

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

1963 Paris Postal Conference Centenary

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In June 1962 Monsieur Jacques Marette, French Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, invited the Postmaster General (PMG), or a senior representative of the GPO, to attend a postal conference in Paris on 7 and 8 May 1963. It was to mark the centenary of the first multilateral conference on international postal services, arranged in Paris in June 1863 by Montgomery Blair, then Postmaster General of the USA. This led to the Berne Conference of 1874, at which the Universal Postal Union was founded. The thirteen nations, including the United Kingdom, which were represented at the 1863 meeting, were invited to the centenary event.

Monsieur Marette suggested all 13 countries mark the occasion with a commemorative stamp. He recommended each country designed its own stamp in the basic international letter postage rate: the British rate was 6d. On 3 July Reginald Bevins, PMG, replied that the Post Office was to contribute a philatelic and historical exhibition in conjunction with the Paris meeting and would 'willingly consider your suggestion for a special commemorative stamp'.

However, the PMG felt the conference was not of sufficient importance to merit a stamp, although the founding of the UPU in 1874 could justify a stamp (1974). The other countries producing stamps put the Post Office under pressure to reconsider, so it invited artists to submit designs on 28 September 1962 as a precaution.

On 1 December 1962 the Director General of Posts and Telegraphs of Denmark contacted the DPS to enquire if the British Post Office was issuing a stamp to mark 'Paris' as time was

getting short for possible production. The Danes had decided not to issue stamps, but wanted to know the British position as British stamps would leave the Danes isolated. On 18 December the DPS sent a cable to Denmark's Director General that the British Post Office had decided that day to issue a stamp.

INSTRUCTION TO ARTISTS

The PSD sent out invitations on 28 September 1962 inviting six artists and three stamp printing companies to submit a design for one 6d stamp to mark the Centenary of the Paris Postal Conference of 1863, which it was proposed to issue in May 1963. The artists were told that although the design had to have a symbolic or pictorial theme relating to the 'Centenary', the artists had a free hand. The design had to include '1863 Paris Postal Conference Centenary' or 'Paris Postal Conference Centenary 1963', and the value 6d in clear Arabic numerals. 'Postage' and 'Revenue' were not required even though the stamp would be valid for both purposes.

The stamp could be vertical or horizontal, 1.51 inches by 0.86 inches excluding the perforations and gutter. The artwork had to be 6.04 inches by 3.44 inches exclusive of any mounting. The stamp would be printed in two colours, one of which was purple, the definitive 6d colour, the other left to the artist. The stamp would be printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons in double pane reel-fed sheets, each sheet of 120 stamps, on multiple crowns watermark paper. Some of the stamps would bear phosphor bands.

The artist would be paid 60 guineas for each completed design, and an additional 190 guineas for the design adopted. Finished artwork, accompanied by a brief description, should be with F Langfield, PSD, by 13 November 1962.

SUBMITTED DESIGNS

The six artists and three printing firms submitted a total of twelve designs, all received at PSD by 12 November. The designs were described by the artists as follows (each submitted one design, except Mary Adshead who submitted three).

P Keely:

The first cell (1863) becomes worldwide network.

M. Goaman:

To symbolise the Conference.

R. Stone:

Strong mid-Victorian feeling.

Miss M Adshead (three designs):

A hand of 15 letters laid out as 15 countries took part in the conference;

The Arc de Triomphe - centre of Paris, the world - as the conference was international, 15 flags, one for each country that took part in it;

The traditional posthorn, and a Royal Mail coach of the period.

P James:

Formal layout of a public notice of the conference.

J Matthews:

Eiffel Tower, and a Post Horn - symbolising the Postal Service.

P Pickard (of Harrison & Sons):

The dove carrying the letter is a symbol of peace and international co-operation throughout the world.

Meritt (of Harrison & Sons):

Invitation in postal form to the International Conference of 1863.

Bradbury Wilkinson:

The open door with letters passing through and around the sphere symbolises obstacles overcome to facilitate worldwide postal communications as we know them today.

De La Rue:

World pillar-box (surrounded by a spiral of 15 envelopes, one envelope of each participating country).

A meeting on 20 November of the PMG's Stamp Advisory Committee was not impressed by any of the designs but finally selected that by R. Stone, subject to modification of the lettering, as first choice and the third design by Mary Adshead as the runner up subject to lettering to be enlarged, mailcoach to be made more prominent, and substituting a second '6d' for the posthorn.

ESSAYS

The two artists were contacted on 21 November, asking that modified artwork be sent to Harrisons by Monday of the following week: that of Miss M Adshead was received on on 29

November and from Mr Stone on 30 November. Reynolds Stone's design was to be printed in green for the foliage and purple for the rest.

Harrisons supplied some essays on 2 January 1963, and further ones on 1 March and 18 March, in the following colours:

Mary Adshead – colour not known;

Reynolds Stone – in purple; reddish purple; violet.

QUEEN'S APPROVAL

On 14 January 1963 essays of the two designs were sent for the Queen's approval. It was explained that on one the lettering reflected the spirit of the period of the original Paris Conference in 1863, while the second showed a Royal Mail coach of the period around 1863. On 16 January, the Queen approved the essay of Reynolds Stone's design.

He was sent a warrant for 250 guineas for the work. Harrisons started full production of the stamps.

GIFT CARDS AND COMMEMORATIVE ALBUM

The Post Office produced a gift card containing the stamp with a brief description of the Paris conference. The card was 6 inches by 9½ inches when laid out flat. It was sent to distinguished people, namely the Queen, Princess Margaret, 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, Postmasters General (or equivalent Ministers) of the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth, members of the Postmaster General Advisory Panel on Stamp Design, and Reynolds Stone

Cards were also sent to Ministers of countries represented at the 1863 conference, except for the Hanseatic League and the Sandwich Islands who were no longer independent postal administrations.

On 2 May 1963, Supplies Department supplied two sheets, totalling 240 stamps, used for the gift cards and postage: only 119 stamps were used and 121 were returned.

On 18 May a request was made by the French Administration for the British stamps to be supplied in blocks of four, 120 blocks total, to be exchanged for an equal number of blocks of the French stamps. The blocks of stamps from countries that had taken part in the

meeting were to be put into albums to be given as gifts to various postal administrations. The Post Office sent the requested blocks.

PREMATURE RELEASE

There were a number of reported incidents of premature release on 6 May of the stamps. The offices and quantities involved were officially reported as follows:

Ferryhill TSO, Aberdeen – 14;
HPO Oakham, Rutland – 12;
Westfield TSO, Radstock – 1;
Kingsgate Street TSO, Winchester – 1;
Sloane Square B0, London SW1 – 4.

Of the total 55 stamps sold prematurely, 32 were recovered. When the stamps were found on 6 May at various sorting offices the date impression was usually obliterated.

PRESS AND BROADCAST NOTICE

The Post Office issued a Press and Broadcast Notice on 7 March 1963 announcing the stamp, to be released on 7 May. The design was described as showing the date and words '1863 Paris Postal Conference Centenary' in a variety of lettering styles, reminiscent of the mid-19th century. 'Behind the lettering are envelope shapes, further stressing the postal nature of the event, and ivy leaves.'

The '6d' was at the top centre beside the Queen's head on the right, surrounded by oak leaves, acorns, rose leaves and flowers.

The Notice included biographical details of Reynolds Stone and mentioned his earlier accepted stamp designs which included the 6d and 1s 6d CEPT stamps (1961), 3d Tercentenary stamp (1960), 3d British Commonwealth & Empire Games stamp (1958), and the 3d, 6d and 1s 3d Wales and Monmouthshire 'Regional' definitives of 1958.

PRINTING DETAILS

The stamps were printed by Harrison & Sons of High Wycombe using photogravure with a 250 line screen on multiple crown watermarked coated paper. Some stamps were produced with phosphor lines, sold in Southampton, south-east London, Liverpool and Glasgow for use with automatic letter facing machines.

The quantity printed was 20,040,000

The quantities sold were:

Ordinary - 18,536,400;

Phosphor - 1,430,800;

Total - 19,967,200.

The returns contained in British Postal Museum & Archives files do not account for the discrepancy of 72,800 stamps, which were probably returned unsold from various counters after the stamps were officially withdrawn on 1 June 1964.

Derrick Page
March 1993

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

P612/67 Paris Postal Conference Centenary

P614/67 (P1895/65) Special issues 1963.