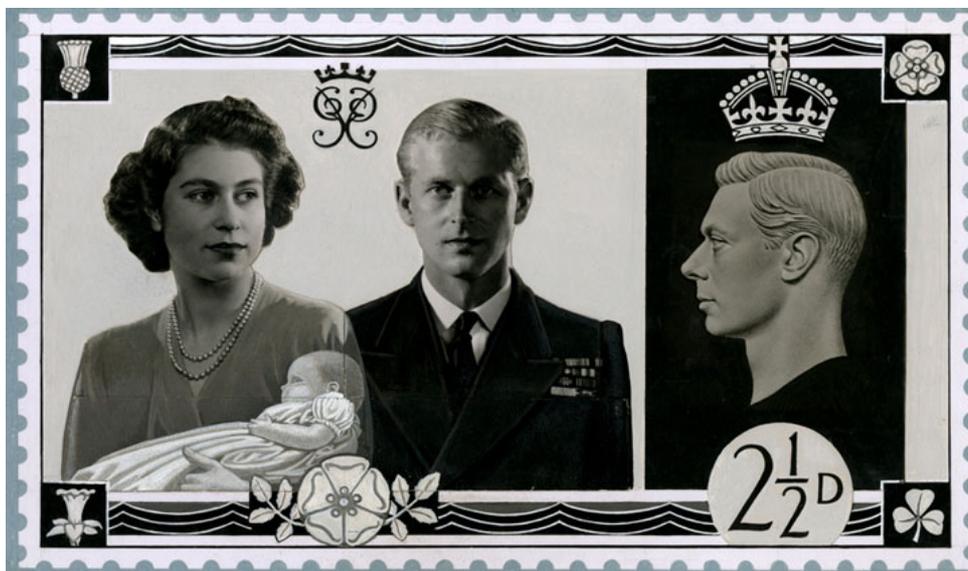


Birth of King's first grandchild

1948 - UNADOPTED ISSUE



The first mention of a possible stamp issue to celebrate the birth of the King's first grandchild came in November 1947, during discussions over the decision to commemorate the Silver Wedding of the King and Queen on 26 April 1948. Normally the GPO restricted commemoratives to only the most important Royal and national occasions (apart from international postal events and anniversaries). However, following the outcry over its failure to issue special stamps for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh on 20 November, the GPO felt obliged to issue stamps for the Silver Wedding.

PRECEDENTS EXAMINED

There were qualms as the Department of Postal Services felt it might create an invidious precedent posing innumerable future obligations. A list of 'special stamps connected with foreign royalties' was drawn up, including mourning, birthdays and anniversaries, and the births and marriages of their heirs, plus the British royal visits to Canada in 1929 and South Africa in 1947. From this a second list was prepared of 'notable dates connected with Royal Family', a chronology of occasions for which the GPO might conceivably issue stamps in the future. This looked as far ahead as the hypothetical 50th anniversary of the King's accession in December 1986, and included such controversial examples as the 50th birthday of the Duke of Gloucester and the 25th wedding anniversary of the Duke of Windsor. Also included under the heading 'other events - dates unknown' were the wedding

of Princess Margaret, the death of George V's widow Queen Mary, and the birth of a first child to the marriage of Princess Elizabeth.

Writing on 28 November, the Director of Postal Services, J E Yates, suggested: 'If the sovereign's or heir presumptive's wedding and silver wedding are to be commemorated in addition to his coronation, silver, golden and diamond Jubilees, certainly also his birth should not be neglected (provided we have due notice) and possibly also the weddings of all his children and his heir's children.'

Mr Yates was doubtless overstating the case to make his point that special stamps should be confined to historic events or anniversaries of the sovereign's reign - he used his words carefully to exclude occasions or anniversaries purely personal to the Royal Family such as births or weddings. However, he conceded that demands for a Royal Silver Wedding stamp were difficult to resist in the current circumstances - 'once made it will be a precedent for all time' - although it would remain policy to restrict the number of special issues as much as possible.

STAMPS REQUESTED BY TREASURY

The birth of a first child to Princess Elizabeth was an occasion the GPO would avoid commemorating if possible. There the matter rested until the following February, and an informal telephone discussion between Mr Leigh-Clare of the PSD and Miss Ralston of the Treasury. Raised was 'the dollar earning capacities of commemoration issues of stamps'; it appears the Treasury had been alarmed by an estimate of \$20 million from sales had stamps been issued for the 1947 Royal Wedding. As Leigh-Clare explained, the time factor had ruled out an issue, and the figure of \$20 million could be considered an overestimate - he remarked in another context that he thought it 'fantastic'. In discussing future stamp issues and their dollar earning potential, however, he informed Miss Ralston that commemorating the birth of a future heir to the throne, likely since Princess Elizabeth's marriage, had certainly been considered; the possibility had also, it seems, occurred to the Treasury.

On 27 February 1948 this discussion was followed up by a letter to Mr Leigh-Clare from Miss Elizabeth L Smart of the Treasury. Harking back again to the lost opportunities of the Royal Wedding, she wrote: 'We cannot help regretting that we missed these dollars at a time when every dollar is of the utmost value to us. You will understand that we are most anxious not to miss future good opportunities ... the interest of the individual US citizen in anything relating to the Royal Family is surprisingly great and we are convinced that the birth of an Heir to the Throne will be of great popular appeal in the US and possibly also in other countries whose currency would be very acceptable to us ... I understand it takes

something approaching a year to prepare a stamp and it seems therefore that it will be necessary to make advance preparations for a suitable issue before any public announcement could be made from the Palace. My real purpose in writing to you is ... to ask if you would be kind enough to reassure us that preparations will in fact be well under way by the time a public announcement is made.'

Leigh-Clare replied on 1 March that 'your last paragraph raises a matter of considerable importance and practical difficulty and I am seeking instructions'. The Treasury was urging a course of action to which the GPO was averse, committing itself to a special issue of unknown date for an event that might not take place. Nevertheless the idea was raised at a meeting of the Post Office Board, and a minute prepared on 8 March for the Deputy Director General, R A Little, by J E Yates, the Director of Postal Services. The proposed issue was hereafter described as being for the King's first grandchild, rather than for Princess Elizabeth's first child or the birth of a future heir as hitherto.

RECOMMENDATIONS BY DPS

The DPS felt that as only limited time might be available, the general format of the stamps should be agreed in advance with the King, to avoid production delays as with the Royal Silver Wedding issue, when essays had been rejected by His Majesty as unacceptable. Mr Yates' personal suggestion was for 'the King's head on the right and a photograph of the Princess on the left with some symbol indicating birth in the middle ... (a) a cradle, or (b) the torch of life, or (c) a full hour glass, or (d) a Stork'. He conceded that a torch might be confusingly associated with the Olympic Games, for which a special stamp issue had already been prepared, and that the stork might be the most popularly acceptable symbol.

Further recommendations were that there should be two stamps, a 2½d and a 1/-, as 'with the addition of the ordinary ½d or 3d stamps, they would cover practically the whole world for either surface or air postage'. If only one suitable design were produced, it should be used for both stamps. Finally, designs should be commissioned from no more than two artists. 'If a decision could be taken almost immediately, we could endeavour to be ready to issue the stamps any time after about October'; the Stores Department would hold them in reserve until the Royal grandchild's birth, after which they could be on sale within a fortnight. The DPS proposals reached the Postmaster General (PMG), Wilfred Paling MP, on 9 March, and were passed to the King for his consideration the next day, although Mr Yates' suggestions for symbolic references to birth were amended by the PMG to 'some appropriate symbolism'.

RESPONSE BY THE KING

The reply, received on 17 March, was not completely helpful: the King welcomed the idea in principle but felt it was too early to consider specific designs, and his private secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, suggested that a selection might be prepared for the King to view when the event was more imminent. A subsequent letter of 23 March gave permission for a suitable photograph of the Princess to be obtained from Dorothy Wilding (Portraits) Ltd, who held all the approved recent portraits. A confidential meeting was arranged for 1 April between the DPS and Miss Beatrice Lester representing Dorothy Wilding. Miss Lester proposed an unpublished full-face study that the Princess had had taken for presentation to selected friends. She believed the Princess was particularly fond of this picture and would choose it for the required purpose. The DPS had been hoping for a profile study but, with none proving available, agreed with Miss Lester's suggestion. On 30 March press reports indicated that Princess Elizabeth was pregnant.

DISCUSSIONS WITH ARTISTS

The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was approached, nominating two artists, Percy Metcalfe and Reynolds Stone. It was agreed with the CoID that 40 guineas (£42) would be paid per design up to 120 guineas maximum for each artist, and 160 guineas (£168) for each design accepted. These were the rates already agreed with the CoID for the UPU 75th Anniversary issue the following year. On 23 April the DPS, with Gould-Smith and Leigh-Clare of his Department, saw the two artists, requesting each supply two or three designs within a month, or as soon thereafter as practicable. No written instructions were given: each artist was pledged to secrecy and supplied with sample drawings of the crown and King's head as featured on the current 2½d definitive, the Dorothy Wilding portrait of the Princess, and a 'shade card' – the latter was supplied to show the range of sepia-grey tones which should be used in artwork to aid photogravure reproduction by Harrison & Sons Ltd. What was discussed is not made explicit, but it appears that portraying the Duke of Edinburgh and some reference to the baby, whether symbolic or actual, were urged on the artists. The DPS undertook to provide photographs of the Duke, and also of the King as full-face head and shoulders. These were made available by Miss Lester of Dorothy Wilding on 1 May, although both artists confined themselves to the familiar profile head already provided to portray the King.

On Friday, 4 June the official announcement was made by Buckingham Palace: Princess Elizabeth's baby was expected in late October. In notes regarding the production position prepared on 5 June, a Stores Department official noted that printing had yet to begin on the Olympic Games issue, but that Harrisons' presses should be clear by 15 August or the

end of the month at latest. Even if the design process was protracted to the end of July, the firm should still be able to complete essaying and cylinder preparation by 6 September and print 500,000 sheets by 20 September, allowing a month for distribution. If acceptable designs were to hand before 10 June, Harrisons could have bromides ready on 14 June for PSD to submit to the Palace, and printing might possibly begin in mid-August.

Meanwhile on 28 May Reynolds Stone wrote to the DPS, enclosing a design featuring the Princess and Duke within an ornamental scroll. 'I enclose my attempted solution of the difficult problem you have set me ... Privately I wish it were possible to dispense with the two heads and fill the space with beautiful lettering'. Mr Yates replied on June 2: 'After some cogitation I am inclining to your view ... alternatively, lettering and the one head in place of the two'. After further correspondence, Stone's amended design with the head of the Princess only within the scroll was received on 7 June. On 8 June Mr Yates briefed Stores' representatives on developments, showing the two Stone designs and a single design that Percy Metcalfe supplied by the end of May. It was during this meeting that Reynolds Stone telephoned the DPS with the offer of a further design; Mr Yates agreed to this, so the artist produced a final design, with lettering replacing the heads, which was received the following day. Stone's covering letter reads: 'Thank you for giving me one more day! The enclosed is the kind of thing I would do if I were allowed to please myself ... [and it] might do better than the first drawing I sent'. He was unable to resist adding that he was aware that his last solution did not give Harrisons the chance to display its 'woosh' (as Sir Francis Meynell called it) from dark to light tones and back again. (Sir Francis, a leading figure in the Council of Industrial Design, tended to despise the photogravure process.)

At his meeting with Stores on 8 June the DPS explained that current plans were to produce 1¼ million 2½d and ¼ million 1/- stamps in sheets of 120, one week after the royal grandchild's birth. He was urged that printing should start not later than mid-August, with the aim of completing supplies by 1 October. The four designs available were seen and approved by Mrs C G Tomrley of the CoID before being given to the printers on 10 June. Mr Coulton of Harrisons supplied three sets of bromides on 14 June (no colour essays are recorded as being produced). The King's secretary, Sir Alan Lascelles, the following day was told that it was planned to issue the stamps within a week of the baby's birth, rather than a fortnight as contemplated in March. This timesaving could be achieved by an advance distribution of stocks to head or district office level (rather than retaining them in the Stores Department).

DESIGNS SUBMITTED TO KING

On 17 June the following bromides and a set of descriptive notes were sent by the PMG to the King for his consideration:

A) Bromide no. 410, from Percy Metcalfe's original drawing no. 406: photographs of the Princess and Duke side by side, with the figure of a newborn babe in arms partly superimposed over the Princess; recommended for the 2½d in blue.

B) Bromide no. 411, from Reynolds Stone's original drawing no. 407: the Princess, drawn not photographed, partly superimposed over the figure of the Duke, within an ornamental scroll ('meant to be festive chiefly ... may be said to echo the Scotch thistle and a feeling of heraldic mantling' – Reynolds Stone, 28 May) including a cherubic figure symbolising childhood; recommended for the 1/- in umber (dark brown).

C) Bromide no. 412, from drawing no. 408: as (B) but Princess Elizabeth's head only within scroll.

D) Bromide no. 413, from drawing no. 409: similar to (B) and (C) but with a simplified scroll of leaves surrounding the legend 'To Princess Elizabeth', no heads.

If (B) or (C) were accepted the drawings of the Duke and Princess would be replaced by the photographs used in (A); if (D), Stone proposed to change the wording to 'For Princess Elizabeth' and add 'Postage' to the left and 'Revenue' to the right of the design. While the words 'postage' and 'revenue' were no longer essential, Reynolds Stone preferred the option of retaining them if he felt (as in this case) that their inclusion would contribute to the whole. It was also stipulated at this time that the word 'postage' could not appear without 'revenue'.

Unusually no guidance as to the King's choice was included in the notes, other than recommending Metcalfe's design for the 2½d and the suggestion that it could also be used for the 1/- if none of Stone's were acceptable. Writing on 9 June, the DPS had inclined towards (D) – 'we now have the simplicity which some people may think the occasion demands'. 'Some people' probably meant the King as in the preparation for the Royal Silver Wedding issue some months earlier, he had made it known quite firmly that he had no taste for over-ornamentation on stamps celebrating those occasions personal to the Royal Family. Finally the notes raised the question of Princess Elizabeth's photograph as proposed for use in designs (A), (B) and (C): as this was not a published picture the GPO could only presume that its reproduction on postage stamps was in order.

ISSUE ABANDONED

A reply had still not been received by 3 July, so A H Ridge, the secretary of the Post Office Board, wrote to Sir Alan Lascelles asking whether the King had been able to study the bromides. No reply is recorded in the files. On 12 July the DPS was contacted by Harrisons as to the current position and informed the company that the project was dead. It seems Mr Yates was only very recently made aware of this himself, as the Stores Department was

not told until the following day and the CoID not until 15 July. The artists were notified on 16 July that the issue had been abandoned and their payment enclosed. Metcalfe received 40 guineas (£42) for his single design, and Stone 80 guineas (£84) for his three – presumably he was paid at the rate for two on the grounds that (C) was simply a variant of (B).

There is nothing in the files as why the plans were so suddenly dropped, nor why the GPO was not informed of this until a month after the designs had been submitted to the King. A possible explanation of the latter is that the King may have been awaiting colour essays; the PMG had indicated in his letter of 10 March that these would be supplied 'in the usual way'. Later discussions with Sir Alan Lascelles are briefly noted on two occasions, concerning proposals for an 'inspired' question and answer in Parliament to make it known that 'after the most careful consideration' a stamp issue to commemorate the Royal birth had been ruled out. The first of these took place during July, the decision going against the proposal. The second discussion was held on 2 November, when it was agreed there should be a written question and answer in the Commons, but not before 9 November. This happened that day without any recorded comment, which, from the discretion of the proceedings, seems to have been the object. Prince Charles was born to Princess Elizabeth five days later.

The involvement of the King's private secretary in these discussions suggests that the issue was abandoned at the King's own wish, but the reasons remain undisclosed. One should remember that, if the decision was taken on 12 July, or very shortly beforehand as seems the case, the Royal Silver Wedding and Channel Islands Liberation issues had appeared just over two months earlier and the Olympic Games stamps were to follow within the month. It seems safe to speculate that in a year with the unprecedented total of three special stamp issues, the King might have felt it invidious to produce yet another; it would have been the second that year to celebrate an event which was basically personal to the Royal Family. It had been emphasised from the outset that because of the personal nature of the occasion, the issue was especially dependent on the King's consent; His Majesty had shown a certain reserve toward the project in the first instance. No comments were noted from the Treasury, who were presumably satisfied with the GPO's contribution to the economy of £6.5 million earned in 1948.

The artwork submitted by Percy Metcalfe was passed to the British Postal Museum and Archive in January 1986; the Reynolds Stone designs have since become mislaid but are included in the photocopy reproductions in the PO Archive files.

THE ARTISTS

REYNOLDS STONE, CBE, RDI, FRSA, was born on 13 March 1909 and educated at Eton and Magdalene College, Cambridge. He subsequently studied printing and became a freelance designer, specialising in book decoration. His work was commissioned by many public bodies, and, from the late 30s to the early 60s, he was also frequently engaged in stamp design. In this field his successes amongst others included the 1946 Victory issue 3d and the Welsh regionals of 1958. He died on 23 June 1979.

PERCY METCALFE, CVO, RDI, was born on 14 January 1895 and studied at the Royal College of Art. Most prominent as a sculptor and medallist, he also designed many foreign coins and, amongst other work, the Great Seal of the Realm in 1928. In the late 40s he contributed regularly to postage stamp design and was successful with the Olympic Games 2½d and the 10/- and £1 definitives issued in 1951. He died on 9 October 1970.

GILES ALLEN
14 July 1993

REFERENCES

PO Archive files

- 52/508 (Stamp production file - birth of royal grandchild 1948)
- 102/11 (Royal Silver Wedding)
- 121/472 (Projected stamp - 1st grandchild of HM King & Queen)