

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

46TH Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference

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On 25 August 1955, Colonel M Stoddart-Scott, MP and Chairman of the British Committee of IPU, wrote to Charles Hill, Postmaster General (PMG), requesting a special stamp for the 46th meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Conference to be held in London on 12 to 19 September 1957. He enclosed a Finnish stamp celebrating the conference held in Helsinki in 1955. Hill replied on 4 January 1956 that his suggestion would not be adopted, as the Post Office policy was to keep commemorative postage stamps to a minimum. He explained that the Post Office had produced eleven special issues from the 1924 British Empire Exhibition and most had been for Royal events. There were many conferences of national or international importance held in London, and all could be considered for commemoration by special stamps. If the Post Office issued a special stamp for the IPU Conference, it would be very difficult to refuse other organisations. The present policy had the respect of stamp collectors, and a few years earlier a resolution had been passed by postal administrations and the International Philatelic Federation (FIP) for a radical reduction in the number of special issues. Hill concluded, 'with regret, I am so sorry I cannot say yes'.

The question of stamp policy was reconsidered in conjunction with the Post Office Advisory Committee in April 1956, and new guidelines evolved. The idea of commemorating the IPU meeting with a stamp was thus reconsidered. The Director of Postal Services on 25 May

1956 put forward a suggestion for a high value stamp for the IPU and felt the PMG might consider it, as it would generate considerable revenue from non-postal sales, as a majority would be bought by philatelists, as had happened with the 1948 Royal Silver Wedding £1 and the 1929 £1 for the UPU Congress.

In June 1956 it was suggested that a new air letter then being developed be overprinted to mark the conference. In March 1955 the Post Office (GPO) had commissioned Lynton Lamb to re-design the printed 'stamp' on air letter forms, the current design having been introduced in 1953 to mark the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II: the new design was issued on 21 August 1957. Ministers had expressed in the Commons how much they liked the design of the new stamp used for the air letter form, and would like to see this design put forward as a stamp to commemorate the IPU meeting.

Colonel Stoddart-Scott wrote to the Assistant PMG on 31 December 1956 that his committee wished to suggest a 4d adhesive stamp as the majority of the delegates would be coming from Western Europe and would not use air letters. From a philatelic view, he pointed out that air letters were not collected as much as stamps. On 9 January 1957, Col Stoddart-Scott was advised by APMG that an issue was out of the question as the Post Office was heavily committed to producing twelve new Regional and three World Scout Jubilee Jamboree stamps that year, and would be unable to undertake any further issues.

Col Stoddart-Scott replied on 24 January, pointing out that the committee was most dissatisfied with the answer given, and a deputation from the Executive Committee of Lady Davidson, John Tilney with himself wished to set a date for a meeting to discuss their protest.

The meeting was arranged for 27 February at the House of Commons in the Central lobby at 3pm. Mr Pickering represented the PMG. Col Stoddart-Scott and Mr Hind MP made it quite clear from the outset they would not accept the Post Office's proposals to overprint the air letter form for the IPU Conference, unless the 4d stamp was additionally overprinted. If the Post Office did not overprint the 4d stamp then the IPU Committee would reject the offer to overprint the air letter form, and withdraw its offer to pay for a special datestamp for use at the Conference. Col Stoddart-Scott threatened to make a great stir about the refusal of the Post Office to mark the Conference in an appropriate way. If the PMG agreed to the 4d overprint, the next argument would be which stamp to use. The 4d Boy Scouts stamp would be on sale at the time of the Conference, but would mean the stamp was released twice, which would no doubt cause confusion at counters. If a new Regional stamp was chosen, this would be certainly be unpopular with one or more other regions that their stamp had not been used. If the 4d Wilding definitive was used, it would spoil its appearance with an overprint on the Queen's head.

Col Stoddart-Scott, speaking on behalf of his Committee, said 'They would not wish for any overprint to be put on any stamp that would detract from its appearance and spoil the effigy of the Queen's portrait'. If any overprint was appeared on the 4d Wilding it would have to have the wording round the edges of the stamp and not across it, and restricted to '46th Parliamentary Conference'.

The stamp printers were requested by the PMG to prepare a design using the 4d Wilding stamp. When ready a further meeting would be arranged to discuss with the committee why the definitive should be used. On 20 March Col Stoddart-Scott replied to the PMG pointing out how delighted he was at the decision.

On 10 April, an official meeting was arranged at Post Office Headquarters to discuss aspects of the overprinting for the air letter and 4d postage stamps and the proposed quantities. Present at this meeting were Miss E Knight and F J Langfield from Post Office Headquarters, T H Bowes and S Robson from Supplies Department, R F York from the stamp printers Harrison and Sons, and H Watts from the printers of the air letters McCorquodales.

It was confirmed by Miss Knight that the air letter overprint would be in blue and the wording would be in the top left corner, making sure the letters did not touch the tower or the Queen's diadem.

The 4d stamp would also be printed with the wording in blue ink, but might not be an exact colour match with the air letter. Mr York could not guarantee the overprint being placed precisely in the correct position every time. Mr Bowes suggested the only way to be sure of a precise position was to prepare a special cylinder: Mr York agreed. By producing a new cylinder both printers' lettering would match, and the cost would be £150, while overprinting plates would cost £70. By using blue for both overprints these would match sufficiently well. Mr York offered to produce a mock-up of the stamp showing the overprint in the correct position, also placing '46th' below the Queen's chin. If it was necessary to use an artist as consultant, Mr Farrar Bell would be on site as he was an employee of Harrisons.

The Supplies Department wanted to know the quantities of 4d stamps required for overprint. It was proposed to order in the region of 12 million, but both printers stressed they were heavily committed, and hoped the Post Office could give an early decision as the date fixed for release of the stamps was 12 September.

On 29 May 1957, the APMG along with Miss Knight met Col Stoddart-Scott and inspected the mock up of the 4d overprint. All agreed it was unfortunate for '46th' to appear under the Queen's chin. The APMG wished to see '46th' omitted or moved to the left, before he decided which to use. He asked to see essays as soon as possible. On 4 June the essays

were re-submitted as 'A' with '46th' removed, and 'B' with '46th' moved to the left. The APMG decided on 'B' and returned it to Harrisons to start printing.

On 30 July, APMG approved the 4d in sheets by comparing with the bromide that had been approved for the design. The colour was compared with the normal 4d Wilding, and found to be lighter. The printers confirmed a slight colour variation but this was within the permitted tolerance.

On 20 August a Press and Broadcast notice was sent out announcing that on 21 August the Post Office was issuing a special 4d postage stamp with the words '46th Parliamentary Conference' which would be available from all Post Offices Counters and withdrawn on 13 October. After this date the normal 4d stamp would be back on sale.

The total of special 4d stamps sold was 10,472,160.

GIFT OF PRESENTATION CARDS

On 15 August 1957, Miss Knight spent £10, from the Treasury Chambers consolidated stamp account, to purchase stamps and special printed presentation cards, along with the overprinted air letter form, to be given to a number of notable people. The Public Relations Department placed an order for 80 presentation cards and 110 envelopes on 16 August with Harrison and Sons. The cost was invoiced at £11 1s 9d (£11.08p).

When the printed cards received from Harrisons were being prepared with the new issue, it was noticed that there was a spelling error 'Interparliamentary' instead of 'Inter-Parliamentary', which had not been seen during the proof checking stage. Harrisons was contacted so that it could correct the error and produce a further supply of 80 cards. Harrisons charged the cost of printing the new cards at £7 10s (£7.50p).

Only 70 of the 4d stamps and 70 of the 6d air letter forms were purchased to be placed into the presentation cards. Of the 70 presentation gift packs, 65 were posted to various dignitaries including The Queen, Mr Macmillan, the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister of South Africa, and other Prime Ministers and Government heads around the world. These were posted with the Boy Scout Jubilee Jamboree stamps on the envelope. The remaining five cards were returned to the Supplies Department on 5 December 1957. Because of the re-print and postage had to be paid for, the total bill totalled £22 0s 8½d. Harrisons did not receive final payment until 24 March 1958, when the new budget for expenditure had been approved.

SPECIAL HANDSTAMP

Colonel Stoddart-Scott ordered a specially designed handstamp for use at the opening of the Conference. This was ordered because there was no official slogan postmark to be used for the first day of issue. The handstamp was to be used at a temporary post office at the conference venue situated in Church House, Westminster, and also at the post office in the Houses of Parliament. Neither post offices were open for the general public; therefore the Post Office allowed the public to take first day covers to the South West District Office to obtain the datestamp. The Post Office did not publicise any details of this service, as it was concerned about the demand. The Philatelic Traders' Society and British Philatelic Association were notified by post on 15 August that the Post Office did not intend to offer a full first day cover service, but would accept covers received at SWDO on the day of issue.

The handstamp showed Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament; its cost was between £15 and £20, paid for by the Treasury, and it took over a month to manufacture.

AIR LETTER FORM

On 9 February 1955, the question was raised by Lord Elibank during Parliament's Question and Answer time about changing the pictorial design on the current air letter form, as it still showed the Coronation stamp of 1953.

In private discussion with the PM.G as a result the Deputy Director General (DDG) said he also wished to see a change to the air letter stamp, and would like to adopt a design featuring Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament, as a historical landmark recognised all over the world. He suggested this be done as soon as possible. His ideas were for a vertical rather than horizontal design, printed in blue to correspond with the existing 'PAR AVION' that appeared on the left side of the form. The DDG recommended Lynton Lamb be commissioned and paid to produce a new design regardless of whether or not it was finally used.

Lynton Lamb was contracted by S D Sargent (DDG) in early March to prepare the new design to include Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament. A meeting was arranged for 30 March, but Lamb wanted to put forward alternative designs, one of the white cliffs of Dover, the other of St Paul's Cathedral, as Lamb thought that these were more distinctive landmarks of Great Britain. Sargent pointed out that the white cliffs of Dover had been used on the 5s stamp issued on 3 May 1951, and St Paul's was not as distinctive as Big Ben with the Houses of Parliament, which he still felt was preferable. Lamb made the point that if Big Ben was drawn in a vertical format, it would show the Queen's head at the top with Big Ben underneath and Parliament buildings crammed in, which would certainly make an

unattractive design. If the design was horizontal he could portray the Houses of Parliament with Big Ben from the east, with the river view, along with the Queen's portrait in a better position with an attractive setting. Sargent questioned Lynton Lamb on the colour of the stamp, which at present was red, asking if blue would be better. Lamb felt that there was no advantage to be gained by changing the colour.

The PMG instructed Sargent to tell Lamb he had been given the commission to draw the design on the lines suggested. The DDG pointed out to the PMG that sometime ago Cecil Thomas had been commissioned to design the embossed envelopes, and no reference was made to the Advisory Committee. For the new design for the air letter form, it would be in the PMG's interest to persuade the Advisory Panel to dispense with a competition asking other artists to submit designs.

INSTRUCTION TO THE ARTIST

On 20 April 1955, S D Sargent wrote to Lamb to confirm the new design, as formal instruction, indicating some points to be observed. Primarily it had to show Big Ben with the Houses of Parliament from the river, and the portrait of the Queen must be in the same style as the high value stamps that Lamb had designed, still to be issued in 1955. For technical reasons the size of the artwork had to be four times that size of the actual stamp, in this case 3.44 inches by 6.04 inches. The fee would be 40 guineas to produce the design, and if used a further 160 guineas would be paid. The letter stated that the Post Office could not guarantee to accept the design, if the Stamp Advisory Committee decided to ask to hold a competition.

SUBMISSION OF DESIGN

On 18 June 1955, Lamb sent to Sargent his completed design, pointing out that he had problems getting Big Ben and the Houses of Parliament in perspective. He found the best place for the wording 'sixpence postage' was horizontally along the base of the stamp. The Queen's portrait was placed over miscellaneous buildings on the embankment on the right hand side of the design. Sargent was very pleased with this first submission and on 25 June ordered twelve bromides for distribution to the PMG, Sir Francis Meynell, Sir Gordon Russell and members of the PMG's Advisory Committee for their views.

On 8 July the Sargent wrote to Lamb that approval of the design was being sought from the PMG and his Advisory Committee, and asked to change the 6d value panel as it appeared too obtrusive on the bromide. The original drawing was returned to Lamb, and sent back to Sargent on 26 July following modification. Twelve new stamp size bromides were ordered

from the altered drawing for distribution to the Advisory Committee, with a covering note mentioning the change to the 6d value.

In the House of Lords on 29 July 1955, the PMG answered the question of 9 February 1955 (Appendix B) from Lord Elibank about a new pictorial stamp on the air letter form. The PMG told the Commons that he had commissioned Lamb to prepare a design for the 6d air letter, to show Big Ben known around the world, and he was pleased to announce that Lamb had submitted his design, and bromides produced for the Advisory Committee on postage stamp designs. If it agreed with the design with no objections, then it would be prepared for the Queen's approval. The Advisory Committee returned the bromides to Mr Pickering (Postal Services Department) on 25 August with a summarised report. Sir Francis Meynell found the new stamp pleasant, but disliked the style of the lettering. Sir Francis was curious about the 'Gothic Arches' surrounding the 6d value, and also wanted it known that the 'Houses of Parliament do not stand upon a bridge'. Sir Leigh Ashton felt the design was 'absolutely deplorable', and 'Big Ben lacked proportion and was quite unacceptable'. Sir Kenneth Clark was not happy with the design, but offered no constructive view regarding improvement. Lady Sempill disliked the 6d value with its surround of gothic arches.

Lamb received a letter on 30 August Sargent explaining how delighted the PMG was with the design; however, the Director of the Council of Industrial Design and PMG's Advisory Committee were critical, and he knew he would be very disappointed. Sargent stated he would contact the printers to see if the company had any comments on the design, and its suitability for reproduction using photogravure. The drawing was retained at the Post Office in case the printers wished to view it. On viewing the drawing and the bromide it was found that the paper used by Lamb had a series of vertical lines running through which showed on the bromide, and which had to be eliminated before the design was re-photographed for photogravure. The cameras used in photogravure work picked up every small detail. The printer's consultants, Blades, East and Blades, who prepared cylinders for McCorquodales, recommended that the design be redrawn on paper free of lines. It was also found that Lynton had used sepia ink, but the Queen's head tone was black and grey. This would present some difficulty as the Queen's head would not match the rest of the stamp in intensity. If the design was left as it stood it would suffer and detail would be lost on reproduction. Lamb was told of the findings in a letter dated 29 September, which also enclosed the original drawing.

Lamb on 7 October wrote a very strong four page letter to Sargent, detailing his unhappiness at the comments raised by the PMG's Advisory Committee. However, he found the printer's comments to be very constructive, and asked to have a meeting about the reproduction of the drawing, as he felt it would be in the interest of the printers to cover themselves, if any part of the drawing was found not up to printing standard. Lamb would

not go any further with any changes to the drawing, which he was now retaining, until the panel and printers told him exactly what changes to make.

A REVISED DESIGN

On Tuesday, 10 January 1956, Lamb was invited to Post Office Headquarters to speak with R H Locke, Director of Postal Services, about his design, not as yet completed since first started in April 1955. At the meeting were K D Carter of McCorquodales, E Carr and W F Bowes of Post Office Supplies Department, H N Pickering and K Hind of Postal Services Department/Home Mails Branch.

The point was made that Lamb should change the lettering on his drawing to bold; it was recommended that Reynolds Stone be consulted on the lettering as Lamb was having problems with this. The 'Gothic Arches' surrounding the 6d value were to be altered so that they were not a part of the Houses of Parliament. 'The main appearance of the Houses of Parliament resting on the bridge would have to be strengthened by lightening and shading of the bridge.'

At the end of the meeting Locke asked Lamb to send a revised drawing, so that bromides could be made, and reproduced on air letter paper to see if it was satisfactory. On 18 May, Lamb returned the modified design. Two copies were ordered reproduced on air letter paper, one to be sent to the PMG and the other to go to DDG.

On 19 June, Sir Francis Meynell and the Committee were sent bromides of the new design, with attention drawn to the points that had been changed. The Supplies Department reported on 9 July that McCorquodales had produced two colour essays (the colour not listed in Archive files). It was noticed that one stamp was darker than the other, due to slightly deeper etching of the cylinder, the essays being printed directly from the copper cylinder. Two more colour essays were produced using greater pressure on the machine, which gave better ink distribution, but was found to fill in the lettering.

The Post Office was not happy with the results of the printing trial, and as yet had not submitted any essays for the Queen's approval. It was hoped to issue the new air letter in January 1957. A meeting was held on 3 August 1956 at Post Office Headquarters involving L Lamb, the designer, R H Locke, H N Pickering, F W Goldsmith and F J Langfield, all from Postal Headquarters, E Carr and T H Bowes of Supplies Department, and Mr Archer and Mr Bryant from Blades, East and Blades Ltd.

Locke opened the meeting by discussing the colour trial essays; he was not happy with the results and thought there was a need to improve the new stamp which now lacked

definition. Bryant made it quite clear that his firm 'had not been given enough time to make a satisfactory job of the cylinder', and under these circumstances he considered it unfair to be strongly criticised. The lettering was again criticised and it was suggested that Reynolds Stone should be again approached to help on strengthening the letters and 6d figure. Bryant brought up the question of the vertical lines on the print, caused by the ribbed texture of the paper. Lamb did not mind if the ribbing was removed. Locke wanted the printers to produce two essays, one showing the ribbing, and the other with the ribbing eliminated. Many other points were discussed to improve the definition of the stamp design. Lamb agreed to work in co-operation with the printers, to save time if any modification were necessary to the drawing. The meeting decided that the printers would print new modified colour essays for approval.

The Supplies Department received six essays from the printers on 27 September, two of each of three variations of the basic design numbered 1, 2 and 3. Lamb found all three acceptable but preferred no. 3, because of its 'crispness and brilliance'.

A letter to Colonel Stoddard-Scott on 2 October enclosed three improved stamp design essays for his panel. The essays were also sent to the PMG for him to select one to be submitted to the Queen for approval. The PMG approved of design no. 3 on 4 October. No reply was received from Colonel Stoddard-Scott or any preference from his pane. The APMG wrote to the Colonel suggesting that, in addition to the special stamp, release of the new air letter form could be postponed to coincide with the Conference, and sold for the short period covering the Conference with a special overprint as its design was an ideal symbol for the Parliamentary gathering.

On 15 March 1957, the APMG wrote to the PMG that the January 1957 release date originally scheduled for the air letters had been and gone. He recommended that the air letter should now be submitted to the Queen, as the colour essay was to hand, and approved by the PMG on 4 October 1956 with a preference for design no. 3. 'The Queen would have to be told that this design was pending a decision on whether to use this air letter to mark the forthcoming Conference of the I.P.U.'

A letter and colour essay were sent to the Palace on 22 March requesting the Queen's approval Buckingham Palace replied on 25 March that the suggested design had been laid before the Queen who approved of 'Mr Lamb's new and excellent design for high value stamps'. Ernest Marples MP, now Chairman of the Post Office Board and PMG, was confused by the reference to high value stamps, these being the design released in 1955.

OVERPRINT

The question of overprinting the new air letter form was first considered in June 1956. The Supplies Department was asked on 26 June if it was feasible to overprint the wording 'Inter-Parliamentary Union - 46th Meeting'. Supplies Department confirmed on 27 June that overprinting with the wording suggested would not present any technical difficulties.

The Supplies Department also enclosed transparent paper with the words in black lettering to give the general effect of the overprint. As the Conference was to be opened on 12 September 1957, the Supplies Department needed to have by 1 March 1957 an estimate of the quantity required for overprint purposes. It was considered essential to issue 3,000,000 overprinted forms, none to be sold through any post office for the period of the Conference. The Supplies Department could supply this quantity if a decision was reached by mid-June 1957. Further specimen air letter forms were sent to the Supplies Department with black wording in February 1957. In March a specimen air letter form was received with blue overprinting; it was assumed up to this point that the overprinting would be in black, as this was the colour used for overprints on air letter forms used for Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. There had been no indication of a problem with the black overprint as the Supplies Department had submitted in June 1956 and February 1957 samples overprinted in black.

The Supplies Department asked the printers McCorquodale & Co Ltd if there had been a problem with the printing of the air letter form. The printers replied that the stamp was printed in gravure and the lettering in letterpress. Using blue or maroon ink as the overprint colour was quite straightforward, but any other colour would cause additional handling work, as the overprinting had to be done on a platen machine which was very slow. Total output for one week would be 100,000, whereas if the colour used was blue or maroon 1,000,000 could be produced in a week. The company sent specimens of various styles and colour trials in the hope that blue ink would be finally chosen as any other colour could cause problems. In support of using blue ink was the cost of black overprinting at £1 per 1,000 whereas the cost of blue overprinting was negligible.

Lynton Lamb received 200 guineas for designing the new air letter form from Mr Pickering and Miss Knight at a meeting on 29 March 1957. He was then advised that his design would be overprinted to mark the Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference in London.

Lamb was not overjoyed with this proposal, as he felt the overprint would spoil the design. He pointed out that if he knew of this intention at the time of producing the artwork he would have been drawn it differently. He pointed out that if there was any overprint he would like to see it printed in blue, as it would show up well in artificial light. Lamb suggested the wording on the overprint should be shortened to read '46th Parliamentary Conference' and that the lettering of 'TH' in 46th should be in lower case. The other letters

he suggested be printed in upper case and bold type. Lamb was anxious that the wording 'Conference' running towards the tower of Big Ben should not cover the tower as this would make the stamp untidy. He also stressed that any publicity about the design should mention that Reynolds Stone helped him with the lettering.

The new air letter, with 'stamp' printed in carmine-red, was printed by McCorquodale and Co Ltd and overprinted using 6pt Windsor type in blue, and read '46th PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE'. A press notice and description of the stamp was released on 21 August and the air letter with overprint was available at all post offices from 12 September 1957. The total air letter forms with the overprint was 5,975,200, while the quantity sold was 4,338,000 and 1,637,200 were returned from Postmasters to the Supplies Department.

PREMATURE SALE

The Divisional Controller of the Foreign Section at East Central District Office reported on 8 September 1957 that one new overprinted air letter had been discovered with a W11 postmark; a further air letter form postmarked W10 was received the following day. On 9 September urgent enquiries were made by telephone to ascertain the office making premature sales of the air letter forms.

It was found that the sub post office at 116 Ladbroke Grove, North Kensington had sold 19 air letter forms with the overprint on Saturday, 7 September. The Foreign Section reported that only four forms had been found up to the date of issue 12 September, and had been dealt with in accordance with the instruction of a Post Office Circular dated 28/8/57.

DERRICK PAGE
18 January 1993

REFERENCES

British Post Museum & Archive Files:

Post 122/976 - 1955/57 46th Conference of IPU: Part 1

Post 122/977 - 1957/58 46th Conference of IPU: Part 2

Post 122/335 - 1955/66 Postage stamps redesigned 6d air letter form.