6,000	11/8
			12,000	9,600	12/8
			<u>6,000</u>	<u>12,000</u>	13/8
(48,000)	(36,000)		<u>48,000</u>	<u>36,000</u>	
72,000		13/8	42,000		15/8
			<u>30,000</u>		18/8

(72,000)			<u>72,000</u>		
72,000	12,000	19/8	26,400		21/8
			19,200	7,200	22/8
			<u>26,400</u>	<u>4,800</u>	28/8
(72,000)	(12,000)		<u>72,000</u>	<u>12,000</u>	
48,000	18,000	25/9	24,000	6,000	3/10
			<u>24,000</u>	<u>12,000</u>	7/10
(48,000)	(18,000)		<u>48,000</u>	<u>18,000</u>	

The above figures total 220 rolls of 1d and 75 rolls of 1½d. The best documented sales figures are in the exhibition postmaster's weekly records, which give 191 rolls of 1d and 58 of 1½d, but go only up to 1 November 1924. Stanley Gibbons records sales totals of 195 and 60 respectively. At the end of 1925 22 rolls of 1d and 16 of 1½d were recorded as remaining unsold from 1924.

The figures detailed above relate only to rolls supplied for use in the two exhibition post offices, each of which had one pair of SVMs, one machine selling 1d and one 1½d. The vending machines were fixed in pairs at the entrances of the Head Office in the Palace of Industry, and the Branch Office in the Palace of Engineering. The firm also manufactured and maintained paired SVMs dispensing exhibition stamps elsewhere on site; there were three other 'official' pairs, one being in the Post Office exhibit in the British Government Pavilion, and two incorporated in telephone call office kiosks - one in the amusement park at the North Entrance and one at another kiosk near the South West entrance. There were also reportedly four others described as 'licensed to Messrs Brooker'. Excepting the two post office pairs, all these were private installations for which the rolls were made up by BSTAD with sheets of stamps purchased at face value from the London Chief Office, and no separate figures are available. BSTAD was not required to make payment for the sheets of stamps supplied directly by Stores to make up rolls for the Post Office pairs. It appears from the files that all rolls supplied for the exhibition post office SVMs were comb perforated; an unidentified number of stamps are known to have been sold from line perforated rolls, which suggests that the London Chief Office supplied BSTAD with a mixture of line and comb perforated sheets.

STAMP ROLLS REISSUED 1925

It had provisionally been agreed in June that BSTAD could charge 4d per roll, on the basis of the 3¼d received by Harrisons for reeling each roll of 1,000 definitives. In view of BSTAD's representations concerning the costliness of the process, a price of 6d per roll of 1,200 was agreed on 6 October, and payment of £7 7s 6d made on 20 October. When the question of producing rolls of the 1925 stamps arose the following year, the company

stated that, though willing to make up rolls at the same rate, they would prefer 8d per roll, as 6d had proved 'scarcely remunerative'. On 27 April 1925 W M Cook reported that Waterlows had now offered the rate of £2 0s 6d per 100 rolls, ie, 4.86d per roll, and this price was swiftly agreed. There was some trepidation that the printers might prove less reliable than BSTAD, as it had been in the latter's own interest to guarantee a product which would function smoothly in its own machines. Nevertheless Stores supplied Waterlows' Watford plant with 4,000 sheets of 1d and 1,000 of the 1½d on 1 May, plus a specimen BSTAD roll of the 1924 stamps for information.

One of the first Waterlows' rolls received was submitted to BSTAD on 8 May for testing, and was found unsatisfactory. It was agreed the following day that BSTAD be supplied with 1,000 sheets of 1d and 500 of 1½d to make up an additional supply of rolls, and this was done on 16 May. Unfortunately there is no clear indication in the files of whether Waterlows overcame their problems making up the rolls or if responsibility for the reeling process was passed back to BSTAD altogether. As has been seen, 250 rolls of 1,200 (200 of the 1d and 50 of the 1½d) were ordered from Waterlows on 1 May, and 75 (50 of 1d and 25 of 1½d) from BSTAD later in the month; subsequent usage appears to have been mainly of Waterlows' rolls.

It had been recommended at the end of 1924 that the number of SVMs should ideally be doubled, and at the 1925 exhibition there were seven 'official' pairs of machines: two at the entrances to the Head Office (now situated in the Palace of Housing and Transport, the former Palace of Engineering); two at the entrances to the Branch Office in the Palace of Industry (the former Head Office); two in the Post Office exhibit in the British Government Pavilion; one in the Imperial Airways exhibit in the Palace of Housing and Transport. The telephone call office installations of the previous year were apparently not reused.

Various sets of conflicting figures are available for totals supplied and sold. The number of 1d rolls actually supplied is variously given as 249, 250 and 251 while it is clear that a supplementary number of 1½d rolls was ordered at some point. The Postmaster's weekly sales returns are again the most detailed figures to hand and record totals of 161 of 1d rolls and 87 of 1½d rolls; Stanley Gibbons gives 160 and 85 respectively. In the last week of October 1925 the SVMs were shut down, and the remaining rolls of both values put on sale over the counter in an attempt to clear existing stocks. After 31 October 90 of the 1d rolls remained unsold while the 1½d rolls were sold out.

From 21 May onwards there were frequent reports that stamps were tearing when being taken from the SVMs - the exhibition Postmaster wrote on 23 May 'that after the passage of a joint [in the roll], the pins fail to catch the perforations and the stamps creep until the dislocations take place at the teeth of the roll cover ... considerably less trouble has been

experienced with the 1½d than with 1d stamps'. A BSTAD engineer who serviced the SVMs on 30 May stated that Waterlows' rolls contained a proportion of uneven joins, and also that the stamps were apparently longer from top to bottom than in 1924, by about one-eighth of an inch vertically for every six stamps. This naturally caused considerable alarm; Waterlows reported on 24 June that their 1924 and 1925 master plates were identical in size, and later that 'the trouble now appears to have been due to the unequal stretch of the paper supplied for the two issues'. Meanwhile the pins of the SVMs had been reset by the required amount and there was no recurrence of the trouble until the end of July. On 25 July, however, the Postmaster reported typical damage to a specimen strip of five 1d stamps: 'The next perforations to the joint show the right-hand pin mark slightly on the second stamp while the left-hand pin has only bruised the perforation, the third stamp shows breaking ... at the right-hand side, whilst the fourth stamp has taken the pins right off the perforation and so, also, has the fifth.'

Similar damage can be seen in many specimens of the 1925 coil stamps.

After a fresh inspection BSTAD confirmed on 10 August that Waterlows' rolls were still often badly joined (sufficient cause of most of the problems) and that the SVMs were suffering wear and tear. Subsequent enquiry established that local engineering staff had not undertaken routine maintenance of the SVMs; once this was put in hand at the beginning of September no further problems arose before the exhibition ended.

The total number of SVMs in use at Wembley is not certain, but on 19 September 1928 the Stores Department reported that 11 wooden SVM cases and six pedestals had been recovered from the Exhibition. A suggestion had been made in 1926 that they might be re-used to install SVMs at railway stations but this had fallen through and they had been disposed of for £3 10s.

FURTHER CALL FOR GENERAL DISTRIBUTION

On 28 April 1925 Mr Hannon asked the PMG in the House of Commons whether any arrangements had been made for sale at all Post Offices throughout the country, and if not whether the PMG would consider adopting this method of publicity. The PMG replied that the cost of production of the special stamps was approximately 12 times that of an ordinary stamp and therefore general distribution was not feasible. Further, although not included in his answer, the PMG had found that if the special stamps entirely replaced the ordinary 1d and 1½d stamps, the extra cost would be about £150,000 for the six months the exhibition was open.

On 9 May the Post Office Stores Department wrote to the Secretary, Sir Evelyn Murray, enclosing blocks of four each stamp to be held as specimens.

In 1924 the British Empire Exhibition opened on 23 April and closed 1 November. The total sales of special stamps sold at the Exhibition during this period were 13,214,491 with a value of £67,409. From 1 July to 1 November 627 postal applications were received to the value of £1,658.

In 1925 total sales of special stamps sold at Wembley were £18,053 (= 3,545,128 stamps). Ordinary stamps were sold at the exhibition to the value of £3,246. There were 528 postal applications to the value of £1,097.

Twenty licences to sell stamps were issued, mainly to holders of postcard stalls. Most licensees also sought and obtained authority to have posting boxes on their stands.

On 16 October 1925 the Post Office Stores Department provided information for the Secretary that the initial supplies of stamps and stamped stationery (1925 issue) obtained from contractors for sale at the exhibition were as follows:

DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
1d stamps in sheets	45,800 sheets of 60
1½d stamps in sheets	23,900 sheets of 60
1d stamps in rolls	249 rolls of 1,200
1½d stamps in rolls	74 rolls of 1,200
Inland Postcards, Stout	750 parcels of 100
International postcards	30 parcels of 240
'A' Postage Envelopes	250 parcels of 220
Letter Cards	350 parcels of 100

It was felt that, with the exception of the 1½d stamps in sheets, stocks were likely to meet requirements until the close of the exhibition. As it was uneconomic to print the small number to meet a possible shortage of 1½d stamps, authority was sought to sell 1½d stamps from surplus rolls (see later) so long as they were available, and thereafter to sell the exhibition 1d stamp in conjunction with the ordinary ½d stamp. No reply is recorded in the files: it is, however, reasonable to assume this happened.

On 26 November the Post Office Stores Department supplied the Secretary with the following information regarding the undermentioned quantities of the 1925 issue of stamps and stamped stationery that remained at the close of the exhibition:

DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
Adhesive stamps 1½d	Nil
Adhesive stamps 1d	17,450 sheets of 60 90 rolls of 1,200

Stamped postal stationery:

'A' Postage Envelopes	13,380 singles
Letter Cards	11,000 singles
Inland Post Cards	43,300 singles
International Post cards	1,490 singles

In addition there remained 36,739 sheets of special watermarked paper obtained from Joynsons: its value was approximately £41. It was not thought suitable for any other stamps and it was initially proposed to treat it as waste. Only one order, the minimum economic amount, for the paper was placed in 1925.

On being asked by Murray why the watermarked paper was unsuitable for other stamps the Stores gave the following reply:

'The surplus watermarked paper if used for High Value Postage Stamps would introduce a temporary variation of watermark which is considered undesirable. The present watermark consists of large Royal cyphers registering on each stamp. The paper is not suitably sized for surface printed stamps. Moreover, even if it could be treated economically in the sheet, the shape and size of the sheet would necessitate the watermark being sideways instead of vertical.'

The quantities of 1924 stamps and stationery remaining on hand as of 18 December 1925 were as follows:

STAMPS

- 1d - 11,221 (860 sheets of 60 stamps)
- 1d - 22 rolls (1,200 stamps per roll)
- 1½d - 1,171 (1,760 sheets of 60 stamps)
- 1½d - 16 rolls (1,200 stamps per roll)

STATIONERY

- 'A' Postage Envelopes - 24,466 singles
- Letter Cards - 3,387 singles
- Inland Postcards - 170 singles
- International Postcards - 10,339 singles

The remaining stocks of Exhibition stamps and stationery at 27 January 1926 was:

STAMPS

1d

	Sheets	Rolls	Stamps
1924	11,221	22	
1925	17,450	90	
Total	28,671	112	1,854,660

1½d

	Sheets	Rolls	Stamps
1924	1,171	16	
1925	-	-	-
Total	1,171	16	89,460

Total costs were recorded as £232 and total face value as £8,287.

STATIONERY

Item	Quantity			Face value	Cost
	1924	1925	Total		
Envelopes	24,446	13,380	37,846	£12	£236
Letter Cards	3,387	11,000	14,387	£5	£90
Inland Postcards	170	43,300	43,470	£6	£181
Foreign postcards	10,339	1,490	11,829	£2	£74
Total	38,362	69,170	107,532	£25	£581

This information was presented to the Secretary by the Controller of the Stores Department on 27 January 1926 together with the suggestion that the sheets of stamps be sold at the Chief Office Counter and possibly a few other large offices in place of the ordinary 1d and 1½d stamps. The Controller estimated that the 1d stamps would last about 2 months at the Chief Office and the 1½d one day. Further it was suggested that the stationery and rolls might be disposed of. On 28 March 1926 the Controller wrote to the Secretary with agreement on disposing of the remaining exhibition stamps: £20 worth of the 1d (1925) stamps to be retained for sale at the Chief Office, and £10 worth each of 1d and 1½d (1924) to be retained for a short period in the Stores Department. All other stamps and stationery were to be destroyed.

On 11 October 1926 it was reported that a use had been found for the remaining stocks of special watermarked paper - 27,778 sheets had been used by Waterlows to print Imperial Reply Coupons. Mr Cook of Stores felt that the 8,961 sheets still unused should be retained to meet future supplies of the item.

A memorandum dated 7 February 1936 records the following stamps and stationery destroyed by burning:

- 1 Postage 1½d single
 - 2 Postcards thin 1½d single
 - 1 Postcard stout 1d single
 - 2 Letter Cards 1½d single
 - 1 'A' Envelope 1½d single
-

POSTMARKS

Slogans postmarks were used advertise the exhibition, first used on 22 October 1922 in Blackpool, Bournemouth, Bradford, Brighton, Cardiff, Exeter, Portsmouth, Preston, Sheffield and Dundee, with Gosport and Sunderland added in early November. Continuous 'Krag' machines were used. Later that same month announcements appeared on single machines in the London District remaining in use until after the exhibition opened.

Slogans supplied for use in the double ring 'Hey Dolphin' machines were used in 1923 and 1924, making their first appearance on 1 January 1923. A new and wider setting measuring 56mm appeared in 1924, replacing the 49mm size.

Slogan postmarks advertising the exhibition were not restricted to the British Isles being also used throughout the Empire, making this the biggest postal advertising campaign ever undertaken by any postal authority for any single purpose. Australia, Bermuda, British Guiana, British Honduras, Canada, Ceylon, Fiji, Gold Coast (Ghana), India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malta, Newfoundland, New Zealand, North Borneo (Sabah), Palestine, South Africa and Trinidad are some of the Empire countries involved. The centrepiece of many of these was the 'Wembley Lion' and in fact the same design was shared by a number of different postal administrations. Handstamps were also used: an oval handstamp was used in Singapore, Malacca and Penang (the three principal post offices of what were the Straits Settlements); a circular cancellation was used at the GPO Kedah, Malaya.

On 19 February 1924 the Design Committee examined two specimens of datestamps, one for stamp cancelling machines [SCMs] and one for handstamping. It advised that the design for the SCMs be used for all purposes. The design was amended replacing the 'picture' lion with the diagrammatic lion designed by Harold Nelson for advertising posters.

Throughout 1924 and 1925 exhibition postal arrangements saw several changes in status of Post Office buildings and locations. In 1924 the Head Office was in the Palace of Industry and the Branch Office in the Palace of Engineering. Cancellations were applied at the two

main post offices, the Sorting Office premises in the Stadium, and the Post Office exhibit in the Government Pavilion. The exhibition closed on 1 November 1924. The interim postal arrangements pending reopening in 1925 were that the Palace of Engineering closed on 22 November 1924 with the Head Office remaining open. In 1925 the building known the previous year as the Palace of Engineering became the Palace of Housing and Transport with the Head Office, while the Palace of Industry Head Office became the Palace of Industry Branch Office. On 7 November 1925 the Palace of Industry accounts were finalised and the Head Office moved to the premises, which closed on 19 November.

Double-ring counter handstamps were used at the Palace of Engineering in 1924 and 1925 with at the top 'Empire Exhibition Wembley', 'Palace of Engineering' at the bottom, and the date in the centre. The counter handstamps used at the Palace of Industry in 1924 and 1925 were similar except having 'Palace of Industry' at the bottom. The counter handstamp used at the Palace of Housing and Transport was double-ring similar in size and shape to the other two but with at the top 'British Empire Exhibition', 'Wembley' at the foot and the date in the centre.

Andy Pendlebury / Giles Allen
November 1996

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APPENDICES:

Appendix 1 Handstamps showing pictorial and diagrammatic lions

Appendix 2 Handstamps used at Palace of Engineering and Palace of Industry