

SPECIAL STAMP ISSUE

10th International Botanical Congress

1964



The 10th International Botanical Congress was held in Edinburgh on 3 to 12 August 1964 under the patronage of the Duke of Edinburgh. King Gustav IV Adolf of Sweden, a practising botanist, was Honorary President. Congresses had been held every five years, alternating between Europe and the rest of the world: Britain previously hosted the congress in 1930. Although the Congress proper would be held in Edinburgh, a number of symposia and exhibitions were planned throughout the UK, including a public exhibition at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, showing the Garden's contribution to botany worldwide.

A SPECIAL STAMP ISSUE

The first approach to the Post Office regarding stamps for the Congress was made by Sir George Taylor, Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Congress, to H A Daniels, Director of Establishments and Organisation, on 13 March 1963. Daniels passed the request to the Director of Postal Services, Brigadier K S Holmes.

Sir George's request had been inspired by the stamps for National Nature Week announced by the Post Office on 7 March. He already intended to have a special handstamp for the Congress, so a special stamp was a logical progression.

The request was forwarded to T P Hornsey, who asked that any relevant information regarding the Congress be forwarded to him, making it clear that, although the matter would be given consideration, no final decision would be taken for some time. Sir George's reaction was that the idea was 'a starter'. He provided a copy of the Congress's first circular with the planned itinerary and various excursions, as well as those associated with the Congress. He also offered his assistance in the preparation of designs and emblems.

The Post Office had recently received a similar request from the organisers of the 20th International Geographical Congress, to be held in July 1964, just a month before the Botanical Congress. It is likely these were considered together, as it would have been difficult to issue stamps for one and not the other. Britain had not previously issued stamps for academic congresses of this nature, although other countries had done so. It is clear the Post Office took a favourable view to a potential issue for the Botanical congress: a note to K Hind from Hornsey of 22 March indicated the congress would be included in the proposed programme for 1964. This was notified to Sir George on 1 April.

It seems there was little further action taken until September 1963, when the proposed programme for special stamps in 1964 was presented to the Assistant Postmaster General, the 10th International Botanical Congress being one of four subjects put forward. The Post Office was aware of the design potential of these stamps: it was proposed that, following the success of the National Nature Week stamps, a floral design would be widely appreciated by the public, and 'this Congress and its associated events will be of particular interest to the British public who have always shown a great interest in gardens and flowers' (Minute to APG, September 1964). The proposal was four stamps, 3d, 6d, 9d and 1s 3d, although no decision was taken regarding day of issue. The APG signed his approval on 27 September 1963.

Sir George Taylor's secretary wrote to Hornsey on 17 October inquiring whether a decision had been taken as Sir George wished to update the Congress committee: F J Langfield of the Postal Services Department was able to give a positive reply, adding that, as 3 August 1964, the day the Congress opened, was a bank holiday, the Post Office was considering issuing the stamps on 4 or 5 August. Sir George replied on 18 November acknowledging the decision, and inquiring whether Saturday, 1 August might be a possible issue date, as the Congress would already be in session on the dates proposed. He, however, recognised that if the Post Office considered distributing first day covers to botanists attending the Congress important, then either 4 or 5 August would be suitable. The decision to issue stamps was confirmed on 19 December 1963, when the APG, Ray Mawby MP, announced in Parliament that a set of four stamps would be issued on 5 August 1964 to mark the 10th International Botanical Congress.

COMMISSIONING STAMP DESIGNS

Consultations on potential designs for the stamps began in late November 1963, when Langfield telephoned Sir George Taylor at Kew Gardens. Langfield suggested that each stamp represent one of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but Sir George felt this rather difficult. Instead it was proposed that the flora portrayed be representative of the UK as a whole, although, as the Congress was to be in Scotland, perhaps this region

could be emphasised. Sir George further stressed that he was eager to include plants other than flowers, and suggested that various toadstools, moss, seaweed, and even fossilised plants be included. The services of the Royal Botanic Gardens were offered in an advisory capacity, where artists were welcome to view both living and dead specimens if required.

Normally a number of artists, often six, both tried and untried, were invited to produce designs for new stamps. For the botanical series, however, it was decided to experiment with just two well-known designers, David Gentleman, who had submitted successful designs for the Shakespeare Festival issue, as well as designs for two stamp issues in 1963, and Michael Goaman, an artist with a number of stamps to his credit.

The initiative for this experiment lay with the Stamp Advisory Committee, which wanted an opportunity to discuss designs with the artists, and to make its final decision from essays, rather than large-scale drawings. This would only be feasible if the number of artists and designs was kept within reasonable limits. The Botanical Congress issue was felt to be right for such a trial because the subject matter readily lent itself to suitable designs.

Formal invitations and 'Instructions to Artists' were issued to Gentleman and Goaman on 18 February 1964, although they were already aware of the commission. The instructions explained the experimental selection procedure, which would have two distinct phases. First, the SAC would hold a meeting with the artists in order to discuss as wide a range of designs as possible. For this stage, the artists were to produce rough sketches to illustrate their ideas. No final choices would be made at this juncture; rather, the committee would make suggestions to the artists about the merits of aspects of the ideas presented. Second the SAC would ask them for detailed drawings of their designs ready for submission to the printers. These would be essayed, and the committee would choose two sets of essays for submission to the Queen.

The artists were instructed that the designs should be pictorial, form a set of four, cover a botanical range, and represent the flora of the four regions of the United Kingdom. Sir George Taylor was to be the first point of contact for advice on botanical matters. There was limit of three colours per stamp, although a maximum of five would be considered if necessary. The instructions clearly stated that white would be acceptable as a background colour. The stamps would be printed, as usual, by Harrison & Son, and questions relating to printing should be addressed to them. Rough designs were to be submitted to Langfield by 24 February, in time for the SAC meeting on 26 February. Final designs were anticipated towards the end of March, the actual date to be confirmed later.

SELECTING DESIGNS

The first meeting of the SAC was held on 26 February with Sir Kenneth Clark in the chair. David Gentleman was the first to present his sketches, having produced two sets, the first showing fossils, fungi, seaweed and flowers, while the second was a floral set. The committee suggested he concentrate on the first set, recommending that a vertical rule separating the Queen's head from the rest of the design be omitted, or made less obtrusive. The Grot lettering used for the inscription was criticised by some members of the committee.

Michael Goaman had three possible designs to present, none of which had been developed into a full set at this stage. He had experimented with both single species treatments, and designs incorporating a number of different plants. The committee decided that the latter were the strongest of the ideas, and Goaman agreed to develop these into a complete set. Both Goaman's and Gentleman's designs were to be essayed in time for the next meeting of the SAC on 20 April.

In the interim, Sir George Taylor wrote to Langfield to report the concern of those involved in organising the Congress that the stamps should be correct in botanical detail, as it was felt that any inaccuracy would antagonise botanists. The Congress committee also seemed concerned that philatelists and others might 'exploit a stamp issue of this kind' (Taylor to Langfield, 3 February 1964). The committee made it clear it did not want to be 'associated with any exercise which would involve us in cashing in on the special issue' (by this they apparently meant the issuing of first day covers).

By the end of March, both artists had submitted their designs for essaying. David Gentleman had been ill, and had only been able to produce trial designs of each of his ideas, rather than develop the sets completely. In spite of its efforts to reduce the number of designs to be scrutinised at the final stage, the SAC found itself confronted by 22 separate designs, some of which had alternatives. Goaman and Gentleman had both worked through all of the preliminary ideas presented to the committee, with the result that it had just as many, perhaps even more, essays to look at than usual.

Each submitted design was given a number by the Post Office before it was sent for essaying by Harrison & Sons; however, there is no complete list of the numbers in the files, so the following list has been reconstructed as best as possible from archival material and the essays held in the British Postal Museum & Archive collection.

Goaman

1 - 9d Honeysuckle

2 - 1s 3d Mallow (Water Lily)

3 - 3d Toadstools and Fungi

- 4 - 6d Wild Roses
- 5 - 6d Moss Plants
- 6 - 3d Sedum Plants
- 7 - 3d Fossil Trees
- 8 - 3d Coniferous Trees

Gentleman

- 9 - 3d Bluebells - with rule
- 10 - 6d Varieties of Seaweed - without rule
- 11 - 1s 3d Varieties of Fern - with rule
- 12 - 1s 3d Varieties of Fern - without rule
- 13 - 6d Varieties of Seaweed - with rule
- 14 - 3d Bluebells - without rule
- 15 - 9d Toadstools and Fungi - with rule
- 16 - 9d Toadstalls and Fungi - without rule
- 17 - 1s 3d Ferns (two versions) - without rule
- 18 - 6d Seaweed - without rule

Goaman

- 30 - 3d Gentian Flowers
- 31 - 3d Primula, Gerdian, Heather
- 32 - 9d Fossils
- 33 - 1s 3d Toadstools and Fungi

Michael Goaman's designs had been drawn by his wife Sylvia, a graphic designer with experience of plant forms. Their designs can be divided into two sets: set 1 comprising nos 1 - 4, 8, 30, and set 2 comprising 5 - 7, 31 - 33. Set 1 was a single species treatment of living flora with the lettering along the base, and the denomination and Queen's head in the top left and right respectively. Set 2 was a combination of fossils and living plants which had lettering on either end of the stamp, with the Queen's head and denomination diagonally opposed. Although the SAC had suggested that he should develop grouped designs for essaying, most of Goaman's final designs depicted a single species.

David Gentleman had also received assistance for the floral drawings, in his case from Rosalind Dease. Unfortunately, due to his illness, he had been unable to complete his work as comprehensively as he had wished, having to settle for designs that represented the options he had chosen. Despite the criticism of the vertical rule, Gentleman had retained it, while also providing a version without the rule for most designs.

All of the designs were shown to the SAC on 20 April in essay form. A number of the designs were essayed in different colours, or with alterations to lettering and borders. It appears

that three essays of each design were produced by Harrison and Sons, forwarded to Langfield on 15 April.

Essays shown to the Stamp Advisory Committee on 20 April 1964 were of all the designs, and included the following colour variations:

Design 3 with blue or brown background;

Design 5 with green background;

Design 6 with light blue background;

Design 7 with brown or grey background;

Design 8 with light green or dark green fern;

Design 9 with bold blue border;

Design 10 with red border;

Design 11 with brown border;

Design 12 with brown border;

Design 13 with red border;

Design 14 with light blue border;

Design 15 with purple stem on mushroom and light brown border;

Design 16 with extra foliage, grey stem and dark brown border, with purple stem and dark brown border, and with white stem and dark brown border;

Design 17 with green border, with brown lettering, and with green border and tint on Queen's head;

Design 18 with red border, with red border green lettering and tint on Queen's head;

Design 31 with purple background;

Design 32 with red background, with dark blue background, and with light blue background;

Design 33 with brown background.

At its meeting the SAC scrutinised these essays and suggested that designs 14, 16, 17 and 18, by Gentleman be recommended as first choice to the Queen. These were grouped versions of seaweeds, ferns, harebells and fungi that omitted the vertical rule. Gentleman was asked, however, to produce versions of the harebells and fungi that matched the other two designs, the principle requirement being the addition of background foliage. Should Gentleman not be able to complete the work in time, slightly different versions of the same design, with the vertical rule, would be presented to the Queen. As its second choice, the committee recommended a set by Goaman (1, 2, 4 and 30), the single species set disliked by the committee at its earlier meeting.

David Gentleman produced the required designs, but when the essays were shown to Sir George Taylor for confirmation of botanical accuracy, it was found that the 1s 3d design was seriously flawed. The depiction of the Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) was inaccurate and required redrawing. This was completed by 12 May when the redrawn artwork was sent to Harrison & Sons, who produced three mounted essays of this new design on 12 May.

SUBMISSION TO THE PALACE

The final essays were submitted by the PMG on 14 May 1964 to the Palace for approval. The PMG, in accordance with the views of the SAC, recommended David Gentleman's designs as first choice because, 'its more botanic style make it more appropriate for the Congress', although qualified his support by stating that either would be suitable. Sir George Taylor, who had checked all of the essays for botanical accuracy, also preferred the Gentleman set. A note of the species depicted in each design was enclosed.

DAVID GENTLEMAN AND ROSALIND DEASE

3d – Flowers:

Small Alpine Gentian (*Gentiana nivalis*)
Harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*)
Blue Rock Speedwell (*Veronica saxatilis*)

6d – Seaweeds:

(*Antithamnion plumula*)
(*Ectocarpus fenestratus*)
(*Nitophyllum punctatum*)
(*Dictyota dichomata*)
(*Corallina officinalis*)

9d – Fungi:

Chanterelle (*Cantharellus cibarius*)
Wood Blewit (*Tricholoma nudum*)
Shaggy Ink Cap (*Coprinus comatus*)
Morel (*Morchella esculenta*)

1s 3d – Ferns:

Hard Fern (*Blechnum spicant*)
Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum capillus veneris*)
Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilata*)
Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*)
Maidenhair Spleenwort (*Asplenium trichomanes*)

MICHAEL AND SYLVIA GOAMAN

3d – Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*)
6d – Dog Rose (*Rosa canina*)
9d – Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*)

1s 3d – Fringed Water Lily (*Limanthemum nymphaeoides*)

Despite the recommendations for the Gentleman set, the Queen replied on 15 May that the Goaman set be issued instead. She considered the latter designs to be ‘brighter and more enterprising ... and ... likely to be of more popular appeal’. In addition, there was concern expressed that the white background of Gentleman’s set would cause the stamps to disappear on an envelope of the same colour. As the PMG had stated his opinion that either design would be suitable, the Queen may not have been aware that both the SAC and the Congress organisers preferred the work of Gentleman. Nevertheless, the Queen’s choice was final, and Michael and Sylvia Goaman’s designs were accepted.

Goaman was informed of the Queen’s decision and asked to carry out some small changes to the seed pods and buds of the plants depicted, which had been found to be inaccurate. These were completed on 27 May, and the final designs submitted to Harrison & Sons for printing.

The experiment that had been tried with the selection process cannot be said to have been an unmitigated success. Indeed, David Gentleman wrote to T P Hornsey of Postal Services on 19 May to express his dissatisfaction with the way in which selection had been made. He was of the opinion that the recommendation put forward to the Queen by the SAC had been based on inadequate information and may not have represented the views of the whole committee. The SAC had only seen two of the four designs by Gentleman that were eventually put forward, and the meeting, at which the recommendation had been made, had not been attended by the Chairman, Sir Kenneth Clark. Gentleman’s main concern was not so much that his designs had not been selected, rather he felt that the process of selection had, in this case, been disorganised and ill-conceived.

Black and white photographs of the selected stamps, together with details of the designers and the Congress, were released to the press on 3 June 1964, receiving a generally favourable response in both philatelic and public circles.

FIRST DAY COVER AND PRESENTATION PACK

As the successful designer, Michael Goaman was invited to submit designs for a first day cover (FDC) and presentation pack. The ‘Instructions to Artists’ required completed artwork to be returned to the Post Office, ready for the printer, by 8 June. The FDC design was to complement, but not repeat, the design of the stamps, which would be affixed to the right half of the envelope. The presentation pack should contain technical information about the stamps, and notes about the designers and the designs. It was to bear the Royal Arms embossed in red, and would be printed in one colour.

The design for the FDC showed an auricula (*Primula scotia*) and sprays of heather in purple and green. It was sent to the Royal Botanical Gardens where R D Meikle of the Herborium confirmed the botanical accuracy of 'a formal, stylised representation of *Primula Scotia* and a Heath' (Meikle to Beaumont, 16 June 1964). He was concerned that the positioning of the lettering around the plants made it appear as though the stamps commemorated the 'Botanical GPO First Day Cover Congress': however, no alterations were made.

The presentation pack design was submitted by Goaman on 10 June to Beaumont, with the thistle emblem of the Congress suggested as an outline drawing. A copy of the die of the emblem was received from Dr H R Fletcher of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh, and arrangements for printing both the presentation pack and cover were made with Harrison & Sons at the end of June. An announcement to the press regarding the availability and distribution of FDC envelopes, both serviced and unserved, was made on 29 July.

ISSUE OF STAMPS

Press coverage prior to the release had been very favourable, expected with such a colourful set of designs. The Philatelic Bureau had issued crown folio size posters of the first day cover to all post offices with a philatelic posting box, for the first time. It was hoped the additional promotion would lead to increased sales of FDCs and presentation packs, as the figures for the Geographical Congress issue had been disappointing. Reports from Head Postmasters indicated that the posters had improved sales, and the Post Office was able to announce that 51,005 FDC envelopes had been sold, almost 20,000 more than for the Geographical Congress stamps. In addition, 15,895 presentation packs were sold.

The Postmaster General made gifts of first day covers, presentation packs and mint stamps to The Queen, Princess Margaret, Sir Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons, previous Postmasters General and Assistant PMGs still in Parliament, Postmasters General, or equivalent, of Commonwealth countries, members of the Stamp Advisory Committee, and Michael and Sylvia Goaman. The following connected with the Congress also received gifts: Prince Philip, Patron of the Congress, King Gustav VI Adolf of Sweden, Honorary President, Professor H Godwin, President. Also the members of the Congress Committee, Duncan Weatherstone, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, Chairman, Sir Edward Appleton, Vice-chairman, Dr H R Fletcher, Honorary Secretary, A L Imrie, City Chamberlain of Edinburgh and Honorary Treasurer, plus members of the Executive Committee: Sir George Taylor, Dr J A Brook and Professor G E Fogg.

There were reported incidents of premature release of the stamps by sub post offices in various parts of the country:

Bedlington (Market Place, Bedlington) - 3d (unknown quantity)
Stroud (North Woodchester, Stroud) - 3d (30), 6d (10), 9d (10), 1s 3d (10)
Cardiff (Rumney) - 3d (192), 6d (25), 9d (12), 1s 3d (17)
Manchester - 3d (2), 6d (2), 9d (17), 1s 3d (2).

More serious than these relatively small lapses was an incident reported in 'The Daily Telegraph' (5 August 1964), that the Philatelic Bureau had inadvertently dispatched an order of stamps to a dealer in Sussex on 31 July. These stamps were then obtained by the Camberley Stamp Centre, Surrey, to have early cancellations applied. An advertisement in 'The Stamp Magazine' (September 1964) offered a total of 238 covers with early cancellations from post offices in Brighton, Liverpool and London.

The Botanical series was withdrawn on 2 July 1965, almost one year after the date of issue, having sold in the following amounts:

Ordinary

3d - 166,491,720

6d - 23,361,120

9d - 11,896,060

1s 3d - 15,664,600

Phosphor

3d - 6,764,880

6d - 996,720

9d - 498,460

1s 3d - 650,920.

The Botanical Congress set had been used to experiment with a more consultative selection process, which had left many of those involved displeased. The stamps were well received, due to their colourful design, but perhaps failed to reflect the wishes of the sponsors.

Alan Griffiths
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REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive:
File No. P109/71

Watson, James. 'British Special Stamps: 30. International Botanical Congress, 1964.' 'Philatelic Bulletin' Vol. 14, No. 7 (March, 1977) p. 12.