

## Tercentenary of Establishment of the General Letter Office

Date of issue: 7 JULY 1960



The idea of commemorating the 300th anniversary of the establishment of the Post Office seems to have first been mentioned in 1955. On 11 October that year, Mr Langfield of the Postal Services Department (PSD) requested information as to whether the anniversary fell in 1957, 'in case the question of special stamps arises'. The idea that the Post Office dated from 1657 arose from Oliver Cromwell's Parliamentary Act of that year which established a 'General Post Office'. The Post Office regarded this Act as marking its creation: in a letter to the Director of Postal Services (DPS) on 21 February 1956, T A O'Brien, head of the Public Relations Department (PRD), stated that 1957 marked the 300th anniversary of the Post Office and that it should celebrate the tercentenary.

However, by March 1956 the attitude of the Post Office had changed in favour of commemorating the Tercentenary in 1960 rather than 1957. A letter from the DPS dated 5 March explained the reasoning behind the change. While he acknowledged that earlier dates were associated with marking the establishment of the Post Office (Charles I's proclamation of 1635 and Cromwell's Act of 1657) the DPS concluded that Charles II's Act of 1660 should properly be considered as marking its foundation. The DPS admitted that the Act of 1660 was substantially the same as that of 1657, but he pointed out that 'it was stated in the preamble in 1657 that the GPO was set up as, in effect, a police-control or spying organisation, and this was omitted from the 1660 Act'. The DPS continued that 'the Post Office as simply a public service for conveying the mails, and not as a spying organisation, dates from 1660'. This seems to have been the popular view as the PSD then proposed an issue of commemorative stamps for 1960.

There was strong feeling both within and without the Post Office to mark a postal anniversary during 1960. For example, the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the London International Stamp Exhibition of 1960, Ewart Gerrish, wrote on 11 October 1958 asking if the Post Office could issue a stamp in 1960 to commemorate the tercentenary of the appointment of Henry Bishop as the first Postmaster General; this request was denied as it was not Post Office policy to issue stamps to commemorate individuals.

Discussion within the Post Office was renewed in 1959. Mr O'Brien of PRD suggested a special issue in 1960 to celebrate '300 years unbroken history of the Post Office', an idea that was rejected. Then on 21 May 1959 a minute went to the Deputy Director General in which the case for and against an issue of stamps to celebrate the founding of the Post Office with the Act of 1660 was presented by the DPS.

The question was put to a meeting of the General Directorate on 25 May, which found 'The general feeling was that a case could just about be made for a stamp or stamps to commemorate the tercentenary of the Charles II Act.' It was suggested that 'influential opinion' be sought: the Keeper of the Queen's Collection and editors of the philatelic magazines were mentioned.

The editors of 'Philatelic Magazine' and 'Stamp Collecting' were contacted and both expressed approval. On 10 June Sir Ronald German, the Deputy Director General (DDG), wrote to Sir John Wilson, Keeper of the Queen's philatelic collection to ask his advice. The letter sought Sir John's opinion on the validity of 1960 as the date of the tercentenary, pointing out that the Post Office had, in 1935, celebrated the tercentenary of the 1635 proclamation of Charles I, although no stamps had been issued. Although Sir John professed not to be an authority on postal history, he offered his opinions to the Post Office in two letters of 17 and 19 June. The Post Office took these to indicate he was in favour of an issue in 1960 to mark the 1660 Act. A minute reporting the results of the discussions with Sir John Wilson went to the DDG on 13 August.

The Post Office now felt sufficient confidence in its position to make a decision and recommended in a minute of 30 October that stamps be issued.

On 26 November Miss Knight of the PSD wrote to the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) asking for a list of artists to invite to submit designs. In a reply of 3 December, the CoID named Michael Goaman, Reynolds Stone, Pat Keely, Gordon F Huntly, Christopher Ironside and Jeffery Matthews. Miss Faith Jaques was added as a 'spare' should any of the six drop out. All seven were invited to submit designs in a letter dated 11 December. Formal invitations were also sent out to the four main stamp printing firms. The deadline for submissions was 29 January 1960: it was envisaged that the full selection process would

take until the end of February, essays would be completed and approved by the Queen by mid-April, that printing would take 7 weeks, so that distribution to offices would be complete by 5 July.

The Post Office's intention was announced to Parliament and the press on 9 December. The stamps would be issued 'some time in the summer'; however, a PSD memorandum to the Supplies Department the previous day had indicated 9 July as the 'target date', since this coincided with the opening of the London International Stamp Exhibition. On 12 December G M Punnett, Assistant Controller of Supplies, was told in a memorandum that delivery of 6 weeks' supply of each value would be required by 8 June 1960, namely 150 million 3d (1.25 million sheets of 120 double-size stamps) and 4.8 million 1s 3d (40,000 sheets).

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## INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

The Post Office prepared 'Instructions to Artists'. It was proposed to issue two stamps, with the essential theme of the Act of 1660. Artists were allowed a free choice of ideas, but 'should not convey the impression that it is the tercentenary of the Post Office or the postal services which is now being marked'. Designs could be either pictorial or symbolic, but must include a representation of the Queen's head: if photographs were not used the artist could indicate in rough where the head was to be positioned. Artists were free to design in either a horizontal (landscape) or vertical (portrait) format. Preliminary rough sketches were not acceptable: only artwork completely finished and suitable for immediate reproduction was to be submitted. Artwork must bear either the 3d or 1s 3d value with detachable value tabs using clear Arabic numerals. It was left to the individual artist whether or not to include 'Postage' and 'Revenue'. The size of the issued stamps would be 1.51 inches by 0.86 inches excluding perforations and gutter; artwork should be four times these dimensions, namely 6.04 inches by 3.44 inches exclusive of mounting.

Printing was to be by photogravure with each stamp in one colour only, the printers to be Harrison & Sons Ltd of High Wycombe, Bucks. Photographs of the Queen's head were enclosed: these were supplied by Harrisons, but had to be returned when the designs were submitted. The payment for submitted drawings was 60 guineas with a maximum of 120 guineas for any one artist; if the design was selected the artist would receive an additional fee of 190 guineas. All designs submitted would become the property of the Postmaster General (PMG).

The following 21 designs were submitted:

- P Keely – 2
- G F Huntly – 2
- R Stone – 2\*

- C Ironside – 1
- J Matthews – 2
- M Goaman – 2
- F Jaques – 2
- Harrison & Sons – 2 (one by W H Brown; one unknown)
- Waterlow & Sons – 2 (artists unknown)
- Bradbury Wilkinson – 2 (one by D C Rivett; one by B L Fox)
- De La Rue – 2 (artists unknown)

\*Reynolds Stone requested that bromides of one of his designs should also be produced in reverse. This was done and both versions were submitted to a meeting of 3 February (see later) as design no. 3. At later meetings, however, they were separately designated as nos 3A and 3B.

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## DESIGN SELECTION

The first meeting to consider the designs was held by the DPS, Brigadier K S Holmes, on 3 February 1960, also attended by Miss E A Knight, F J Langfield, and H N Pickering of PSD; G M Punnett of Supplies; B T Coulton and H A Berry of Harrisons. Discussion included the symbols used and the suitability for photogravure printing. It was decided that heraldic detail would be cleared with the College of Arms.

On 5 February Mrs Tomrley and Lady Sempill of the CoID were sent details of the designs together with copies of the comments made on 3 February. The College of Arms was also consulted concerning heraldry.

A meeting of the Stamp Advisory Panel was held on 18 February; present were Miss M Pike (APMG), Sir Ronald German (DDG), H N Pickering (PSD), Miss Knight (PSD), F J Langfield (PSD), D S Haskett (PSD), T A O'Brien (PRD), plus Sir Gordon Russell, Sir Kenneth Clark, Sir John Wilson, Lady Sempill, J Fitton and Mrs C G Tomrley (all of the CoID).

Of the submitted designs all but three were rejected (it had been the intention to shortlist only three): those selected were by:

R Stone (presented as design no. 3B) – 3d;

Miss F Jaques (presented as design no. 7) – 1s 3d;

J Matthews (presented as design no. 5) – 1s 3d.

The committee recommended a number of modifications before colour essays were produced; these were:

3B - Lettering strengthened, drawing 'generally tidied up'.

7 - The Crown to be corrected, the Bishop Mark to be removed and the space filled 'at the artist's discretion'.

5 - An alternative view of the mace and the horn lying below it. To be used as a reserve in case it was decided not to adopt a vertical format.

The modifications were undertaken during the latter part of February; revised drawings by Jeffery Matthews and Faith Jaques were delivered to Harrisons on 27 February, followed by the redrawn version of Reynolds Stone's design on 1 March. Essays of Stone's design in violet, Jaques' design in green, and Matthews' design in both violet and green were delivered on 5 April.

The essays were viewed at a meeting the same day by Sir Gordon Russell and Mrs C G Tomrley of COLD, Sir Ronald German, Brigadier Holmes, and Mr Pickering and Miss Knight of PSD. The essays of Stone's 3d design met with wholehearted approval and it was decided that Harrisons could proceed with the production of the cylinder immediately. At this stage the Queen had yet to be approached for her approval of the designs but the feeling was that in this case the Post Office could afford to take the chance that this design would be approved. Miss Jaques' upright design was recommended for the 1s 3d, even though the Post Office representatives had doubts about its appropriateness. It was felt that the portrait of the Queen on the design should be sharpened slightly to make it more prominent.

The PMG wrote seeking Royal approval on 13 April and a reply from Windsor Castle came on 15 April. The Queen approved of all three designs but agreed with the selection of Stone's design for the 3d and Miss Jaques' design for the 1s 3d. Production could now proceed: approved essays of the selected designs were returned to Harrisons on 21 April (3d) and 26 April (1s 3d). The company was asked to improve the definition of the head on the 1s 3d design.

It was decided to increase the quantity of 1s 3d stamps from 4.8 million to 7.2 million (150 million of the 3d remained unchanged) representing a sales period of 4-6 weeks at all offices, plus six months' postal sales by the London Chief Office.

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## REVISED ISSUE DATE

The stamps had been intended for issue on 9 July, to coincide with both the Universal Postal Union conference in Eastbourne and the London International Stamp Exhibition. The date had been proposed when Ewart Gerrish, Chairman of the Exhibition's organising committee, wrote to Miss Knight on 14 December 1959. On 26 April 1960, however, the issue

date was advised as 7 July because 9 July was a Saturday, a day not normally used for launching stamps, while if issued on Thursday, 7 July the stamps could be distributed at the Eastbourne UPU Conference, which closed on 9 July. It was felt the organisers of the London International Stamp Exhibition would be otherwise fully occupied on 9 July.

A note in the Post Office 'Circular' of 4 May advised Postmaster and Sub-Postmasters of the issue. They were requested to place initial requisitions by 20 May, based on two weeks' demand, including 'any provision for local stamp dealers'.

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## FINAL SALES TOTALS

On 7 July the set was issued. The stamps were printed in sheets of 120 on paper with the multiple Crown watermark, which appeared sideways on the 1s 3d. It was the watermark's first use on special stamps. An unknown quantity of the 3d was printed on chalk-surfaced paper, again the first time that this was used for commemorative stamps.

A Press and Broadcast Notice of 25 August published sales figures for the stamps:

3d – 140,828,400

1s 3d – 6,336,600.

Stocks were described as being 'nearly exhausted', however they would continue to be available by post from the Divisional Controller at King Edward Building.

Curiously, having made this announcement, discussions then took place within the PSD concerning the destruction of a quantity of the 3d. A letter to Miss Knight dated 19 September pointed out that Supplies Department still had some 80,000 sheets of 3d stamps on hand. The CEPT stamps had by this time been issued and consequently demand for the Tercentenary stamps was expected to vanish. Although it was originally proposed that all but 3,000 sheets be destroyed, following further correspondence it was decided that 5,000 sheets would be retained and held until 31 December 1960. After this, all but 200 sheets were to be destroyed. These instructions were given to the Supplies Department on 26 September.

A Press and Broadcast Notice of 6 June 1961 gave final sales figures:

3d - 143,390,520 (95.6% of stamps ordered)

1s 3d - 6,090,840 (84.6% of stamps ordered).

As forecasts of special stamp requirements were often severely over-estimated, this can be considered a good result. While these figures are quoted as 'final', that of the 1s 3d is lower than given in August the previous year.

Some essays were retained by Supplies for record purposes, while others went to the Royal collection. The rest were destroyed by the Accountant General's Department.

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## PREMATURE RELEASE

It was reported with regret that in the North Western Postal Region stamps had been sold before the issue date. At Stockport sorting office on 6 July 1960 the new stamps were found affixed to items in the evening collections. The Head Postmaster conducted a full investigation and found that £1 19s 9d worth of the 3d and 18s 9d of the 1s 3d had also been sold on 6 July at Lancashire Hill TSO, Stockport, Cheshire. On further investigation it was discovered that £1 15s worth of stamps had been purchased by two companies in the Stockport area: one was Rope & Twine Co, the other Hadfield Ltd. The remaining 4s 9d worth had been sold to members of the public. The Post Office found a parcel bearing a few 1s 3d stamps which was handed to the supervisor on the sorting office floor, whereupon it was traced back to the same sub-post office.

The sub-postmaster under investigation, B J McManus, was asked to give an explanation. In a letter to the Postmaster he stated that his lapse was 'due to familiarity with procedure in the Manchester area where new issues of stamps are normally received only on the day of issue'. It was found, however, that the Post Office rule for issuing new stamps to sub-post offices in the Manchester area was that they received new stamps a day before the issue date, under separate cover with an official red printed warning notice giving the date of sale. In the past this system had normally proven both reliable and acceptable.

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## PRINTED GIFT CARDS

The Postmaster General ordered presentation cards bearing two mint stamps to mark the Tercentenary. These special presentation cards had been used before for the British Empire and Commonwealth Games stamps and these gifts were to be sent to the same list of dignitaries. The white card measured 12 inches (304 mm) by 4.875 inches (124 mm) and was folded in half. Printed on the front was the royal coat of arms in gold and lettering in black describing the issue and value of the stamps. Inside the card were the two stamps mint with compliments from the Postmaster General. There were 42 cards produced and 32 were posted to distinguished people on 7 July 1960, sent as first day covers but with only one of the values on the envelope.

The listed dignitaries included The Queen, Princess Margaret, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Winston Churchill, all ex-PMGs and ex-APMGs still in

Parliament, the members of the PMG's Advisory Panel on Stamp Design, the PMGs of the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth, plus Southern Rhodesia.

Of the ten cards not posted six were handed out as gifts to Yugoslav guests of the Union of Postal Workers on 28 October 1960, one card was given to a Japanese visitor on 20 January 1961, and the final three were given to the Director General of Posts and Telecommunications of the Lebanon (of which one had the complete set, while the other two had only the 3d).

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## COMPLAINTS

The public from around the world wrote many letters to the Queen and to the Postmaster General complaining about the issue. A large number were about the 3d stamp which showed the date '1660' as many thought that this was a printing error for '1960' (the year the stamp was issued) and a number of the stamps were returned.

Other complaints concerned the Royal cypher, maintaining it was printed incorrectly. On the 3d stamp the cypher used was 'CII', whereas on the 1s 3d it was 'CIIR'. The public was also confused by the fact that the cypher that appeared was not that of the reigning Monarch.

In answer, the Post Office explained that the cypher 'CII' represented the Monarch on the throne at the time of the General Letter Office Act, while '1660' marked the year of the Act. The Post Office maintained that there was no special reason why the Royal cypher appeared in two different forms. The design was left entirely to the artists' discretion.

A letter of complaint was sent by Mr Maudsley of Uckfield, who wanted to know why the issue did not feature a 6d stamp. This was then the postage rate for airmail letter forms to countries outside Europe, and there had been no special stamp of this value since the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games. The Postmaster General thanked Mr Maudsley for his letter, and was happy to advise that 6d would be included in the next special issue, soon to be announced.

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## THE STAMP DESIGNERS

REYNOLDS STONE, CBE, RDI, FRSA, an indirect descendant of Sir Joshua Reynolds, was born on 13 March 1909. He was educated at Eton and Magdalen College, Cambridge. Later he studied printing at the Cambridge University Press, practised cutting and drawing under Eric Gill, and finally spent two years with Barnicott & Pearce (the Wessex Press, Taunton). He became a freelance designer specialising in wood-engraved calligraphy, lettering and



book decoration, interrupted by wartime RAF service. He performed commissions for bodies including the National Trust, Arts Council, Victoria & Albert Museum, Eton College and HM Stationery Office. Apart from the Tercentenary 3d his successful stamp designs for the GPO included the 1946 Victory 3d, the 1958 Welsh 'regionals', the 1960 'Europa' set and the 1963 Paris Conference stamp. Other examples of his work include banknotes and Sir Winston Churchill's Memorial in Westminster Abbey. He died on 23 June 1979.

FAITH HEATHER JAQUES, MSIA was born in Leicester on 13 December 1923. She was educated at Wyggeston School in Leicester, Leicester School of Art, and the London County Council Central School of Arts and Crafts. On leaving in 1948 she went straight into freelance design work and became a member of the Society of Industrial Artists the following year. Her work included book and magazine illustrations for such publications as 'Radio Times', 'Lilliput' and 'Strand', book jackets for various publishers, typographical ornamentation and greetings card design. She also taught at Guildford School of Art and was a staff member of the Graphic Design Department at Hornsey College of Art. As well as the Tercentenary 1s 3d she designed the 7th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference set of 1961.

Derrick Page  
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