

Freedom from Hunger

Date of issue: 21 March 1963



The Freedom from Hunger campaign was initiated in 1960 under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Conceived as a five-year project, it was intended to increase public awareness of the problem of world hunger and to co-ordinate action to solve the problem. Thirty national Committees were set up around the world, including one in Great Britain chaired by the Duke of Edinburgh.

One of the activities of the Freedom from Hunger (FFH) Campaign was a simultaneous worldwide stamp issue in the tradition of other United Nations agency campaigns. The stamps would draw attention to the needs of the hungry, as well as raising funds. There were three ways by which participating postal authorities could make a financial contribution. First, quantities of stamps could be donated for sale through the FFH Campaign. Second, those postal administrations with a tradition of issuing surcharged stamps might consider such a surcharge to FFH stamps and making the resulting funds available to the campaign. Third, it was expected by the campaign organisers that FFH stamps would be 'more sought after than other stamp issues' and hoped that any extra income arising from this popularity would be donated to the campaign.

Issuing stamps for campaigns sponsored by United Nations Agencies had already been tried: World Refugee Year (1960) stamps had been issued by 57 nations and raised \$1.6 million for UN refugee work; the World Health Organisation sponsored a campaign for Malarial Eradication in which 48 nations would participate in 1962.

INVITATION TO THE POST OFFICE

The first suggestion that the Post Office might issue Freedom from Hunger stamps was the result of canvassing a number of Government departments for ideas for new issues. On 29

May 1961, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food suggested FFH stamps: the Food and Agriculture Organisation first contacted the Post Office in September 1961. At the end of that month there was a meeting between the Director of Postal Services (DPS) and the FFH stamp plan officer, Raymond Lloyd, at the European Postal and Telecommunications conference in Torquay.

On 4 October the stamp plan co-ordinator, C H Weitz, wrote officially to both the Colonial Secretary and the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to ask for the participation of the Post Office.

At this stage the Post Office thought it might repeat previous practice as both World Refugee Year and Malarial Eradication had been marked by a special postmark, but not postage stamps.

POST OFFICE POLICY

On 30 January 1962, R E Prentice MP asked in Parliament whether the Post Office would be issuing FFH stamps. The Assistant Postmaster General (APG) replied that the matter was under consideration. Internal correspondence around this time reveals that the Post Office felt bound by policy, which was for the Post Office to issue stamps to mark only 'current national or international events and Royal and postal anniversaries'. FFH was seen as primarily a charitable campaign and not a current event of any great significance, national or international. By late March enquiries had been made as to the intentions of Common Market countries, while the Post Office had been contacted by a number of other postal administrations. This included the Department of Technical Cooperation (the body responsible for stamps issues in the overseas territories), as several postal administrations were waiting for the Post Office's decision before committing themselves. At this juncture only fourteen countries had pledged their support and a further twenty were said to be 'sympathetically disposed'. The Post Office might be forgiven for viewing the international reaction as unremarkable. There was no indication that the response would be any different to that to other UN Agency-sponsored stamps.

The fund-raising aspect also presented the Post Office with difficulties. There was a very real concern that, having previously refused all similar requests, to issue stamps for this particular campaign would take the Post Office into 'the field of good causes, charitable appeals and other campaigns'. It was envisaged that similar requests would increase once a precedent had been established. The Post Office would be placed in the awkward position of having to discriminate among various causes. The feeling was that a 'formidable list of requests' would build up, putting pressure on the Post Office to increase the frequency of

special issues. There was strong objection to the idea of donating stamps or funds to the campaign.

The Post Office was considering special stamps during 1963 to commemorate National Nature Week and the Centenary of the Red Cross. With opinion at the time in favour of two sets a year, it was felt that FFH stamps would not fit in with the tentative plans for 1963.

Thus the Post Office decided not to issue FFH special stamps. The Postmaster General (PMG) so advised Mr Prentice at the end of March 1962, and towards the end of April wrote to Mr Weitz.

CONTINUED DISCUSSIONS

The pressure brought to bear on the Post Office did not lessen. On 15 May 1962, Mr Prentice raised a further question in Parliament asking for an explanation of the PMG's refusal to issue stamps.

In late August the Director General of the FFH Campaign, Dr Sen, wrote an 'aide-memoire' to the DPS, in an attempt to address the reasons for the Post Office's refusal to issue stamps and play-down the fund-raising aspect of the campaign, believing it was more concerned with 'the themes of economic development and peace' than with charity. In a letter to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Dr Sen described the campaign as an attempt to focus world attention on the problem of malnutrition rather than a charity appeal.

In late September a meeting between Mr Weitz and the DPS during the Universal Postal Union conference at Berne, Switzerland was a further attempt at reassuring the Post Office. Weitz argued that participation would not result in an avalanche of similar requests from other charitable organisations as the FFH stamp was part of an internationally supported campaign on 'an entirely different footing from a nationally or privately sponsored charity'. Weitz also dealt with problems connected with recent UN Agency-sponsored stamps and the way in which some had seen 'philatelically objectionable practices', assuring that requests for UN Agency issues be reduced, but that no improprieties would occur with FFH stamps. The DPS merely affirmed the Post Office's decision not to participate.

POST OFFICE POLICY IN REVIEW

By October 1962, some 75 postal administrations, including fourteen from Europe, were committed to issuing FFH stamps. The pressure on the Post Office increased: on 13

November 1962, Mr Oram asked a further question in Parliament. By the end of November the number issuing stamps was 89 and another Parliamentary question was scheduled for the middle of December.

Internal correspondence reveals that during late November and early December a review of Post Office policy was undertaken by Post Office management. It was now felt that the campaign organisers had shifted emphasis to the 'principle of self-help and of practical assistance, rather than to the collection of funds'. No longer were donations of stamps or cash expected.

The FFH stamp plan was an outstanding current event that now had international support far in excess of that enjoyed by earlier UN Agency stamp campaigns, with countries continuing to pledge support.

The Post Office appeared satisfied that the organising body had taken precautions to prevent exploitation of philatelists. It was assured that sufficiently large quantities of stamps would be printed, enough to guarantee satisfying all demands postal and philatelic, through Post Office outlets at face value.

So in early December 1962, just over three months before the issue date, the Post Office decided that it would, after all, play its part in the Freedom from Hunger stamp plan.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

On 18 December 1962, for the fourth time, the PMG was asked in Parliament about FFH stamps: Mr Oram was now told that there would be an issue.

The same day the Post Office published a Press and Broadcast Notice announcing a record number of special issues for 1963, with total of five to be released, the first to be Freedom from Hunger with two stamps, 2½d (internal postcard rate) and 1s 3d (overseas airmail rate).

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

As the time available to produce an issue was extremely limited, it was decided to invite only one artist, Michael Goaman, thought to have 'considerable experience of designing stamps both for us and for other countries' and designer of two of the POSB Centenary and all three CEPT stamps issued in 1961. He was contacted on 18 December 1962 and asked to submit completely finished artwork for the two denominations.

Goaman was given a list of instructions that advised him that there were to be two stamps, to form a set, and that both stamps should incorporate the FFH symbol of three ears of wheat. The stamps were to be double the usual size, horizontal in format, and would be printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons. He was told that he could use up to two colours and, other than being asked to keep the background colour of the 2½d red, all other colours were left to his discretion. Two sizes of Queen's head were offered, the small one as used in the current 2½d and the larger variety used on the 3d. Completed work was wanted as soon as possible, and Goaman was encouraged to 'collaborate as necessary direct with Messrs Harrison'.

The Post Office intended to have essays ready for submission to the Palace by 20 January 1963.

PRODUCTION PROCESS

Goaman produced two designs: that of the 2½d 'symbolised the interdependence of the family unit and its daily bread', whilst the 1s 3d incorporated three children of different races 'together with the themes of the world and its food resources'. It seems that these were not shown to any advisory panel but instead were sent directly to Harrisons to be prepared as colour essays. The Post Office's own schedule of events was as follows:

- 24 January 1963 - essays from Harrisons to GPO;
- 31 January 1963 - approved essays to Harrisons;
- 8 March 1963 - delivery to Supplies Department of 80 per cent of total order;
- 21 March 1963 - date of issue.

In fact the first essays were delivered on 16 January. Information within the production files makes no mention of what colours the essays were printed in or how many were printed in each colour. Further essays were received on 1 March 1963, four in each denomination but again precise information is not available.

SUBMISSION TO PALACE

Two essays of each design, in different colour schemes, were forwarded to the Palace on 21 January 1963. The Queen was advised that should either of the two designs prove unacceptable then the other could be used for both denominations but in different colours. In a reply the next day from Sandringham the Queen's approval was granted for the two separate designs.

Royal Approval was advised to a meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee on 25 January, which was shown the designs and agreed they were most attractive.

PRINTING AND SUPPLY DETAILS

Copies of the approved essays were sent to Harrisons so production could start. Goaman received payment of 500 guineas. The stamps were printed in sheets of 120 on white chalk-surfaced paper, with multiple crown watermark. The paper was the balance of that used for the National Productivity Year stamps of 1962, which had been trimmed and re-reeled before use so the watermark was inverted. Phosphor lined stamps were produced for use in Southampton, Liverpool, Glasgow and south-east London, where trials with Automatic Letter Facing machinery were being conducted: the 2½d had one phosphor band, the 1s 3d three phosphor bands.

A Post Office 'Circular' of 23 January 1963 advised Head Postmasters to place initial requisitions based upon 'realistic estimates' of the first two weeks demand. The 'Circular' also included advice concerning the issue date: 'Special care should be taken to ensure that the stamps are not exhibited, sold or used for any purpose before the commencement of business at Post Offices on Thursday 21 March 1963.' A further 'Circular' of 6 March again warned Head Postmasters against selling these stamps prior to the day of issue.

The number of stamps sold was as follows:

2½d - 97,050,000 (ordinary), 2,784,920 (phosphor);

1s 3d - 9,009,000 (ordinary), 624,960 (phosphor).

The stamps were officially withdrawn from sale on 1 May 1964.

CRITICAL RESPONSE

When news of the stamp issue was first announced the philatelic press was not favourable. The 'Philatelic Trader' of 14 September 1962 stated its opposition to the practice of UN Agencies sponsoring 'gigantic' global stamp programmes which resulted in philatelists becoming the continual targets for charitable campaigns, criticising the abuses that these issues seemed to involve which it felt threatened 'the very foundation of stamp-collection'. Likewise 'Stamp Collecting' of 28 September 1962 expressed concern that UN Agencies were trading on the 'sometimes uncontrollable urge of the collector to buy anything that looks like a stamp', also citing the possibility that speculators might gain private profit from what was intended as 'public benefaction'.

The stamps themselves were well received when released. 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' of May 1963 congratulated the Post Office for overcoming the 'unprecedented problems of design and production' caused by the limited amount of time available, concluding that 'everything was in apple-pie order'. 'Stamp Magazine' of April 1963 praised the Post Office for a 'completely new' style of stamp design. This sentiment was echoed in the 'Long Island Press' of 24 March 1963 when it said that 'Great Britain's commemorative stamp designs are becoming more pictorial and colourful than ever before'. 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' also congratulated the Post Office for stamps that were 'very attractive in the modern-idiom'.

There was, however, some criticism, with 'Stamp Collecting' of 15 March describing them as being 'typically Goamanesque and, frankly, disappointing. The lettering looks as though a typewriter has been let loose on the design.' The inscription had similarly concerned 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly'.

POST OFFICE GIFTS AND DONATIONS

It was usual for the PMG to send 'Gift cards' containing mint copies of the stamps to various 'distinguished people'. Such gifts were usually sent to the Queen, Princess Margaret, Sir Winston Churchill, The Prime Minister, The Speaker, previous PMGs and APMGs still in Parliament, members of the Stamp Advisory Panel and the PMG or equivalent of self-governing members of the Commonwealth. On this occasion cards were also sent to the PMG and the artist, the Duke of Edinburgh and Sir Gilbert Rennie of the UK Committee of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, U Thant, Secretary General of the UN, and Dr Sen. Although it was thought initially that up to 100 of these cards might be required, only 42 were distributed.

On 31 August 1963, Mr Weitz contacted the DPS to ask if the Post Office would donate 200 sets as the Food and Agriculture Organisation was organising a presentation of stamp albums to heads of States. Although there was some feeling within the Post Office that this was an unnecessary gesture, the request was granted and the stamps despatched on 14 October.

There was a similar request on 27 January 1964. International displays of Freedom from Hunger stamps were being prepared and the Post Office was asked to contribute 2,000 stamps to this project. The DPS contacted Weitz on 10 February agreeing to this second donation. The stamps were lightly cancelled with lines in black ink, 'so as to destroy any postal or philatelic value while retaining their value for exhibitions'.

The Post Office did not make any direct contribution to FFH Campaign funds, either money or stamps: it was left to the Government to make a financial contribution, with £20,000 going to the FAO in Rome and £35,000 going to the UK FFH Campaign Committee.

SPECIAL POSTMARK

A special postmark was used in conjunction with the stamp issue. Fifty dies were used at 48 of the larger post offices across the country. The postmark comprised the words 'FREEDOM FROM HUNGER WEEK, 17-24 MARCH 1963' and was intended for use between 23 February and 24 March 1963, but there is evidence it was still in use at Cardiff on 28 March.

PREMATURE RELEASE

There was a number of incidents of premature release of the stamps: the details are as follows (all sold on 20 March):

Luton SO, Toddington sub office on 20 March: 38 of the 2½d, two of the 1s 3d (29 of the 2½d, two of the 1s 3d recovered)

Brentwood SO, Warley Road TSO: 36 of the 2½d, five of the 1s 3d (15 of the 2½d, four of the 1s 3d recovered)

Shanklin SO, Atherley Road sub office: 7 of the 2½d, three of the 1s 3d (all recovered)

Chipping Norton SO, Lower Slaughter: 6 of the 2½d (5 recovered).

An incident of a different nature was reported at Basingstoke, Hants, where a rubber packet-stamp did not have the date changed at midnight on 20 March. This error went unnoticed until noon on 21 March and it is not known how many items were affected.

SIMON BATES
29 JANUARY 1993

REFERENCE

British Postal Museum & Archive File:
P422/63 - 1963 Freedom from Hunger