

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

Ninth International Lifeboat Conference

Date of issue: 31 MAY 1963



On 10 April 1961 the Post Office was approached by Patrick Howarth, the Finance and Appeals Secretary of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, suggesting a stamp marking the Ninth International Lifeboat Conference, to be held in Edinburgh in June 1963. These conferences were held every four years with different countries acting as hosts: this was the first to be held in the UK since the initial conference, held in London in 1924. The purpose was to enable delegates to exchange views on life-saving techniques, to learn from the experience of others and to demonstrate and examine lifeboats and other life-saving equipment: 25 countries had been invited to participate.

The Post Office considered the suggestion and decided on 1 October 1962 to mark the Lifeboat Conference with three stamps, 2½d, 4d and 1s 6d. The GPO had a close association with the lifeboat service in that an official of the Post Office Savings Bank, Charles Dibdin, founded the 'Civil Service Lifeboat Fund' in the 1800s, and became Secretary of the Institution on leaving the Post Office. Mr Langfield of Postal Services Department (PSD) requested more information about the conference and any symbol or badges that could be included in designs. The RNLI replied that there was no symbol or badge, but hoped that stamps would be inscribed 'Ninth International Lifeboat Conference'.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was asked on 1 October by PSD to offer names of designers and on 15 October six artists and three stamp printing firms were invited to submit designs, namely D Gentleman, F Jaques, J Matthews, A Breese, J Farleigh, H Schwarz plus Harrison & Sons, Bradbury Wilkinson and De La Rue.

The Conference details were confirmed as 3 to 6 June 1963 in Edinburgh, but no date of issue appeared in the Instructions to Artists. They were invited to design three stamps that

formed a set, but the Post Office reserved the right to select only one design from a set. Designs could be symbolic or pictorial, must include the Queen's head, had to include '9th International Lifeboat Conference' and show the value, 2½d, 4d and 1s 6d, in clear Arabic numerals once in each design. (Twelve photographs were enclosed to help the artist.) The colours were: 2½d in two basic colours with background colour red; the 4d up to five basic colours with background colour light blue; the 1s 6d in up to three basic colours with background colour steel blue. The secondary colours were left to the discretion of the artist.

The stamps would be printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons of High Wycombe, using a 250 line screen. The printed surface would be 1.51 inches by 0.86 inches excluding perforations and gutter. Artists were asked to make their drawings horizontal (exclusive of any mounting) 6.04 inches by 3.44 inches, to arrive by 3 December 1962. They were paid 60 guineas for each finished design, with a maximum of 180 guineas to any one artist, plus an additional 190 guineas for any design used, including any modifications that might be needed.

SPECIAL MEETINGS FOR ARTISTS

Due to confusion over the 'Instructions to Artists' a meeting was held at Post Office Headquarters on 24 October 1962, present being F Langfield and D Beaumont of the Post Office, Mr Tranter, F Jaques and A Breese of Harrisons, plus H Schwarz, J Matthews and J Farleigh. The artists had ten points that needed clarification.

Chinese white: use of this had been discouraged by Harrisons as it did not photograph a tone as a visual colour; Process white could be used instead. The Post Office was going to amend this paragraph for future 'instructions' with the guidance of Harrisons.

Queen's portrait: artists were instructed that, if they wished they could wash a colour over the Queen's portrait, to indicate full colour in the finished design.

The remark 'The three stamps will form a set, all designed by the same artist, although the Post Office reserves the right to select one design only' was found to be ambiguous.

The question was raised of whether the twelve photographs provided could be cut up? In reply the artists were told they might cut the photograph if it helped the design.

The artists were free to use any depth of background colour, as the Instructions were not clear on this point.

The reference to basic colours was to imply the printing colours of red, yellow, blue.

New colour samples ('wedges') were suggested.

The artists may produce black overlays, as the printers could reverse to white.

One artist requested permission to use black colouring in his design, which was accepted.

There was confusion on lettering or figures to be used as it stated that words should be used in full but showed '9th' as a figure in the Instructions. This was answered by letter on

29 October stating that '9th' or 'Ninth' could be used, also stressing that 'Life-boat' had to be with a hyphen.

Artists were again contacted on 17 November to advise that drawings were now required by 10 December not 3 December.

SUBMITTED DESIGNS

There were 29 designs submitted as follows:

David Gentleman (nine designs – three sets of three);

Miss Faith Jaques (three designs);

Jeffery Matthews (three designs);

A Breese (six designs – two sets of three);

J Farleigh (three designs);

H Schwarz (five designs, offered as a single design, and two pairs);

G Cayford of Harrisons (six designs – two sets of three);

Bradbury Wilkinson (three designs);

De Ls Rue (three designs).

By 20 December the PMG's Stamp Advisory Committee had selected six designs by David Gentleman. The first choice was two designs from his second set with one from his third; second choice was another from his third set with two from his first. The CoID agreed that all six be shown to the Queen but stated they would like one of the final designs to include a helicopter. A minor modification was required on the accuracy of the drawing showing the lifeboat and RNLI uniform.

On 1 January 1963, the modified drawings were sent to Harrisons for essays to be produced. The CoID suggested on 4 January that it would like the 4d changed to 3d to sell in larger quantities as 4d was only for postcards to Europe. The Post Office considered the proposal but was concerned that the issue was too close to that for National Nature Week, which included a 3d: having two different stamp designs in the same value would cause confusion. The Post Office requested essays from Harrisons of the six designs, allocated the values 2½d, 4d or 1s 6d, which were received on 26 January.

SUBMISSION TO THE QUEEN

The Queen was on a Royal Tour so special arrangements were made with her Private Office to send details of the proposed stamps. On 15 February 1963, a detailed description was drafted and sent as a telegram to the Queen on the 18 February via the Cabinet Office. The

Queen would sign the relevant document approving the stamps on her return to Buckingham Palace, the Post Office requested a telegram be sent in return if the recommended designs were accepted.

On 22 February the Post Office received a letter of approval from the Queen. A warrant for 750 guineas was sent to David Gentleman on 25 March as full payment.

GIFT CARDS

For each new issue the Post Office produced a gift card containing the stamps with a brief description. This time the card measured 14 inches by 6 inches when fully opened, but was folded into three equal sections. The cover featured the royal crest embossed in red at the top right hand corner. The black text read 'Postage Stamps of the reign of HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II issued on 31 May 1963 to mark the Ninth International Lifeboat Conference', while in the bottom right hand corner in black appeared the drawing of a Lifeboat as shown on the 4d stamp. The inside included the text 'With the compliments of Her Majesty's Postmaster-General The Rt. Hon. Reginald Bevin MP 31 May 1963 General Post Office London', one of each of the stamps, and 'This conference is the first to be held in this country since the original London conference in 1924. Great Britain was the first country to have a national lifeboat service.'

100 gift cards and 125 envelopes (to allow for spoilage) were ordered on 28 March. The Post Office sent cards to the Queen, Princess Margaret, Sir Winston Churchill, Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister, Sir H Hylton-Foster, Speaker of the House of Commons, previous Postmasters General and Assistant Postmasters General still in Parliament (10), Postmasters General of the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth (13), Members of the PMG's Advisory Panel on Stamp Design (10). Cards were also sent on this occasion to The Queen Mother, who was patron (along with the Queen) of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution, The Princess Marina, Duchess of Kent, who was involved as President of the Institution, and The Secretary, S Whorlow. Each of the 42 cards sent was in an envelope bearing a full set of stamps cancelled 31 May.

PRESS AND BROADCAST NOTICE

The issue enjoyed much press, television and radio publicity, the first announcement being made in Parliament and through a press notice on 18 December 1962. A Press and Broadcast Notice of 7 March 1963 announced that David Gentleman had designed all three stamps, and that the 2½d and 4d were the first British stamps to be printed with a white background using the photogravure process. The original design of the helicopter and lifeboat had been

engraved in wood by David Gentleman, the first time this technique had been used on British stamps.

PREMATURE RELEASE

There were some incidents of premature release of the stamps, those officially reported being:

29/30 May - Pitlessie, Cupar, Fife (15 of the 2½d);

30 May - Long Elms, Harrow (2½d - quantity not given);

30 May - Keyham Barton, Plymouth (25 of the 2½d, 3 of the 4d, 3 of the 1s 6d);

30 May - Bengoe T.S.O. Hertford (72 of the 2½d).

Envelopes bearing the stamps were found at various sorting offices around the country on 30 May. Quantities found were 29 of the 2½d, 4 of the 4d and 5 of the 1s 6d plus a further 28 stamps in various denominations not fully recorded.

QUANTITY OF STAMPS

Harrison and Sons printed the following, in photogravure process on multiple crowns watermarked paper, each sheet containing 120 stamps:

2½d - 85,644,000 (713,700 sheets)

4d - 8,424,000 (70,200 sheets)

1s 6d - 10,872,000 (90,600 sheets).

The stamps were withdrawn on 1 September 1964: records show all stock was sold. There were with phosphor bands to assist with the automatic letter facing machines in Southampton, Liverpool, Glasgow and London SE district.

DERRICK PAGE
26 March 1993

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:
P615/67 International Lifeboat Conference
P614/67
P1895/65 Special issues for 1963