

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

INTERNATIONAL GEOGRAPHICAL CONGRESS

1964



The 20th International Geographical Congress (IGC) was held in London during July and August 1964, sponsored by the Royal Society, under the patronage of The Queen. Initiated by the International Geographical Union based in Zürich, the first Congress was held in Antwerp in 1871. Subsequent Congresses followed at four-year intervals at various locations worldwide.

The 20th Congress was the second held in the United Kingdom, the first in 1928, and was expected to be of major international and scientific importance. Over 3,000 geographers attended the extensive programme of exhibitions and field studies which climaxed in a week of seminars held in London from 21 to 28 July. The official opening, attended by The Queen, was held at the Royal Albert Hall on 21 July. The Congress chairman was by Professor L Dudley Stamp, CBE, a former President of the International Geographical Union and then President of the Royal Geographical Society.

A STAMP ISSUE?

In February 1963 the Postmaster General (PMG) received a letter from Sir Howard Florey, President of the Royal Society, requesting a commemorative stamp issue to mark the occasion. Professor Florey concluded 'I greatly hope that in view of the special relationship that exists between postal/telecommunications and geography, as well as of the importance of the gathering itself, you will find it possible similarly to mark the Congress to which I have referred' (letter to PMG, 7 February 1963).

The PMG replied that the special stamps for 1964 had not been finalised, and consideration would be given to the Royal Society's request. Policy required that special stamps were only issued to mark 'outstanding current national or international events and Royal and postal anniversaries'. Two previous Congresses, Egypt 1924 and Brazil 1956, had been marked by stamps.

In due course, a memorandum to the Assistant Postmaster General in September 1963 and circulated to the members of the General Directorate included the 20th IGC among the proposed special stamp issues for 1964: 'It seems clear from what they [the IGC organisers] have told us that taken in conjunction with the supporting exhibitions at Museums and Universities, and the associated symposia and Field Study meetings which are being organised, the Congress will attract a lot of publicity and constitute an event whose importance can be held to justify a special stamp issue. From the pictorial point of view the subject should be very suitable for such an issue and we think it would be appropriate to have one.'

The decision to issue stamps was taken by the Assistant Postmaster General, Ray Mawby MP, on 27 September 1963: four stamps in July 1964, namely 2½d, 4d, 8d and 1s 6d. This was conveyed to Professor Elkins on 24 October by F J Langfield of the Postal Services Department (PSD).

DESIGNING THE STAMPS

At this time it was the intention of the Post Office that the stamps depict views from each of the home countries. However, Professor Elkins sent Langfield a copy of a confidential memorandum which he had circulated requesting design ideas. It is unclear whether the Post Office solicited the opinions of the Congress organisers, or whether they were offered of their own accord. However, the ideas put forward by the IGC organisers formed the basis of the designs commissioned.

The themes put forward in early December 1963 by the IGC organisers were: Maps of the United Kingdom; Changing Britain; Views; Abstract - map of the UK and the Congress symbol; Eminent geographers, eg, Geraldus Cambrensis. The idea of scenic views was actively discouraged, while the first two of the themes were favoured.

The following is quoted from Elkins' letter of 1 December to Langfield:
Alternative Schemes for four postage stamps to mark 20th International Congress 1964.

1. Maps of the United Kingdom. Four maps of the United Kingdom, showing in simplified form:

- (i) relief and drainage;
- (ii) population distribution;
- (iii) an aspect of land use (arable land (?), moorland, forest and rough grazing (?));
- (iv) simplified major roads, present & proposed motorways,

plus head of HM Queen, Congress symbol (or perhaps better 'International Geographical Congress 1964')

2. Changing Britain.

- (i) Forth Road Bridge, with rail bridge in the background
- (ii) an industrial scene:
atomic power station
Spencer steel works, South Wales
Northern Ireland shipyard with modern rear-engined ship.
- (iii) a New Town centre, Stevenage, Coventry or Cumbernauld
- (iv) a national park or nature reserve:
Gordale Scar (Yorkshire Dales Park)
Snowdon from Llyn Llydaw
Dale Fort Field Centre (Field Studies Council)
alternatively agriculture (fodder cutter working?)

It was argued that the theme 'Changing Britain' 'would be very much in accord with the current emphasis of HM Government on renewal and change'.

PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT

It was decided that the IGC stamps be issued on 1 July to avoid any potential clash with the special stamp issue for the International Botanical Congress scheduled for 5 August 1964. On 19 December the Assistant Postmaster General announced in Parliament the special stamps. The subsequent press release made no mention of possible designs, stating only the intended denominations and containing a brief background regarding the Congress.

A request came from the Secretary of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society, D G Moir, for 6d and 1s 3d denominations, the current postage rates for ordinary and airmail to Europe and America from where most of the delegates would be coming. This was not considered practical. First, it was not desirable to have more than two stamps of the same value available at any one time in order to minimise problems at post office counters. Both the Shakespeare Festival and the International Botanical Congress sets planned for 1964 contained these denominations. Second, the overall value of a special issue was kept at a reasonable amount in order to encourage sales to collectors.

COMMISSIONING DESIGNS

On 31 December 1963, Langfield wrote to Mrs C G Tomrley of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) requesting the names of six artists to whom invitations to submit drawings for the stamps should be sent, to include three previously successful artists and three who had not had designs accepted.

The Post Office had by this time decided to adopt the 'Changing Britain' theme. A handwritten note on a subsequent Post Office memorandum clarifies the point: 'Object of Design: To set new industrial and urban development against the general background of the British landscape.'

The invitations and accompanying 'Instructions to Artists' were sent by Langfield on 3 January 1964 to Lynton Lamb, Faith Jaques, Justin Todd, Peter Robeson, William Kempster, S R Badmin, and, through the Post Office Supplies Department, to the printing firms of Harrison & Sons and Bradbury Wilkinson & Co. As Lynton Lamb was unable to take up the commission due to other commitments, an invitation was sent to A S B New on 15 January.

The 'Instructions' stipulated a set of four pictorial designs was required. The stamps were to measure 1.51 inches by 0.86 inches, horizontal or vertical. Artists were free to use up to three colours for the 2½d and up to four for the other denominations: under special circumstances up to five colours would be considered. Black was not to be used as a background, while for the 2½d violet was not to be used as background.

Artists were also given some suggested designs identical to those forwarded to the Post Office by Prof. Elkins and were issued with photographs of possible scenes. These were, however, purely intended as guidelines and they were encouraged to include ideas of their own which corresponded to the general theme. Finally, each set of designs was to represent the four home nations, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland.

Professor Elkins arranged to be available for consultation with the artists on 10 January at the Royal Geographical Society in London, while questions of a more technical nature were to be directed to Harrison & Sons. The stamps were to be printed using multicolour photogravure. Completed artwork was to be submitted to Langfield by 17 February.

The 'Instructions' incorrectly gave the Congress's title as '20th International Congress of Geography': this was subsequently amended in a letter 'of 15 January to '20th International Geographical Congress'. In the original letter sent by Prof. Florey requesting a stamp, he referred to the Congress by the erroneous title.

A further amendment had to be issued when the Spencer Steel Works, Wales was withdrawn as a possible subject. A letter from Langfield to E Williams, Supplies Department, dated 30 January stated, 'We have now been advised that in view of the present state of affairs in the steel industry this particular item should be withdrawn.' This related to the debate over the state ownership of the steel industry. The replacement subject was the Trawsfynydd Atomic Power Station.

SUBMITTED DESIGNS

All of the designs had been submitted by 17 February and consultation began with the Congress organisers and the Stamp Advisory Committee. A stamp-sized photograph, or bromide, was produced for each design.

Faith Jaques:

- Trawsfynydd (2½d)
- Forth Bridge (4d)
- Harvester (8d)
- Belfast Freighter (aeroplane) (1s 6d)

Bradbury, Wilkinson:

- Stonehenge (2½d)
- Loch Lomond (4d)
- Snowdon (8d)
- Giants Causeway (1s 6d)
- Forth Bridge (2½d)
- Atomic Power Station (4d)
- Shipyard (8d)
- Atomic Power Station (1s 6d)
- Atomic Power Station (8d)

Justin Todd:

- Agriculture (2½d)
- Goonhilly (4d)
- Aeroplane (8d)
- Atomic Power Station (1s 6d)
- New Town (2½d)
- Agriculture (4d)

William Kempster:

no descriptions given for the given for the four design submitted (2½d, 4d, 8d, 1s 6d)

S R Badmin:

- Snowdonia (2½d)
- Shipbuilding (4d)
- Gordale Scar (8d)
- Forth Bridges (1s 6d)
- Gordale Scar (8d)

A S B New:

- New town (2½d)
- New town (2½d)
- Forth Bridges (4d)
- Forth Bridges (4d)
- Trawsfynydd (8d)
- Lough Navar (1s 6d)

Peter Robeson:

- Atomic Reactor (2½d)
- Dartmoor (4d)
- Giorra Dam (8d)
- Basildon (1s 6d)
- Shipyard (8d)
- Snowdon (1s 6d)

Harrison & Sons:

- New town development (2½d)
- Shipbuilding (4d)
- Forestry, North Wales (8d)
- Nuclear Power (1s 6d)
- Atomic Reactor (2½d)
- Snowdon (4d)
- Coventry (8d)
- Shipbuilding (1s 6d)
- Motorway (2½d)
- Shipbuilding (4d)
- Dounreay Reactor (8d)
- Trawsfynydd (1s 6d)
- Coventry (2½d)
- Shipyard (4d)
- Forth Road Bridge (8d)
- Pembroke Refinery (1s 6d)

A total of 56 designs was received, copies of which were shown to Prof. Elkins and Prof. M J Wise, MC, the latter of the London School of Economics and a member of the IGC Executive Committee, at a meeting with Langfield on 19 February. The designs submitted by Harrison & Sons had not been ready, so on 21 February Langfield forwarded them to Prof. Wise who responded the following day that he felt that on the whole these designs were generally inferior to those selected at the previous meeting.

A meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) was scheduled for 26 February with the intention of forwarding the selected designs to Harrison & Sons for essaying on 27 February.

An undated brief prepared by the Post Office for the SAC outlined the opinions of the sponsors, in this case Prof. Elkins and Wise, and the printers on each set of designs. The sponsors favoured those by S R Badmin and Peter Robeson. In addition, the brief contained a note to the effect that the Air Ministry preferred that aeroplanes should not feature on the stamps due to the 'delicate political situation in Northern Ireland'.

The SAC met on 26 February at the Council of Industrial Design with Sir Kenneth Clark in the chair. Also present were Messrs Hornsey and Langfield of the Post Office and Mr York of Harrison & Sons. There was no representative of the IGC, although the committee was aware of the opinions of Prof. Elkins and Wise.

The SAC recommended that three sets of designs be essayed once certain amendments had been made. Those by William Kempster were considered the strongest, but did not include any agricultural designs. It was recommended that the 2½d and 1s 6d designs be redrawn to remedy this imbalance. Four of Peter Robeson's six designs (not Giorra Dam and Basildon) were considered acceptable as they were, although 'Shipyard' required redrawing and the border redesigning for printing purposes. The third set chosen were the first four submitted by Harrison & Sons, which required attention to the value figures but were otherwise acceptable: it was decided that the artist would be asked to consult Professor Guyatt of the SAC as regards improvements.

A letter was sent to William Kempster on 27 February notifying him of the decision of the SAC, asking him to provide his re-drawn designs by 16 March. He replied that he would be unable to provide new designs before April, and consequently, his submission was withdrawn from consideration. In the meantime, Romek Marber, who had been commissioned by Harrison & Sons, informed Prof. Guyatt that he had passed on the commission to Dennis Bailey, now resident in Paris. Mr Marber agreed to see Mr Bailey with regard to the changes required to the designs.

Peter Robeson's designs were sent to the Supplies Department at Hemel Hempstead on 2 March, then forwarded to Harrison & Sons for essaying. Dennis Bailey's designs were dispatched direct to Harrison & Sons on 16 March by Langfield, after having received them from the artist via Harrison & Sons on 11 March. The essays were to be delivered by 31 March at the very latest and preferably by 26 March, being required for the SAC meeting on 2 April: they were supplied by Harrison & Sons on 31 March.

Ironically, after having said that he would be unable to resubmit designs in time, Kempster sent new designs for the 2½d and 1s 6d stamps to Langfield on 15 March. Although they arrived at the Post Office on 16 March, the original deadline given to him, the other designs had already been submitted for essaying and Kempster's designs were set aside. When he resubmitted his designs, Kempster did not return the originals.

The second meeting of the SAC took place at the Council of Industrial Design on 2 April. The committee was informed that Kempster had been able to re-submit his designs: these were well received by the committee who wished to know whether it would be possible to have them essayed in time for submission to the Palace. Should this be possible, Kempster's designs would be the first choice recommendation. However, Harrison & Sons was unable to oblige due to the International Botanical Congress stamps being produced at the same time.

The SAC consequently decided that both Robeson's and Bailey's designs be submitted for royal approval, with Bailey's recommended as first choice. However, neither design was considered particularly good and it was felt by some that the best was being made of a rather mediocre job. This was certainly the sentiment expressed by Sir Kenneth Clark, Chairman of the SAC, in a letter to the PMG of 3 July 1964: 'I'm afraid it is not one of our most successful designs, in fact, we all felt very uneasy about it. It was particularly disappointing as much better designs by Mr Kempster were sent in a few days too late.'

ROYAL APPROVAL

The feeling of dissatisfaction continued through the minutes circulating in preparation for the submission to the Queen. Two minutes, both dated 16 April, from the Director General to the Assistant Postmaster General and to the PMG, express reservations over the designs. On one, the approval signature of Ray Mawey, MP, is followed by a comment wishing that more designs could be found, while the Director General in his letter to the PMG again expresses the view that they are rather second rate.

Nonetheless, on 21 April the PMG, Reginald Bevins, MP sent essays of both designs to the Queen's Private Secretary, Sir Michael Adeane, with the recommendation that the designs

by Bailey be approved. There was no mention of the reservation felt by the SAC and the Post Office over these designs, merely a description of each stamp.

Bailey's designs:

- 2½d (England) - new housing developments at Roehampton with Richmond Park in the foreground.
- 4d (Northern Ireland) - Shipbuilding in Belfast.
- 8d (Wales) - Forestry - Beddgelert, Caernarvon, North Wales.
- 1s 6d (Scotland) - Nuclear power plant - Dounreay.

Robeson's designs:

- 2½d (Scotland) - Nuclear power plant - Dounreay.
- 4d (England) - Widcombe Church, Dartmoor National Park.
- 8d (Northern Ireland) - Shipbuilding, Belfast.
- 1s 6d (Wales) - Snowdonia National Park.

Bailey's designs received royal approval on 22 April 1964. A final set of essays was produced showing improved lettering and slight alterations in colour.

PRODUCTION OF STAMPS AND FIRST DAY COVER

Formal instructions were issued to Harrison & Sons on 27 April with a request for negatives as soon as possible in order to issue press photographs.

The artists who had submitted unsuccessful designs were notified and issued with payment of 240 guineas (£252) on 4 May. Although Kempster had produced new designs, he received the same amount, as did Robeson.

The completed artwork was forwarded to Harrison & Sons on 4 May along with instructions for the preparation of a first day cover and presentation pack. It was agreed that as the firm had commissioned the stamp designs, it should be given the opportunity to design the rest of the accompanying material and provide quotes for the presentation packs. This was to be completed by 10 May for submission to the IGC organisers for approval.

The 'instructions for the preparation of a first day cover design and design of a presentation pack' sent to Harrison and Sons stipulated that 'the design on the envelope should be consistent with the style of the stamps ... [and] should feature the same theme'. The presentation pack would consist of a wallet, an information card, and a transparent sleeve. The first and last of these were standard items, but the information card required designing. It was to bear the Royal Arms in red and printed in one other colour. Draft

designs were required by 11 May, with final artwork ready for the printer by 18 May. The envelope and information card would both be printed by lithography.

In the event, the information card carried the Royal Arms in blue, the logo of the IGC, and photographs of the M1 at the A50 interchange; the Top Dam Reservoir, Eden Valley, Craig-Goch; and the Jodrell Bank Radio Telescope. The cover was designed by H Baxter, a staff artist at Harrison and Sons, and featured the same motorway scene as the information card, as a colour drawing. This scene had first appeared as one of the original designs for the stamps submitted by Harrison and Sons, although it is unknown whether the same artist produced both.

The printing of the stamps, envelopes and presentation packs was a rather hectic affair. The cover design by Harrison & Sons was approved in mid-May, and an initial order for 50,000 envelopes was placed with the company. By late June 150,000 envelopes had been ordered of which 100,000 had been delivered and distributed as follows: 60,000 to Hemel Hempstead, Supplies Department for distribution to Head Postmasters; 40,000 to the Philatelic Bureau; and 50,000 to the Supplies Department for stamping.

50,000 presentation packs were ordered from Harrison & Sons through the Supplies Department by mid-June with anticipated delivery by 16 June. This was a somewhat optimistic timetable, however, and it was eventually agreed that the printers would deliver the first 10,000 on 23 June with the remainder to follow by 29 June. The packs were dispatched to the Post Office Supply Department in Edinburgh where the stamps were inserted.

A press release issued on 3 June announced the stamps to be issued on 1 July and gave design details.

Each stamp was printed in four colours by photogravure, apart from the 4d with five colours.

2½d - yellow, grey, black, green;

4d - pink, black, brown, mauve, dark brown;

8d - light green, dark green, brown, black;

1s 6d - pink, yellow, brown, black.

All were printed on coated paper with multiple crown watermark in sheets of 120 (6 x 20). The print order was telephoned to Harrison & Sons on 9 June:

Ordinary (non phosphor)

2½d - 891,000 sheets - 107 million stamps

4d - 170,000 sheets - 20.5 million stamps

8d - 82,000 sheets - 10 million stamps
1s 6d - 92,500 sheets - 11 million stamps

Phosphor

2½d - 56,000 sheets - 6.75 million stamps
4d - 7,000 sheets - 840,000 stamps
8d - 5,500 sheets - 660,000 stamps
1s 6d - 8,000 sheets - 1 million stamps.

FIRST DAY COVERS: A NEW POLICY

Having issued specially designed envelopes and presentation packs for the first time with the Shakespeare Festival issue of 24 April 1964, a memorandum was issued by the Director General on 2 June outlining to the PMG a set of proposals for future issues. The Shakespeare presentation pack had proved very popular and considerable delays had been experienced in meeting the demand. This needed to be avoided, starting with the Geographical issue.

Previously, the printed envelopes had only been available from the Philatelic Bureau and then only as part of a fully serviced first day cover (FDC) 'package'. Those philatelists wishing to stamp and post the covers themselves were unable to do so. It was decided that the envelopes for the IGC stamps would be available unstamped, in advance, from both the Bureau and the forty Crown Offices that had philatelic posting boxes. In pricing the envelopes, it was decided to provide discounts to bulk buyers in the hope of appealing additionally to the stamp trade.

The charge for servicing a FDC was to rise from 1s 2d (the Shakespeare FDCs cost 7s 2d, of which 6s was the face value of the stamps) to 3s. This was justified for three reasons: the Shakespeare issue had higher servicing costs than expected; future issues would have a better standard of service which required more staff; and as the special envelope was available separately, the public could service their own covers if so wished. It was expected that profits would be about £10,200 or 250 per cent net if 50,000 full service FDCs were sold, and about £4,175 or 140 per cent net if only 25,000 sold. These proposals were duly approved.

ISSUE OF THE STAMPS

The 20th International Geographical Congress stamps went on sale on 1 July 1964 and a press release issued the following day announced that about 10,000 covers had been

posted during the day, while a further 10,000 special envelopes had been sold by the Philatelic Bureau for customers to post themselves.

The Postmaster General made a gift of the official first day cover, presentation pack and mint stamps to various eminent persons including the Queen, Princess Margaret, Sir Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister, Sir H Hylton-Foster, Speaker of the House, previous Postmasters General and APGs, members of the Stamp Advisory Committee, and the designer. Gifts were also sent to Sir Howard Florey, President of the Royal Society, Prof. L Dudley Stamp, B F Macdona, and Prof. Elkins, who were Chairman, Hon Treasurer and Hon Secretary of the Geographical Congress respectively.

A special pictorial handstamp inscribed '20th International Geographical Congress, London, S.W.7 July 20th- 28th, 1964' was used exclusively at the London South-West District Office during those dates.

A number of Head Postmasters throughout the country reported that some stamps had been sold prior to the official date of issue (figures in brackets refer to those subsequently found).

Rossendale SO - Burnley Rd TSO: 2½d - 8 (4); 4d - 1 (1); 8d - 1 (1); 1s 6d 2 (2)

Radstock SO - Vobster SO: 1s 6d - 1 (1)

Sheffield SO - Ranmoor TSO: 4 stamps denominations unknown (4)

Manchester SO - Ashton under Lyne: 2½d - 1 (1)

Bridgewater SO - Devizes: 4d - 3 (1)

Hereford SO - Hereford: 2½d - 1 (1)

Knutsford SO - unknown (possibly Plumley SO): 2½d- 3 (3); 4d - 3 (3); 8d - 3 (3); 1s 6d - 3 (3)

Kilrea SO - Upperlands SO: 2½d - 39 (39 - items held over until 1 July 1964)

Upper Edmonton SO - Ashton under Lyne: 1s 6d - 1 (1)

Newton Abbot SO - Bishopsteignton SO: 2½d - 9 (Additional quantities of each denomination were sold, but the amount is unknown, and none were recovered.)

None of these pre-issues involved large numbers of stamps and most were either recovered or had the datestamps cancelled before they were delivered.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 2 July 1965, although the 2½d had sold out earlier. Final sales figures were as follows:

Ordinary

2½d - 109,768,120

4d - 15,241,680

8d - 8,226,800

1s 6d - 10,154,040

Phosphor

2½d - 3,377,520

4d - 577,800

8d - 465,720

1s 6d - 519,000

Presentation Packs - 29,952

Blank FDC envelopes - 31,505.

It is interesting to note, as a postscript, that although the design of the IGC stamps was considered below par by those involved in their production, the 'Philatelic Bulletin' (Vol. 14, No. 7: March 1977: pp. 11-12) remarks: 'Happily the designs were modern and attractive, probably ten years ahead of their times.'

A D Griffiths
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