

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

## Centenary of first adhesive postage stamp

Date of issue: 6 MAY 1940



On 21 January 1938 Sir John Wilson, President of the Royal Philatelic Society London, visited GPO Headquarters to discuss the international philatelic exhibition due to open in London on 6 May 1940. The exhibition would celebrate the centenary of the day adhesive stamps were first accepted as indicating postage paid, although the Penny Black had gone on sale five days earlier. At the meeting were A R Kidner (Director of Postal Services) and Lt Colonel E T Crutchley (Public Relations Officer to the GPO). Sir John stated that any co-operation the GPO could extend would be welcome and it was hoped this would include commemorative stamps. Mr Kidner was able to agree to this, emphasising that the GPO's own plans for the centenary inclined more to commemorate the penny post and other Rowland Hill achievements, and would also be directed as much to the present and future of the postal system as the past.

He also promised to consider several other proposals put forward by Sir John, one being a special miniature sheet for sale at the exhibition. The DPS did not actively discourage this last suggestion, but noted in his own minutes of the meeting that the stamp dealers Stanley Gibbons had denounced the growing overseas practice of issuing such sheets in the most recent number of their monthly magazine and stated that they would not deal in any such future issues.

In the course of subsequent discussions with the DPS, A G Tydeman (Controller of Stores) proposed ½d, 1d, 1½d and 2½d as suitable values. He was not enthused by the idea of special souvenir sheets which would chiefly benefit stamp dealers and collectors - in a memorandum to Kidner dated 28 January, he criticised this as 'contrary to the established procedure of the Post Office ... I do not favour breaking down the old tradition'. He conceded that there would be no problem in actually supplying special blocks or miniature sheets if required, but felt (in a subsequent memorandum of 4 February) that the real

opportunities offered by the centenary lay elsewhere: 'For months past I have had under consideration the possibility of providing photogravure bi-colour stamps of good quality.'

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## BI-COLOUR EXPERIMENTS

The prospect of bi-colour stamps had first been raised in informal discussions between Stores and the printers Harrison & Sons Ltd about a year earlier, since when Harrisons had undertaken several such orders from overseas. The company was eager to use the centenary as a showcase by doing the same for the GPO. With the encouragement of the Postal Services Department, Harrisons produced a set of essays between 21 March and 22 April 1938, showing heads and frames in 26 separate colour combinations including differing shades of red, violet, blue, orange and green (although six of these were rejected as insufficiently distinguishable from the others). These were based on Edmund Dulac's '1840 No. 2' and 'hexagonal' designs for the George VI definitives. In March Dulac produced twelve hand-painted sketches in various colour combinations to indicate what might be done. Though the results were technically encouraging the essays were never regarded as more than experimental. In August the project was effectively suspended as issuing low value stamps in other than the standard single colours would be a breach of the UPU Convention, although discussions on using bi-colour as an alternative to obtaining special designs for the centenary continued until the end of the year.

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## NEW PLANS FOR CENTENARY

In the meantime, the Postal Services and Stores Departments met on 6 April and decided to issue special stamps on 6 May 1940. The GPO was now formulating plans for an exhibition of its own to open concurrently with that planned by the Royal Philatelic Society. While postage stamps were seen as playing only a minor part in this, it was now felt that the centenary should be presented as of the first adhesive postage stamps, as undue reference to the 'penny post' might encourage false expectations that the old rate was to be restored after 25 years.

On 5 May the Post Office Board endorsed the issue, values ½d, 1d, 1½d and 2½d, to remain on sale for two months. At a second meeting with Sir John Wilson on 17 May the DPS, Mr Kidner, confirmed this: as yet there was to be no public announcement, although there had already been parliamentary questions about stamps for the centenary, which had received press coverage. Asked for his comments on design, Sir John urged that the stamps should not be pictorial and should include some reference to the original Penny Black. His chief interest remained in the possible issue of the stamps in miniature sheets: the meeting left this undecided.

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## 'AUSTRALIAN' FORMAT AND KING'S HEAD

It seems no further action was taken on the issue until the end of the year. Some technical discussions took place with Harrisons during July and August, during which the size and shape of the stamps came under consideration. In 1935 complaints were received that the double-sized Silver Jubilee stamps had been 'too large for general use'. Although the George VI Coronation stamp, of similar dimensions, had since been issued, the 'Australian' or 'Egyptian' format of 1½ times the normal size was now contemplated. In a memorandum of 16 August, Harrisons' manager, W Rhodes, confirmed its format as 160 to a sheet at 1.2in by 0.95in per stamp, including a gutter of 0.095in to give an actual design print surface of 1.105in by 0.855in. Such a format had been envisaged for the projected Edward VIII Coronation stamps; its use for the Centenary issue seems to have been agreed without query, although exactly when is not known.

Harrisons also stated that they hoped to start printing no later than 1 October 1939, or preferably as early as 1 July of that year; the Stores Department determined, after the most rigorous scrutiny of practicalities, that the latest viable date to start printing was mid-October 1939. Matters started moving again when, on 3 December 1938, Mr Tydeman, the Controller of Stores, who had been pressing since the outset for suitable fresh designs as a first priority, minuted the Postal Services Department with a draft set of instructions to artists. At an ensuing meeting between PSD and Stores on 15 December, the question was raised of whether the King's head might be omitted from the design, or if artists might be allowed this as an option. Mr Kidner expanded in a memorandum to the Deputy Director General, Sir Raymond Birchall, on 23 December:

'Ever since the introduction of the first postage stamp it has been the unvaried practice to portray the head of the reigning sovereign ... the choice of Queen Victoria's head for the first stamp may have owed something to the example of the coinage, and possibly appealed to the originator as the best means of conveying to the public the official sanction behind what was then an entirely novel idea. The continued use of the King's head ... imposes severe limitations on the design of postage stamps and this is a consideration of some weight now that so much interest is taken in postage stamps and postage stamp design by collectors and by the public generally, and now that the postage stamps of this country are subject to comparison with the freer design and greater variety of the productions of other Postal Administrations ... My personal feeling is that the occasion justifies a break with tradition.'

This was acknowledged by Sir Raymond on 30 November with the reply: 'I am afraid we must abandon the idea of a stamp without the King's head.'

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## GPO ADVISED ON DESIGN

December 1938 and the first three months of 1939 involved consultation over the terms of the invitation and selection of artists. Several names were suggested by the Stores Department, while discussion also took place with various outside bodies. These were the Design and Industries Association (DIA), an independent pressure group; the Council for Art in Industry (CAI), set up under the auspices of the Board of Trade in response to the DIA's activities; and the National Register of Industrial Art Designers, founded by the Board of Trade in February 1937 at the CAI's instigation. The CAI featured heavily on the Register's governing body and board of advisers, although the DIA, among many other organisations, also had a small representation.

The DIA was particularly eager to offer advice: the organisation's secretary, M L Anderson, wrote an extended memorandum to the Postmaster General (PMG), Major George Tryon MP, on 1 March: 'The conditions and requirements in full (but not too limiting) detail should be clearly defined at the outset, as ... under the rules of the Royal Institute of British Architects ... Circumstances have so altered since [stamp designs were first solicited in] 1839 that the GPO must now be in a position to set down clearly all the technical requirements, eg, size, inscription, colours, method of production, etc'. While the GPO was somewhat dismissive of the DIA's intervention, suspecting jealousy of the larger public role assumed by the CAI, Mr Anderson's memorandum contained informed and perceptive remarks and also included the interesting suggestion that the set should include a black or dark grey 1½d for the inland letter rate, echoing Sir John Wilson's earlier remarks about having elements of the Penny Black on the new stamps.

On the same day Lord Sempill, President of the DIA and in later years a leading figure in the CoID, wrote an eloquent appeal to THE TIMES: 'Vast numbers of stamps daily leave this country and, we fear, do not on arrival at their destinations excite the same measure of approbation as do the best examples which reach here from abroad'. However, the GPO had 'in recent years made considerable progressive advance in stamp design', and he hoped that, by repeating the exercise of the Treasury Competition of 1839 which had sought designs for the first stamp, something might be achieved 'which will not have to be tampered with afterwards, but which is beautiful, effective, and right from the first'.

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## INVITATIONS TO ARTISTS

Plans for the issue were announced in the House of Commons on 27 March; on the following day invitations and accompanying instructions were sent out to 20 artists. These included Maxwell Armfield, Robert Austin, Edward Carrick, John Farleigh, Meredith Frampton, Barnett Freedman, Eric Gill, MacDonald Gill, George Kruger Gray, Harold Nelson, Agnes Miller Parker, T L Poulton, Eric Ravilious, Mark Severin, Percy Smith, Charles Wheeler, Rex Whistler, E McKnight Kauffer and A H Williamson. On 30 March similar invitations went out to the College of Arms, the three stamp printing firms (Harrisons, Bradbury Wilkinson and Waterlows) and Edmund Dulac. Dulac had been singled out from other artists as it was understood he would merely be developing a design originally submitted for the George VI low value definitives. The instructions gave free rein to the artists, specifying only the King's head, denomination, the words 'postage' and 'revenue', and the dates 1840-1940.

The flat fee payable to each artist for submitting work was the standard 15 guineas (£15.75), but the additional fee for successful designs was increased from 50 (£52.50) to 85 guineas (£89.25). This and the unusually high number of invitations were planned to ensure the highest possible response and maximise the chance of securing completely satisfactory designs. Despite this Barnett Freedman replied that he considered 15 guineas a completely inadequate inducement to perform the work entailed, while Frampton, Kauffer and Waterlows declined, pleading pressure of other obligations, and Gray, Poulton and Whistler failed to acknowledge the invitation. Although Gray was a respected artist, his inclusion in the list is hard to explain, as he had been consistently refusing requests for stamp designs from the GPO since 1924.

By 2 May, three days after the stated deadline, 44 designs had been submitted by a total of 19 separate artists. All bore the King's head as stipulated save for one stamp size drawing by Edmund Dulac, an attractive design depicting 'a running Mercury', which the artist correctly anticipated 'I don't suppose [it] will be considered for a moment'. A descriptive list (combined with their fate under the selection process, and other points worthy of note) follows.

### Centenary issue designs submitted

| <b>Artist</b>    | <b>Date submitted</b> | <b>No. of designs</b> | <b>Comments</b>                    |
|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Maxwell Armfield | 21 April              | 1                     | -                                  |
| Robert Austin    | 26 April              | 3                     | 1 shortlisted by PO Board 11 May   |
| Edward Carrick   | 27 April              | 1                     | 'Centenery' [sic]                  |
| John Farleigh    | 28 April              | 4                     | Mentioned by Harrisons' rep 9 June |
| Eric Gill        | "                     | 1                     | Mentioned 9 June                   |

|                     |          |   |   |
|---------------------|----------|---|---|
| MacDonald Gill      | "        | 1 | -   |
| Harold Nelson       | "        | 4 | -   |
| Agnes Miller Parker | "        | 4 | -   |
| Eric Ravilious      | 23 April | 1 | -   |
| Mark Severin        | 30 April | 6 | 2 shortlisted by PO Board 11 May; 1 other by CAI 3rd choice 12 June   |
| Percy Smith         | 28 April | 2 | Also 6 stamp size variants  |
| Charles Wheeler     | "        | 1 | -   |
| A H Williamson      | "        | 4 | 1 vertical and 1 horizontal design Board shortlist 11 May   |
| George Bellew *     | "        | 1 | -   |
| Eric W Crafer **    | "        | 1 | Board shortlist 11 May  |
| Ernest Linzell ***  | 27 April | 3 | Dual head & train/mailcoach designs Board shortlist 11 May  |
| E J Jackman ***     | 30 April | 1 | Board shortlist 11 May  |
| Edmund Dulac        | 1 May    | 3 | Horizontal dual head mentioned 9 June; vertical dual head Board shortlist 11 May, 1st choice Stores/Harrisons/CAI 9-12 June, selected for essaying 20 June, rejected by full RFAC 18 January 1940                             |
| H L Palmer **       | 28 April | 2 | Full size with floral emblems CAI 2nd choice 12 June; stamp size with VR/GR/1840/1940 preferred by PMG/Board 8-11 May, selected for essaying 20 June, changes advised by full RFAC 18 January 1940, approved by HM 30 January |

\* College of Arms.

\*\* Harrisons.

\*\*\* Bradbury Wilkinson.

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## SELECTION OF DESIGNS

The PMG saw the submitted artwork on 8 May and favoured the horizontal design by Harrisons' staff artist H L Palmer, as a stamp-sized version with 'VR', 'GR', '1840' and '1940' in the corners rather than a full-sized drawing with national floral emblems. On 11 May the designs were viewed by the Post Office Board, which selected a shortlist of twelve. On 9 June they were further reviewed by Victor Harrison and Mr Rhodes on behalf of Harrisons, and Fanshawe and Dell of the Stores Department. (R Fanshawe had replaced Mr Tydeman as Controller of Stores on 1 June.) Particular attention was paid to the shortlist, with the following conclusions:

Robert Austin's short-listed design (which of the three submitted by the artist is not made clear) was rejected as unsuitable for photogravure

A H Williamson's horizontal design (one of two submitted) was found unattractive and unsuitable for reproduction; a vertical design (also one of two) met with more favour but was thought insufficiently suited to the Centenary

E J Jackman's design for Bradbury Wilkinson was good, but old fashioned and 'insufficiently suited to the occasion'

Eric Gill's design was good and original, and would print well, but was not in harmony with British ideas of stamp design, and was also 'reminiscent of the peace stamps issued in another country'

Mark Severin's two designs (out of six submitted) featuring Victoria's profile in silhouette beside the King's were found to lack balance; also Victoria would not be readily recognisable in stamp size and the design would not reproduce well generally

Ernest Linzell's design for Bradbury Wilkinson with the dual heads of Victoria and the King was thought too detailed; also the exact copy of the 1840 Penny Black in the left hand panel both clashed with the portrayal of George VI on the right and raised problems with the design's use other than for the 1d value. A pictorial design showing an old mail coach and modern express train was 'fundamentally good', but might not reproduce adequately in stamp size, while the contrast of modernity might be better represented by an aeroplane

E W Crafer's pictorial design for Harrisons was equally admired, but would need redrawing, both for the figures of early Victorian and modern postmen, and to avoid repetition of the value figure.

The two most favoured designs had a 'dual head' format; one of these was the H L Palmer design already favoured by the PMG. The most preferred overall was a vertical design by Edmund Dulac showing the King in profile superimposed over the silhouetted profile of Victoria; it was thought that the artist could successfully modify this to show Victoria's head as represented on the Penny Black. The Stores' and Harrisons' representatives also liked a horizontal variant of Dulac's design (not short-listed) but rejected it because of the repetition of the crown and value figures. Mr Rhodes was attracted by John Farleigh's set of four designs for the ½d, 1d, 1½d and 2½d, also omitted from the Board's shortlist, which depicted the last hundred years' advances in transport methods used by the GPO, but conceded that the individual designs did not adequately convey this idea.

On 12 June the Stamp Committee of the Council for Art in Industry were shown the designs. Its preference was for Dulac's vertical dual head design, without modification of the silhouette; Palmer's design in the initial large format with floral emblems in the corners; and one of Mark Severin's six designs, showing the King's head in a circle above the value tablet in a laurel wreath surround, against a background of geometric criss-cross lines. This last was chosen as an example of good well-balanced stamp design rather than as a serious contender to the other two.



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## CHANGES REQUESTED

At a meeting on 20 June of the PMG, DDG, and the Assistant PMG Sir Walter Womersley, it was decided to proceed with the Palmer design as already favoured by the PMG, and to seek a revision of Dulac's vertical design with a profile portrait in place of the silhouette, despite the urgings of the CAI. The 'GR VI' monogram in the top right hand corner of Dulac's design to be shortened to 'GR', and the value in words on Palmer's design to be replaced by figures. Both artists were to use larger lettering for 'Postage' and 'Revenue', and to amend the purely decorative work as necessary. Essays were to be produced of both designs, and of Dulac's original version with Victoria in silhouette. No action would be taken to proceed with the Severin design proposed by the CAI.

Palmer's design was returned to Harrisons on 23 June and Dulac's taken by the artist for redrawing the same day. By 29 June Dulac had supplied two new drawings: these shared the same revised border with altered ornamentation and lettering, one with Victoria in silhouette and the other with both heads shaded in tone. The artist stated he was willing to shade Victoria's head in line if required, to imitate the engraving for the Penny Black, but thought his solution better. The drawings, including Dulac's original artwork for the design, were forwarded to Harrisons for essaying the same day. On 6 July essays of the Palmer and all three Dulac designs were ready, bearing a 2½d value, in each of five colours: the standard ½d green, 1d red, 1½d brown and 2½d blue, plus a purple-brown similar to that used for the Coronation 1½d stamp.

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## FIRST ESSAYS RECEIVED

Consultations took place the same day between the Controller of Stores, Mr Fanshawe, and the DPS, Mr Kidner: it was agreed that Dulac's original silhouette design (no. 1) and the revised version (no. 3) were unsatisfactory. On the new version with both heads in tone (no. 2), Victoria's head should be redrawn in line-shading; in addition 'Postage' and 'Revenue' should be bolder and ornamentation removed from the upper corners to make more room for 'VR' and 'GR'. As for the Palmer essay, this required bolder redrawing of the lettering and ornamentation; also the lettering across the upper border, 'VR - Postage - Revenue - GR', seemed too congested, in contrast to the lower border, '1840 - 2½d - 1940', where there seemed too much empty space. It was decided to leave Harrisons to amend this as they thought fit. More importantly, the portrayal of Victoria did not do justice to the original Heath engraving. Mr Rhodes of Harrisons, who was present for part of these discussions, produced the Penny Black that Palmer had used as a model; it was agreed that it would be better to take a pull from the original die and supply photographs of this to both



artists. On the following day, 7 July, the original Penny Black die was first taken to the Royal Mint where unsuccessful attempts were made to achieve a satisfactory result, and thence to Waterlows, the stamp printers and engravers, where two pulls of the required quality were obtained. (When cleaning the die, Mr Clifford of Waterlows found traces showing that pulls in blue ink had at some time been taken.)

On 17 July Dulac's new drawing (no. 4) was received; rather than tone-shading being replaced by line-shading on the head of Victoria alone as expected, he had done this for both monarchs. He explained that he found the GPO's concept (of Victoria 'in line' as on the 1840 stamps, and George VI 'in tone' as the current definitives) 'extremely inappropriate from the artistic point of view', going so far as to hint 'that he would throw over the Centenary design altogether rather than make a drawing which he considered to be wrong in conception'. It was agreed after speaking with the DPS to proceed with essaying the new drawing, Mr Rhodes of Harrisons tending to support Dulac's feelings, although willing to implement the GPO's concept in regard to the firm's own design by H L Palmer. However, Dulac was warned that restoration of the George VI head 'in tone' might still be required. On 21 July Harrisons supplied essays of the 2½d value in brown, followed by further essays on 25 July in green, red, purple-brown, blue, and black, this last colour having been suggested by Mr Fanshawe. A similar total of 36 essays of the Palmer design in the same colours followed on 31 July, and a further batch of 28 in green, red, brown and purple-brown from a 'second etching' on 4 August.

The essays were submitted to the Postal Services Department on 9 August, listed as follows:

- A - the revised design by H. L. Palmer
- B - Dulac's no. 1 (the original 'silhouette' design)
- C - Dulac's no. 3 (the revised 'silhouette' with the amended border)
- D - Dulac's no. 2 (as 'C', but with both heads 'in tone')
- E - As 'D', but with both heads 'in line' and other amendments as requested 6 July.

As well as specimens of the normal range of colours for the chosen values, B, C and D were provided in purple-brown and A and E in black. Dulac had undertaken some retouching on essays B to E.

Mr Fanshawe recorded in a memorandum of 14 August that the Postal Services Department favoured the Palmer design, although the DDG 'still had a liking' for the original Dulac silhouette. His own view as given to Mr Kidner, the DPS, was that the choice should fall between the Palmer design and Dulac's 'D' or 'E'; of these last two he found the former rather dull in tone, while on the latter the King's head was too light, and the depiction of Queen Victoria's head fell short in both cases. Harrisons' own design by Palmer only needed improvements to the size and spacing of the heads. Meanwhile the PMG was not available

to view the designs himself, while submitting them to the Royal Fine Art Commission could not be until the end of September.

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## PLANS SHELVED, AND REVIVED

Shortly after, the decision was taken that there would be no Centenary stamps in books, a possibility since the earliest discussions the previous year. Books of the Silver Jubilee stamps had been issued, but not for the Coronation stamp due to the time factor. Enquiries, made in July 1939 and confined to a few stamp dealers and branch offices, indicated that there would be a very short-lived philatelic demand for such books of the Centenary issue, and probably no public demand at all. The Postal Services Department finally confirmed in a memorandum to Stores on 24 August that there would be no requirement.

Another decision which had not been finalised at this time was whether the stamps should be vertical or horizontal. While there is no record of a suggestion that the Palmer design might be redrawn in a vertical format, there are indications in both the BPMA albums and Archive files that Dulac was prepared to alter his vertical design horizontally if required.

With the outbreak of war in September 1939 the GPO reluctantly abandoned its plans for both the special issue and the intended exhibition, while the Royal Philatelic Society felt obliged to cancel its own plans for a philatelic exhibition in May 1940. The GPO's decision, influenced by the prospect of supply shortages, the likelihood of a postage rate increase in the New Year, and whether any sort of commemoration was appropriate in wartime, was finally confirmed on 6 October after discussions between the PMG and DDG.

By 21 December, however, the PMG felt that the GPO had gone too far in curtailing all but essential activities, and now doubted the wisdom of abandoning the Centenary issue. Asked to review its prospects, the Assistant DG, T H Boyd, approached Harrisons, who insisted that printing should start by 1 March 1940; he also contacted the Royal Fine Art Commission and arranged a meeting with its Technical Sub-Committee for 10 January. The day before this meeting the PMG took the opportunity of a meeting with the King to show the designs; His Majesty favoured designs 'A' by Palmer and 'C' by Dulac (the revised silhouette) and retained these to show the Queen. Copies of the two designs were accordingly taken to the meeting by the new DPS, Lt Colonel C F G Twinn, and Mr Fanshawe. The RFAC had much to say about the Palmer design: the juxtaposition of line and tone shading on the two heads was disliked; 'Victoria' and 'George' should replace 'Postage' and 'Revenue' across the top border, and moved to the sides; the heads should not overlap but be separated either by oval frames or a vertical divider - rough sketches made at the

meeting to illustrate this were passed to Harrisons; finally, repositioning of the heads to face each other should be considered. Comment on the Dulac design was confined to suggestions that the Queen's head should be reduced in size and a stipple effect used on the silhouette to achieve a lighter tone.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS BY FULL RFAC

A subsequent meeting with the full committee of the RFAC was arranged for 18 January, prior to which Dulac produced a new drawing with a stippled silhouette on 12 January, while Harrisons was able to supply the following by the day of the meeting:

16 January -

Dulac 'C.1' - six essays in 1½d brown, six in 2d orange (silhouette altered to medium from dark tone by Harrisons)

Bromides

158 - Palmer, plain dark background, heads facing each other

155 - Palmer, plain dark background, heads facing left

160 - Palmer, oakleaf mace in centre, heads facing each other

157 - Palmer, oakleaf mace in centre, heads facing left

159 - Palmer, heads in ovals facing each other with decorative filigrees

156 - Palmer, heads in ovals facing left with decorative filigrees

162 - Dulac 'C.2', silhouette stippled by artist

161 - as 162, but frame as Dulac 'E'

18 January -

Bromides

163 - revise of 157

164 - revise of 155

Essays

6 each in brown/orange from bromide 156 (Harrisons' 'Y')

6 each in brown/orange/blue from bromide 162

6 each in brown/orange/blue from bromide 161

6 in blue (Dulac 'C.1', as 16 January)

The full meeting of the RFAC saw the Dulac essays C, C.1 and C.2 and concluded that the design was better suited to a poster than a stamp. The Palmer designs on the other hand met with general approval - bromides 155-160 and 163-164 were available for inspection, plus essay 'Y', the only one of the new Palmer bromides there had been time to essay, essay 'A' as submitted the previous August, and a large size drawing of the bromide no. 164

design. Considerable discussion took place there being less objection than hitherto to the combination of line-shaded and tone-shaded heads within one design. It was decided at the urging of the chairman, the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, that both heads should face leftwards as this had become the established tradition during the 100 years' history of the British postage stamp. The meeting found itself unable to choose between 'A', 163 and 164; Earl Crawford first cast his deciding vote to exclude 'A', and then recommended the acceptance of 164. This was agreed, subject to the following minor improvements: squaring up of the borders, a very slight enlargement of the heads and the removal of the remaining decorative 'grilling'. A final question was whether one stamp, if necessary a little-used denomination, could be in black (an essay in black of Palmer's design 'A' had been much admired by the meeting). Mr Gould-Smith, who was present at the meeting on behalf of the Postal Services Department with Mr Fanshawe of Stores, explained that staff were accustomed to identify denominations rapidly by the standard colours, and that there would also be a problem because of black ink used in cancellations; however, he would convey the meeting's wishes.

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## APPROVAL

In the meantime a reply had been received from the King that he was unable to decide between designs 'A' and 'C', asking for further guidance. Before answering His Majesty the improvements requested by the RFAC were put in hand; a revised master drawing (no. 165) and bromide (no. 166) were ready on 22 January, and essays in green, red, brown, orange, blue and black on 26 January. The addition of orange in the colour range since the revival of the issue was due to the (incorrect) anticipation that 2d would be the new rate for inland letters after the impending tariff increase.

On 27 January copies of essays 'A' by Palmer and 'C.1' by Dulac, plus one of the new Palmer essays incorporating the RFAC's recommendations, were submitted to the King with a note explaining the changed circumstances. George VI's private secretary, Sir Alexander Hardinge, informed the PMG on 30 January that both the King and Queen preferred the last of the three, and that he personally found it 'a great improvement'.

Mr Fanshawe met Victor Harrison and Mr Rhodes of Harrisons on 1 February to request slight alterations to spacing and lettering on the 26 January essays plus improved reproduction of the line shading on Victoria's face. He particularly emphasised the importance of lettering and stressed that Harrisons 'must go over the drawing again and again until everything is perfect'. This process took until 23 February when a final essay was at last approved. For most of the following month the printers worked on preparation of the value tabs, only '2½d' having been used up to this point. On 20 March it was decided after talks between Colonel Twinn, Mr Fanshawe and the DDG, that the full range of values should be ½d, 1d,

1½d, 2d, 2½d and 3d, to cover all likely outcomes of the postage rate increase. On the following day Colonel Twinn asked if 1s 3d, the basic airmail letter rate, could be added to the range. Harrisons replied that they had only agreed with reluctance to include the 3d, and this new demand was quite impracticable.

It was during the above period that the proposal for miniature sheets of the Centenary issue, first raised by Sir John Wilson two years earlier, finally met its demise. Since the outbreak of war Sir John had been urging that miniature sheets could be sold at a surcharge to raise money for the Red Cross, and had been supported from January onwards by Lord Luke, on behalf of the British Red Cross War Appeal. Unfortunately this brought both up against the GPO's aversion at being seen to favour one charity or special cause over any other. All the arguments were aired, creating dangerous precedents, the administrative disruption, and the difficulties of obtaining the special legislation needed before such an exercise could even be lawful. Despite Harrisons' claim at the beginning of February that they could print miniature sheets in sufficient quantity for the effort to be justifiable (this being dependent on obtaining special perforating equipment, and somewhat at odds with their claims of working under pressure), the PMG made a firm statement on 1 March that no special blocks or miniature sheets would be issued.

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## STAMPS PRINTED AND ISSUED

Working under hectic conditions (Fanshawe considered they had been asked to achieve the impossible) Harrisons succeeded in getting printing under way:

| 1st cylinder proof approved |          | 1st delivery |
|-----------------------------|----------|--------------|
| 1½d                         | 11 March | 18 March     |
| 1d                          | 19 March | 27 March     |
| 2d                          | 2 April  | 4 April      |
| 2½d                         | 5 April  | 12 April     |
| ½d                          | 5 April  | 15 April     |
| 3d                          | 17 April | 18 April     |

Between March and August 1940 the company delivered 5,294,348 'good' sheets out of 5,709,454 to Stores, a 'waste' proportion of 7.27% (the normal allowance was 10%). The total cost of printing was approximately £8,900, some £3,000 more than the norm for the quantity of stamps involved.

The stamps were issued on 6 May 1940, five days after the postal rates increase. A total of three special handstamps were associated with the issue date; these were for the 27th Philatelic Congress of Great Britain and the Adhesive Stamp Centenary Exhibition, both held at Bournemouth on 3 to 6 May and 6 to 14 May respectively, and the Stamp Centenary (Red

Cross) Exhibition held at the London Museum, also on 6 to 14 May, the last of these being struck in red. All these were organised in whole or part by the Royal Philatelic Society. 97,650 first day covers bearing a 2½d only, and 2,000 with the full range of stamps, were prepared on the order of the Department of Overseas Trade for the World's Trade Fair in New York, which opened on 11 May.

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## COMMENTS ON ISSUE

At a celebratory dinner held by the Royal Philatelic Society on the day of issue, W S Morrison MP, who had replaced Major Tryon as PMG on 5 April, declared: 'British stamps are real stamps, designed for real postal purposes and not issued to make money out of stamp collectors'. These remarks were not in earlier drafts of his speech, and were possibly intended as a response to criticism (whether anticipated or actual) that the Centenary set was more austere than might have been expected. In fact the stamps were generally well received, although Mr Fanshawe was quick to point out in an internal memorandum that any success could be largely attributed to the changes recommended by the Royal Fine Art Commission, a remark with a good deal of truth, though hardly fair to the efforts put in by Harrisons. There was some parliamentary criticism of the larger size of the stamps as being wasteful in wartime. More colourfully, the DAILY WORKER, seeking to link criticism of the issue to its attack on the recent postage increase as an extortionate tax for the capitalists' war, claimed that the unusual number of 160 stamps to a sheet was causing every counter clerk in the land to lose £2 a day in attempting to balance the stocks. It is certainly true that the Union of Post Office Workers asked to be consulted before 'Australian' sized stamps were ever issued again, because of problems that had arisen at the counter.

In 1946 a senior GPO official, R G Bennett, drily commented:

'The issue of the Centenary stamps drew little or no comment from the public, which was not surprising as the country at the time had far more serious matters to concern it.'

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## FINAL SALES TOTALS

The total stamps issued to postmasters were as follows:

82,896,960 of the ½d,  
232,903,680 of the 1d,  
40,412,800 of the 1½d,  
121,065,120 of the 2d,  
312,957,440 x 2½d,  
22,128,000 of the 3d.

These figures are often wrongly given as 'sales'; however the evidence on file indicates that quantities of all values were returned by counters after close of sale on 18 December, and that totals in excess of 100,000 of the ½d, 200,000 of the 1d, 36 million of the 1½d and 830,000 of the 2d were then left in the Stores Department as either returned or unissued stock. Numbers of unsold 2½d and 3d seem to have been minimal, but huge quantities of 1½d were left unsold because this value no longer corresponded to any postage rate.

The above totals do not include stamps overprinted for issue to overseas postal agencies. The overprint sales figures normally quoted for the Centenary issue do not seem to be complete, as they date from a memorandum of 27 January 1941, whereas the overprints were not withdrawn from sale at agencies until 13 March that year and sales to dealers via the Accountant General's Department did not end until the end of October. A memorandum of 20 August 1952 presumably incorporating all later returns and revisions states the final totals as follows:

| Value/overprint | 'Tangie' | 'Morocco Agencies' * |         |
|-----------------|----------|----------------------|---------|
| ½d              | 192,427  | '5 centimos'         | 543,155 |
| 1d              | 174,507  | '10 centimos'        | 289,467 |
| 1½d             | 139,627  | '15 centimos'        | 242,027 |
| 2½d             | -        | '25 centimos'        | 195,947 |

\* Tetuan in Spanish Morocco only.

A flat payment of 15 guineas each was made to all who submitted designs on request; George Bellew (of the College of Arms) and Edmund Dulac received larger amounts including sums outstanding from their work on the George VI definitives. Although this was not the practice in later years, individual payments were made directly to each artist employed by Bradbury Wilkinson and to E W Crafer who had submitted a design for Harrisons. This was because both Linzell and Jackman were independent artists paid by Bradbury Wilkinson on a retainer, and Crafer was an outside artist whom Harrisons had commissioned. For the successful design by H L Palmer, the full total of 100 guineas was paid direct to Harrisons, as Palmer's position was that of a staff artist.

In 1940 Harrisons' artist H L Palmer was 34 years old. He had previously attended Watford School of Art and been apprenticed in the photogravure section at Waterlows. In later years he was chief etcher and retoucher in Harrisons' photogravure department and contributed stamp designs to the GPO for a number of issues, including a successful 2½d design for the Victory set of 1946.

GILES ALLEN  
10 January 1994



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