

Channel Islands liberation

Date of issue: 10 MAY 1948



The Channel Islands were liberated from German occupation on 9 May 1945. In March the following year an Inter-Island Conference was held on Jersey: one of the topics discussed appears to have been how publicity might be generated to help revive the tourist trade. Subsequently the Lieutenant Governor of Jersey wrote to the Home Office suggesting that Jersey and Guernsey each be allowed to have its own distinctive postage stamps, or failing that a slogan postmark. This request was forwarded to the GPO by T Hutson of the Home Office on 8 April 1946.

C O L Leigh-Clare of the Postal Services Department replied on 26 April, detailing the GPO's policy of issuing a single range of definitives for the territory under its administration, and special stamps to celebrate occasions of national importance or international postal significance. This was the standard response. A similar request had come from the Minister of Commerce for Northern Ireland in 1937. Another factor was the perceived indignity of associating stamps with commercial advertising. The Department of Overseas Trade had made very similar overtures on behalf of the Travel Association of Great Britain and Ireland, asking for pictorial stamps as a spur to tourism, and been refused.

On 31 May, however, the Home Secretary, Mr Chuter-Ede, wrote to the Earl of Listowel, the Postmaster General (PMG). He had visited the Channel Islands and received representations that he was inclined to favour. Discussions took place involving the GPO, both internally and in negotiation with the Home Office, for nearly a year. The proposal of a slogan postmark was easy to reject - the Channel Islands proposed one for permanent use on a local basis, whereas the GPO permitted such use only on a nationwide basis for a period not longer than a month. This had been the GPO's stated policy since December 1945, with which the Home Office concurred the following March. Postage stamps, however, proved a far more intractable problem.

POSTAL AUTONOMY

The GPO found the prospect of issuing special stamps for the Channel Islands unappealing. They would have to be distinguishable from other British stamps by a legend or overprint identifying them with the islands, which would question the unique privilege of not including the name of the country of origin. The Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales would demand similar issues which would be impossible to resist: the GPO would ultimately face the burdens of administration, production and supply involved maintaining several sets of definitives simultaneously. If revenue from the sales of the Channel Island stamps was diverted to the islands' use, as it was assumed they wished, this would require special legislation for which parliamentary time was not available in the foreseeable future. However, this question of revenue was a red herring, as there is no record of any such suggestion.

During June consideration of all the factors led to the conclusion that it would be preferable to grant postal autonomy to the Channel Islands, so that the problems of a stamp issue would be theirs alone. On 15 July the PMG, who was pressing for an answer to the Home Secretary, received a recommendation from D J Lidbury, the Assistant Director General (Services), which was passed to the Home Office the next day.

The Home Secretary consulted afresh with the Channel Islands before replying to this proposal on 11 September. He made it clear that the islands did not wish the revenue from stamp sales for their own benefit but hoped only for an issue of stamps, with one common design for the Channel Islands as a whole, to be produced and sold in the ordinary way. If this was acceptable, they wanted nothing further than an opportunity to comment on the design. The idea of transferring the postal administration of the islands into their own hands was smartly rebuffed.

REGIONAL DEFINITIVES

The Home Secretary conceded that a Channel Islands issue might lead to a demand for similar stamps by the Isle of Man, which enjoyed a comparable degree of semi-autonomy under the Crown. He felt that such a demand could be headed off by reminding the island of the importance of its connection with Great Britain. The question should not arise with Scotland and Wales as they were integral parts of the United Kingdom. The Government was especially against Scottish and Welsh stamps for fear of encouraging nationalist aspirations.

The GPO was not convinced by the Home Secretary's optimism over containing demands for regional stamps, so in response the PMG produced a fresh proposal, which the Postal Services Department had drawn up in anticipation of the worst. This was for new low value definitives for general release, which would variously feature emblems of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales. Prior to this proposal being sent to the Home

Secretary on 24 September, Leigh-Clare had already contacted Archibald Russell MVO, Lancaster Herald at the College of Arms, requesting rough guideline sketches using the various coats of arms. These were supplied under extreme confidence, for a total recorded cost of £10.15, by the end of December. Harrison's used these to produce bromides of designs for the Channel Islands, Isle of Man and Scotland. The suggestion was passed on by the Home Secretary and welcomed by the Channel Island authorities. The issue of special stamps for the islands was now 'merged in the larger question of a new permanent issue'. A side effect of this decision was, as the stamps planned were of the ordinary definitive size, to see if the words 'Postage' and 'Revenue' could be omitted to leave greater space for the development of designs. This matter was pursued with the Inland Revenue solicitors, who finally agreed on 5 February 1947 that there was no longer a requirement for the words to appear on postage stamps. A similar agreement was first reached in June 1910, although both parties seem to have forgotten it in the intervening decades.

On 28 January 1947 a further letter was received from the Home Secretary pointing out that there were no floral, animal or heraldic emblems exclusively associated with the Channel Islands. In February the Bailiffs and Lieutenant Governors of the islands put forward suggestions; these included the first reference to 'vraicing', the gathering of seaweed or 'vraic' from the beaches in horse-drawn carts for use as fertiliser in the winter months. It was felt this was the only theme that would be uniquely recognisable to all Channel Islanders. The Bailiff of Guernsey, Ambrose Sherwill, on 1 May supplied a picture on the theme of vraicing by the late Gilbert Holliday for the GPO's information; his Jersey colleague, Sir Alexander Coutanche, provided two similar illustrations by the local artist Edmund Blampied at about the same time. Meanwhile Harrison's, responding to whether the King's head could be reduced to make more room for a pictorial design, produced definitive size essays in blue on Royal Cypher watermarked paper showing the head in various sizes and positions.

DECISION

It was proposed that the Channel Islands feature on 1½d and 9d values in the new series; the islands' representatives agreed to this, although still expressed a preference for a full set unique to themselves. In April Wilfred Paling MP became the new PMG and J E Yates the new Director of Postal Services: the post of Assistant Director General (Services) was abolished. The Home Secretary wrote to the new PMG on 6 May re-iterating his preference for an issue confined to the Channel Islands only. At a meeting in the House of Commons on 19 June the Home Secretary made it clear that now preferred was a set of double-size pictorial stamps in the ½d to 3d range, to be available by mid-1948. However, a stringent supply problem had arisen so Mr Wells of the GPO Supplies Department, who was present, undertook to investigate and report back.

His report was to hand on 23 June: it advised that a complete new range of stamps was not theoretically achievable until 1950, and completely unattainable under the conditions currently

prevailing. Harrisons already had a full workload and were plagued by technical problems with short cylinder lives; Waterlows had only limited photogravure capacity, of a lower standard than Harrisons; line engraving by De la Rue or Bradbury Wilkinson would be prohibitively expensive; in addition, huge demands would be made on GPO resources in the form of extra workload and ancillary costs. However, a limited range issue for the Channel Islands for a short term only was manageable. If it was confined to 2½d and 3d, and essays were to hand by 1 November, Harrisons could print an adequate supply by 1 April 1948. The PMG wrote to the Home Secretary on 30 June stating the intention to produce an issue of Channel Island stamps only, in two denominations of double size, which would be on sale for a limited period.

On 8 July the DPS (Mr Yates) and the Deputy Director General (R A Little) met with the Bailiffs to finalise the details of the issue. A pictorial vraicing theme would be used with wording confined to 'Vraicing - Channel Islands [or Isles]'. The issue would consist of the 1d and 2½d values - the 1d was widely used on the islands to send newspapers to expatriates throughout the world. The issue would go on sale on 9 May 1948 to celebrate the third anniversary of liberation, and continue throughout the holiday season till withdrawn on 30 September. As 9 May was a Sunday, the release date was later changed to 10 May 1948.

ARTISTS AND DESIGNS

The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was contacted, replying on 29 July 1947 suggesting Robert Gibbings, Kenneth Rowntree, John Minton, Fred Taylor and Reynolds Stone as suitable artists. To these the GPO added Edmund Dulac, a respected Jersey artist who had designed some of the wartime occupation stamps, Harrisons and Waterlows. The number of artists was few as the agreement reached with the Bailiffs had left little scope for variety of design, although it was conceded that 'a design symbolical of the Islands as a whole, of some quite different character', might be added to the vraicing scene. Instructions were sent out on 1 August. The specified caption could only be in small letters if used; the colours would be the same as the definitives of the same value, but in deeper and richer shades than had been the norm since 1941.

Robert Gibbings replied on 20 August declining because he was 'moving about continuously' in New Zealand; Fred Taylor replied that, having only designed stamps for the British mandate in Palestine 20 years earlier, he had not been sufficiently impressed by his own efforts to wish to repeat the experience. Edmund Dulac also declined.

By the deadline of 15 October, the remaining artists had all sent designs, Blampied submitting no fewer than four different pieces of artwork on vraicing, although only one went forward to the selection process. Interestingly, Blampied was the only contributor to produce a design on any other theme, submitting a dramatic picture of a Union Jack unfurled against a background of

clouds and sea (unfortunately the flag was drawn upside down). The following list was drawn up for selection:

- 1) Minton
- 2) Stone
- 3) Blampied
- 4) Blampied (the inverted Union Jack)
- 5) Waterlows (L D Fryer)
- 6) Rowntree
- 7) Harrisons (artist unknown)
- 8) Harrisons (artist unknown)
- 9) Harrisons (J R R Stobie)

All four artists and both printing firms received a flat fee of 25 guineas in November.

DESIGNS SELECTED

On 31 October Sir Kenneth Clark, Sir Francis Meynell and Mrs C G Tomrley of the CoID called at GPO Headquarters to meet the Assistant PMG, Mr Rhodes, Mr Coulton of Harrisons and Mr Lewis of the Supplies Department. The final selection in order of preference was by:

John Minton (1);

J R R Stobie of Harrisons (9);

Blampied (3).

It was felt that the words 'Vraicing - Channel Islands' be omitted from Stobie's design and that Blampied's drawing should occupy more of the stamp. On 3 November Ambrose Sherwill, the Bailiff of Guernsey, met with Yates and Leigh-Clare of the PSD to view the designs: he commented that while Minton's design made the best picture, the artist clearly had 'no idea of the Islands'. In Stobie's design the cart and human figure were not typical of the islands, but viewed purely as a stamp was the most successful overall. Blampied's design, as might be expected, was the most factual portrayal of the theme. He agreed with the alterations proposed by the CoID.

On 5 November proposals for changes were sent to Blampied in Jersey: more space was to be created for the vraicing scene by removing dark borders at top and bottom; the value table was to go in the top left hand corner; the clearly defined border surrounding the King's head was to be replaced by deeper shading. That same day the chosen designs were forwarded to Harrisons for work to begin on essays. Blampied replied by telegram on 10 November confirming his agreement to the proposed changes, with the actual work being done by Harrisons.

Colour essays were made available to the King for approval on 11 December as follows: (A) Minton, (B) J R R Stobie, (C) Blampied. (A) and (B) were in the 2½d denomination, and (C) as 1d. All essays

were supplied in both red and blue, making a total of six. In line with the GPO's recommendation, the King approved (B) and (C) the following day. It was decided that the Stobie design would be the 1d in red and Blampied's the 2½d blue. It was felt that this colour would enhance Blampied's design, as well as associating him with the denomination likely to sell in the higher quantities - this would go towards rewarding him for his ingenuity in incorporating the royal monogram 'GR' in his designs for Jersey's wartime occupation stamps.

The only amendments required were that the crown on Stobie's design should not extend to the white border surrounding the stamp, and be redrawn similar to that as adopted by Blampied and as used on the definitive issue, and that the lettering of the value tables on Blampied's design was to be re-drawn. Both tasks were carried out at Harrisons by Stobie, as Blampied was only able to visit their High Wycombe works on 19 and 20 December. The work was completed on 29 December and final essays prepared. These were seen and approved by 26 January 1948 and on 2 February a printing warrant was issued for 50,000 sheets of 120 stamps of each value. A second warrant was placed in mid-May for 22,000 further sheets of the 1d and 27,500 of the 2½d. Blampied and Harrisons were each paid 125 guineas in February for their successful designs.

An internal memorandum from R J Lewis, Assistant Controller in the Stores Department, to F H Brent, one of his senior officers, paints a revealing picture of GPO Headquarters' attitude to the Channel Island issue which is worth quoting: 'This issue is obviously going to be mainly a publicity and philatelic stunt ... I have no objection to the British Post Office getting a little easy money, although it is a pity we are having to countenance such blatant manoeuvres'.

THE STAMPS ISSUED

The stamps went on sale at post offices throughout the Channel Islands on 10 May and were withdrawn at the end of September; during the same period they were also available at the headquarters counter or enquiry office of each Postal Region, namely London Chief Office and the Head Offices in Bristol, Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Cardiff and Belfast. Breakdowns of national (and, insofar as available, local) sales figures were:

1) TOTAL SALES AND RETURNS:

1d value

Printed – 8,640,000

Waste – 396,00

Good – 8,243,000

Specimens, departmental waste, etc – 3,389

Total received by Stores – 8,240,011

Held in Stores on 30 September 1948 – 1,359,629

Issued – 6,880,682

Returns after 30 September 1948 – 946, 603

Sales – 5,933,779

Unsold – 2,306,232

2½d value

Printed – 9,300,000

Waste – 1,074,600

Good – 8,225,400

Specimens, departmental waste, etc – 3,382

Total received by Stores – 8,222,018

Held in Stores on 30 September 1948 – 1,513,834

Issued – 6,708,184

Returns after 30 September 1948 – 1,310,055

Sales – 5,398,129

Unsold – 2,823,889

2) TOTALS BY POINT OF SALE (to nearest '000)

1d value

GUERNSEY

Issued – 1,900

Returns – 646

Sales – 1,254

JERSEY

Issued – 1,268

Returns – 134

Sales – 1,134

REST OF THE UK

Issued – 3,712

Returns – 167

Sales – 3,545

2½d value

GUERNSEY

Issued – 1,920

Returns – 967

Sales – 953

JERSEY

Issued – 1,440

Returns – 192

Sales – 1,248

REST OF THE UK

Issued – 3,348

Returns – 151

Sales – 3,197

Sales at the mainland offices were comparatively steady throughout the period of issue. On the Channel Islands, however, after an initial surge of buying by the local population, the response was much poorer than anticipated, mainly because the expected demand by holidaymakers did not arise. Various figures may be quoted to show this. On the mainland 4.5% of all stamps issued to offices were returned unsold; on Jersey the figure was 12%; Guernsey returned one third of their 1d stamps and half of their 2½d, having been allowed to grossly over-order on the basis of wartime occupation issue sales, which some islanders had reputedly bought up in bulk lots as an investment come the day of Allied victory. Overall, the Channel Islands received 48% of the issue but accounted for only 40% of sales, while nationally the ratio of returned to issued stamps was about one in six. As the Stores Department still retained some 24,000 sheets of unissued stamps by the end of September, the ratio of unsold stamps to saleable stamps received by Stores in the first instance is 31%. From the sales viewpoint the Channel Islands issue cannot be said to be a success. Total sales were 5,933,779 of the 1d issue and 5,398,129 of the 2½d representing a total sales value of just under £81,000; it was later estimated that half of all sales were purely philatelic.

A total of 36 first day covers, bearing each of the stamps and containing a brief description of the issue, was prepared for limited distribution; Jersey Head Post Office cancelled half and Guernsey the remainder. The PMG, Wilfred Paling, visited both islands for the launch of the stamps on 10 May, and personally to hand first day covers to the Bailiffs and to Lieutenant Generals Sir Philip Neame and Sir Edward Grasett, the Lt Governors of Guernsey and Jersey respectively. The remaining 32 covers were posted to the following prominent persons:

Clement Attlee (Prime Minister)

J Chuter-Ede (Home Secretary)

Earl of Listowel (PMG, 1945-47)

Wilfred Burke (Assistant PMG, 1945-47)

Capt. H F C Crookshank (PMG, 1943-45)

R V Grimston (Assistant PMG, 1942-45)

S P Viant (Assistant PMG, 1929-31)

W S Morrison (PMG, 1940-43)

Sir Thomas Gardiner (Director General of the GPO 1936-45)

Sir Donald Banks (Director General, 1934-36; a Guernseyman, and at the time of the issue, a director of the stamp printers De La Rue)

REACTIONS

Generally the issue met with a very poor reception; outside the Channel Islands the significance of the vraic gathering was lost and the press coverage was filled with baffled references to ‘refuse carts’, ‘muck carts’, dejected horses, and gloomy storm clouds, while in Parliamentary question time on 30 June Mr Skeffington - Lodge MP dismissed the entire issue as ‘this absurd mistake’ suggesting the GPO did not know its job. On the islands, Blampied’s design was much appreciated, but Stobie’s correspondingly derided as being of very poor quality in comparison – ‘pretentious, false and vulgar’ to quote an irate reader of the JERSEY EVENING POST. Another critic pointed to the outdated carthorses transporting the vraic rather than modern motor lorries, deriding it as an attempt at the picturesque. There was also question at why stamps deliberately issued on the anniversary of the liberation made no reference to that occasion or any aspect of the wartime occupation. A protest at lack of recognition was (not unfairly) received from Major N V L Rybot, who had designed occupation issues on Jersey prior to Blampied, and had similarly concealed anti-German messages in the artwork.

In fact, there was little enthusiasm outside the Channel Islands for celebrating the anniversary of liberation; the PMG was specifically urged by the Home Office to make only the most general references to the war in public speeches during his visit to the islands. As early as 19 January 1948 J Darke, Director of the South West Postal Region, of which the islands were a part, had asked in an internal memorandum ‘what Guernsey and Jersey had done to get such a huge advertisement without doing a stroke of work’. Those areas on the mainland where the Channel Islands issue was of particular interest were generally disappointed by the decision to limit sales to regional headquarters offices, examples of such protests being received from Stockport where many Channel Islanders had been evacuated in 1940 and formed local ties, and Southampton, where the local philatelic society protested that the town’s historic connection with the islands had been ignored. The issue represented a low point in public relations by the GPO.

In 1949 the Contracts Department of the GPO carried out a costings exercise on the three special stamp issues of 1948, including the Channel Islands stamps; the results may be summarised as follows:

	Paper	Gumming/printing	Overprinting	Miscellaneous costs	Total (£)
Silver Wedding					
Special	1875	1850	750	1100	5575
Ordinary	(770)	(925)	(400)	-	(2095)
Extra	1105	925	350	1100	3480

Olympic Games

Special	3030	3100	400	1085	7615
Ordinary	(1200)	(1550)	(250)	-	(3000)
Extra	1830	1550	150	1085	4615
Channel Isles					
Special	195	190	-	115	500
Ordinary	(80)	(95)	-	-	(175)
Extra	115	95	-	115	(325)

Notes:

- 1) Silver Wedding 'miscellaneous costs' include all £1 stamp costs; all other costs are 2½d only
- 2) The costs shown as 'ordinary' total lines are for the same quantities of definitive stamps; the 'extra' totals represent the additional costs raised by printing the special issues.

THE ARTISTS

J R R STOBIE first worked for Harrison and Sons Ltd as an apprentice retoucher and re-joined them when invalided out of the forces after wartime service. Notwithstanding his selection by Harrisons to illustrate this particular theme, his especial interest was in portraiture. He worked on the 1948 Silver Wedding and 1953 Coronation issues and also the low value definitives of 1952, but this was the only occasion when his designs were adopted.

EDMUND BLAMPIED was born in Jersey on 30 March 1886. After studying in both France and Britain he exhibited oils, etchings and watercolours in both countries as well as Italy, USA and the colonies. In addition to his work on stamps during the German occupation and for the Liberation issue, he also designed wartime banknotes for use on Jersey as well as the island's 2½d regional definitive of 1964-66. He died on 26 August 1966.

GILES ALLEN
14 April 1993

REFERENCES

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Articles

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