

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

Shakespeare Festival

Date of issue: 23 APRIL 1964



The 400th anniversary the birth of William Shakespeare in 1664 was marked by a Shakespeare Festival centred on Stratford-upon-Avon under the auspices of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The Director of the Trust, Levi Fox, responsible for the overall planning of the anniversary, approached the Postmaster General (PMG), Reginald Bevins MP, on 14 September 1961, requesting stamps to commemorate Shakespeare.

The GPO was reviewing the criteria for special stamps as it was considered, both within and without the Post Office, that it was too cautious in its selection of subjects. The new criteria still stated that stamps would be to mark Royal or postal anniversaries only, plus current events of national or international significance. Historical anniversaries were not included because of the frequency with which these arose, while the Post Office did not wish to have to choose among worthy candidates. Despite his contention that Shakespeare was 'not just an English poet but by common consent ... the greatest dramatic genius of the English-speaking peoples' (Levi Fox to PMG, 14 September 1961), the request was turned down. The reasons given by F J Langfield, of the Postal Services Department (PSD), included the policy considerations and the restriction that no person apart from the monarch and the Royal Consort could appear on British stamps.

Despite this Fox, and other members of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, did not allow the matter to rest. In mid-December, two letters arrived at GPO Headquarters seeking reconsideration. On 11 December Fox wrote to Sir Ronald German, the Director General of the GPO, reminding Sir Ronald of the verbal request by the Mayor to the PMG and himself during their recent visit to Stratford. The Mayor, Councillor S C Rosser, was also the

President of the Post Office Engineers Union. Another letter in support came from John Profumo, MP for Stratford-upon-Avon. In mid-January, Sir Ralph Rayner, a member of the Post Office Advisory Committee and the Chairman of the Royal Society of St George, wrote to the Director General (DG) supporting the idea as Shakespeare is generally accepted as born on St George's Day, 23 April (the only available records show that Shakespeare was baptised on 26 April 1564, making it probable that he was born three days earlier on 23 April).

A memorandum of 29 January 1962, from the Director General to the PMG, put forward a case for Shakespeare stamps. Sir Ronald German felt a relaxation of the guidelines would be justifiable on this occasion as it was unlikely that the current policy would justify enough events to meet the Post Office's stated target of two sets a year. It would be possible to issue Shakespeare stamps without featuring his effigy by concentrating on such subjects as Anne Hathaway's cottage or the Stratford Memorial Theatre. A stamp for Shakespeare could be controversial as the Post Office had, for a number of years, been receiving representation for a commemorative stamp for the bicentenary of Robert Burns' birth. These requests had been repeatedly rejected so an announcement of a Shakespeare stamp would cause an outcry in some circles. Nonetheless, Sir Ronald felt that with background information about the accompanying Festival, justifying the issue would be much easier. Both the PMG and Assistant PMG agreed to the Director General's suggestion. To enable the matter to be considered fully before a final decision was made, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust was asked to provide details of the arrangements to commemorate the anniversary,

Sporadic discussions continued over the following year between the Festival organisers and the Post Office as the former began to finalise details. It was clearly communicated to Levi Fox that the Post Office's official position was that it could only commemorate events of current national interest. If the organisers could demonstrate that the Festival would constitute such an event, the Post Office would be very sympathetic to a possible stamp. The matter was raised at a meeting on 25 January 1963 of the PMG's Stamp Advisory Committee with concern that such an important subject be properly treated. The Committee wanted to commission designers if the Post Office felt an issue was likely. Regarding Shakespeare's head appearing with the Queen, the matter could be decided once designs were to hand. It would be most disappointing to have a decision delayed until it was impossible to obtain good designs. By mid-March, Frank Langfield of Postal Services had received a breakdown of the Shakespeare anniversary activities planned throughout the country co-ordinated by the Birthplace Trust. They consisted of staging Shakespeare's plays, while in Stratford itself an anniversary ball and the opening of the new Shakespeare Centre was planned for 23 and 24 April followed by an anniversary service at Holy Trinity Church on 26 April at which the Archbishop of York would officiate.

At the end of March 1963, the Director General sent a minute to the PMG recommending that the Shakespeare issue be officially approved, as the Festival was considered worthy enough to justify stamps to mark 'a national event of outstanding importance'. This was just a diplomatic way of avoiding the fact that the Post Office was to issue stamps to commemorate an anniversary, despite its own criteria. The Director General recommended four stamps, 3d, 6d, 1s 3d and 1s 6d, representing the most widely used values for inland, surface and airmail letters. He also proposed there be a high value 2s 6d, larger than usual, perhaps double the size of the equivalent value definitive. This last proposal caused a great deal of discussion relating to the overall cost of the set and the method of printing. Some Post Office officials warned that the overall value would dampen philatelic sales and would alienate the philatelic world as a result, while others argued that the appeal of Shakespeare would provide enough incentive to justify the higher price. High value stamps were traditionally line engraved with Bradbury Wilkinson holding the contract at that time. Harrison and Sons had the contract to print the low values using photogravure, by which every commemorative stamp had been produced since its introduction in 1934. The proposed use of two different printing processes, with their differing design requirements, within one set gave rise to a potential problem of co-ordination. The possibility of the high value being printed in photogravure was raised, but it was decided to approve the issue of a five-stamp set and to wait until the design process before attempting to resolve both the printing method and the problem of Shakespeare's effigy appearing with the Queen.

The intention to issue the stamps on 23 April was announced in the House of Commons on 22 April 1963 by the PMG - for the Shakespeare Festival: the proposed values were not mentioned.

COMMISSIONING AND SELECTION OF DESIGNS

The design of the stamps was discussed quite extensively at the Stamp Advisory Committee meeting on 3 May when it was agreed that the best way forward would be to treat the production of the four low value and one high value stamp as separate projects because of the difference in technical requirements; unity across the set was not considered primarily important. The inclusion of the Queen's head and the denomination were obligatory as usual, and the title 'Shakespeare Festival' was agreed for all the stamps. Although there is no record of approval having been obtained from the Palace, it was agreed that Shakespeare's head could appear on the stamps on the following conditions: 'if the artist wishes to include a representation of the head of Shakespeare, this may be done provided that it is a linear stylised head no larger than the Queen's head and provided that it is integrated with the decorative design of the stamp while the Queen's head remains, as an independent inset, one of the dominant features of the design' ('Instructions to Artists', issued 5 June 1963).

It was hoped that, as the Shakespeare Festival marked such a significant event in British cultural history, the stamps would be exceptional in their design. To ensure this was the case the Committee planned three meetings to consider designs. The first would consider all the submitted designs and select between two and four sets for essaying. At the second meeting these essays would be considered and the artists given time to make any changes required. Finally at the third meeting the Committee would select first and second choice recommendations for referral to the Queen.

The files contain a proposed timetable for the production and design of the special stamps. The values of the stamps are given as 3d, 6d, 1s 3d, 1s 6d and 2s 6d. The following artists were sent invitations to submit designs for the two competitions on 5 June -
Low value photogravure set of four: Reynolds Stone, David Gentleman, Christopher and Robin Ironside, Justin Todd, E William Fenton, Michael Goaman, and Harrison and Sons.
High value line engraved single stamp: Lynton Lamb, Enid Marx, John Brinkley and Bradbury Wilkinson.

All accepted the invitation with the exception of Justin Todd who was unable due to other commitments so an additional invitation was sent to Edward Bawden on 11 June. Bawden had originally been put forward as a potential designer by the Council of Industrial Design, but had not been included in the original list because the Post Office wished to commission designs from Michael Goaman. Bawden accepted the commission and agreed to the same submission date as that given for the others, 15 July, later extended by a fortnight to 29 July.

The following designs were received prior to the deadline date and examined by the Stamp Advisory Committee at its meeting of 31 July (all designs were allocated a number, but this is only given here for those designs which were 'short-listed').

Photogravure designs.

E Bawden (4 designs):

3d Shakespeare in oval frame

6d 'The Comedies' - A Midsummer Night's Dream: Puck and Bottom

1s 3d 'The Tragedies' - Macbeth: The witches and Macbeth

1s 6d 'The Histories' - Richard III: Richard III and his horse.

D Gentleman (6 designs):

3d Poetic Masque - A Midsummer Night's Dream: Puck and Bottom

3d Comedy - Twelfth Night: The clown, Feste

1s 3d Tragedy - Hamlet: Ophelia and Hamlet holding Yorick's skull

1s 3d Tragedy - Romeo and Juliet: Romeo speaks to Juliet on her balcony.

1s 6d History - Henry IV and V: Falstaff and Prince Hal, later Henry V
1s 6d History - Henry V: Henry kneels in his tent on the eve of Agincourt.

Harrison and Sons:

Set A

3d Shakespeare from the bust by Gerard Johnson in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon

6d 'The Dramatist' - Festival figure of Motley with masks of Tragedy and Comedy

1s 3d 'The Poet' - The Bard's Crown, the Lyre and the Quill

1s 6d 'The Swan of Avon', Swan representing Ben Jonson's poem to the memory of Shakespeare, also the device of the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Set B

All with dates: 1564 - 1964, and laurels

3d Anne Hathaway's Cottage and Avon Bridge

6d Globe and Royal Shakespeare Theatres (no. 6F)

1s 3d Shakespearean characters

1s 6d Holy Trinity Church and Johnson bust of Shakespeare (no. 6H)

E W Fenton (4 designs - each in two colour versions):

3d Shakespeare in square frame

6d Globe Theatre stage

1s 3d Anne Hathaway's cottage

1s 6d Royal Shakespeare Theatre

R Stone (5 designs):

3d Shakespeare among leaves, shield and sword.

6d Actor on stage in laurel oval

6d 'Shakespeare Festival'

1s 6d 'Shakespeare Festival' in oval

1s 9d Shakespeare's Arms.

R & C Ironside (4 designs all of which share the same form with differing pictorial panels):

3d Hamlet holding Yorick's skull

6d Othello*

1s 3d The Tempest - Ariel

1s 6d Henry IV - Falstaff

M Goaman (4 designs - all vertical):

3d Shakespeare

6d Globe Theatre stage

1s 3d Poetic masks of tragedy and comedy
1s 6d Shakespearean characters.

Line Engraved Designs (all 2s 6d value).

Lynton Lamb (2 designs):

The Globe Theatre

Shakespeare in oval and rectangular frame (no. 8B)

Enid Marx (2 designs):

Shakespeare in S shaped frame

Shakespeare in frame matching that around Queen's head

(A third bromide of this design exists, but was produced as part of Marx's design process and was not submitted to the SAC.)

J Brinkley (2 designs):

Anne Hathaway's cottage

Shakespeare box-framed by 'Shakespeare Festival' (no. 10B).

Harrison and Sons (1 design):

Shakespeare - this design is similar in style to gravure Set B

Bradbury Wilkinson (4 designs):

Shakespeare seated on plinth and Globe Theatre

Poetic masks of Comedy and Tragedy

Shakespeare seated and flower

Shakespeare standing outside Anne Hathaway's cottage.

The PMG's Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), with Sir Kenneth Clark in the chair, examined these on 31 July and selected four of David Gentleman's designs as first choice for the photogravure stamps. These were the 3d featuring a scene from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', the 3d from 'Twelfth Night' (to be changed to 6d), the 1s 3d from 'Romeo and Juliet', and the 1s 6d from 'Henry V', showing Henry kneeling in his tent on the eve of Agincourt. The Committee requested that these be essayed twice, the second set with lighter backgrounds. Gentleman had intended that the backgrounds be much deeper in tone with the wood engraved figures in bright tones to give the appearance of being lit by a stage spotlight. Robin and Christopher Ironside's designs were selected as an alternative, second choice, set. Although they had completed four different pictorial elements, the Ironsides had been unable to finish the scrollwork and bordering on all but the 3d design. However, as all four designs would be identical in this respect, apart from the value, this was not a major problem. The brothers were asked to complete all four designs and submit them to Harrison and Sons for essaying as soon as possible. None of the other photogravure

designs was considered of sufficient merit to warrant further development, although there was some discussion of having Lynton Lamb's second design for the high value stamp (no. 8B) adapted for photogravure and further designs obtained from the artist featuring different heads to complete a set. It was decided to defer this possibility until it proved necessary.

Despite having two workable sets, it was felt opportune to obtain more designs for the photogravure set, so it was suggested that George Mayhew and Shirley Thompson be invited to submit designs. T P Hornsey (of PSD), who attended the Committee meetings as a Post Office representative, mentioned that David Gentleman was understood to have a second set of designs that he had abandoned. The Committee expressed a wish to see these at its next meeting.

As regards the designs for the line engraved high value stamp, the Committee selected Lynton Lamb's design (no. 8B) and one of John Brinkley's (no. 10B) featuring Shakespeare's head. Brinkley's design required amendment to the lettering 'SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL' to ensure that 'PEARE' did not appear at the top of the stamp. In addition, he was asked to fill in the background surrounding the Queen's head. Both were to be prepared as stamp-sized drawings by Bradbury Wilkinson as trials before actual engraving.

Further invitations to submit designs were sent on 2 August to George Mayhew, Shirley Thompson, and, following a suggestion by Mrs Tomrley of the Council of Industrial Design, K George Chapman. The letters of invitation contained the following paragraph giving an insight into the SAC's thoughts regarding the new designs:

'I should explain that our Stamp Advisory Committee have already considered a number of designs for this issue and have asked me to emphasize that they do not wish artists to feel in any way inhibited by past trends in British stamp design. They are anxious to give artists complete freedom ... to produce a personal solution to the somewhat unusual problems presented by stamp designs on this topic.'

This instruction seems to reflect a belief among members of the Committee that many of the earlier submissions had been too traditional and that the issue should be innovative. It was hoped that the new designs would be ready by mid-September.

David Gentleman's four designs were sent to Harrison and Sons on 2 August with instructions they be essayed in dark and light shades. Christopher Ironside completed his artwork and submitted it to Harrison and Sons for essaying during the latter half of August. On 7 August three designs were forwarded to Bradbury Wilkinson for reproduction as stamp-sized colour drawings; however, only one of the three was one selected by the SAC, Lynton Lamb's design (no. 8B), as that by John Brinkley had been returned to the artist for amendment. The other two designs sent for reproduction were the 6d (no. 6F) and 1s 6d

(no. 6H) from Harrison and Sons Set B. On both designs the years '1564' and '1964' were to be omitted and the values changed to 2s 6d, while no. 6F was to be printed in green with the lettering 'Shakespeare Festival', value and Queen's head in purple. The trees to the right of the Queen's head, on the hill above the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, were to be reduced in size as it was felt they interfered with the head. The other design, no. 6H, was to be essayed in its original colours with no other amendments. There is no indication in either the SAC minutes or the Post Office files as to why these were selected for essaying as high value stamps so one can only assume that either the Chairman of the Committee or someone in the Post Office, possibly the PMG or his Assistant, ordered these essays. John Brinkley's reworked version of the line engraved design no. 10B was submitted to the Post Office in late August having been quite considerably changed. The original box square containing 'Shakespeare Festival' had been transformed into an oval and the dates removed, while the Queen's head was now surrounded by elaborate scrollwork with the value centred underneath it. In his accompanying letter, Brinkley made it clear that he wished to ensure that the panel containing Shakespeare's head be kept as distinct as possible from that containing the Queen's portrait 'otherwise he might appear to be Prince Consort'. This should be accomplished by treating the Queen's half in a more tonal way while emphasising the engraved look of Shakespeare.

The new designs were by now arriving at the Post Office, beginning with George Mayhew's on 9 August. By the time of the next SAC meeting on 11 September the following new artwork for the photogravure low values set had been received.

Shirley Thompson (4 designs):

3d Bird with Shakespeare text

6d Floral arrangement

1s 3d London with Globe Theatre and St Paul's Cathedral

2s 6d Tudor wood frame with Shakespeare's signature.

George Mayhew (4 designs - all with Shakespeare's signature):

3d Poem: 'But the eternal summer...'

6d Poem: 'When wasteful war...'

1s 3d Engraving of the Globe Theatre

1s 6d 1598 Title Page for 'Love's Labour's Lost'.

George Chapman (6 designs):

3d Othello with white oval frame

3d Othello, Queen's head in hexagonal frame

3d Shakespeare

6d Falstaff

1s 3d Macbeth

1s 6d Hamlet holding Yorick's skull.

Chapman proposed an innovative idea with each sheet containing six different se-tenant designs featuring Shakespeare and five of his characters. These would appear across each row so that each 20-row sheet contained 20 of each design. For each denomination there could be different Shakespearean characters, or more simply, the same six designs could be used for each denomination by altering the colours.

David Gentleman, having been asked to let the SAC see his unsubmitted designs, forwarded these together with a high value based on the 3d Arbour design listed below. There is no record of his having been asked to submit a high value design so presumably he was invited verbally as he was in close contact with the Post Office. He was still reluctant to allow the 'Arches' set to be formally submitted: 'I am sorry to give up the arches-with-figures as a motif for a set - since in itself I think this might have made a pleasantly unified though varied set. But I am now sure that the essentially decorative theme of arches in front of a receding stage could not be successfully and logically combined with the photographic realism of the Queen's head, and any solution would have inevitably weakened and compromised the basic idea.' (D Gentleman to T P Hornsey, Postal Services.)

The arches-with-figures set comprised the following:

3d – Pillars: Shakespeare and Feste, the clown

6d – Arbour: Puck and Bottom

1s 3d – Grey Stone: Hamlet and Ophelia (there were two versions of this)

1s 6d – Brown Stone: Falstaff and Prince Hal.

The 6d design featuring a green arbour with figures from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' was adapted by the designer as a 2s 6d stamp with alternative figures from 'As You Like It': Orlando meeting Rosalind dressed as a boy in the forest. This design was sent to Bradbury Wilkinson for essaying for the next meeting of the SAC on 11 September.

The first set of essays sent to F J Langfield of the Postal Services Department from Bradbury Wilkinson on 6 September were those requested on 7 August of two designs by artists at Harrison and Sons, one design by Lynton Lamb, and the modified John Brinkley design. Lynton Lamb's design (no. 8A) had, as requested, been essayed in three colours, brown, red and blue. These were followed on 10 September by an essay of Gentleman's 2s 6d. Essays of the Gentleman and Ironside designs for the low value photogravure set were seen by the Committee at its meeting on September 11. The Gentleman designs had, in consultation with the artist, been essayed in two versions: one with colour washed over Shakespeare's head and the second in which the head remained in monochrome. Ironside's designs were essayed with either a dark or light background.

The SAC considered all the new designs for the photogravure set, including David Gentleman's despite his request to the contrary, and the essays of Gentleman's original submission and those of Robin and Christopher Ironside. It concluded that Gentleman's original set was still by far the best, so much so that it wished to make only one recommendation to avoid the risk of the Queen overriding the selection. T P Hornsey informed the Committee that two sets were required and it agreed that the Ironside set go forward as an alternative. None of the designs commissioned from George Chapman, Shirley Thompson and George Mayhew were considered of sufficient merit to warrant further development. As regards the high value stamp, the Committee saw the essays of designs by Gentleman, Lynton Lamb and the reworked design by John Brinkley. (There is no record of it having seen the designs by the artists from Harrison and Sons.) None was thought suitable, and it was suggested that two of the Ironside designs be essayed for the line engraved stamp, the 3d featuring Hamlet and the 6d showing Othello. It was pointed out to the Committee that should one of these prove satisfactory for the high value, a new design would be required to complete the second choice set for the low values. It was agreed to ask the Ironsides to draw a fifth design and at the same time the Committee asked for the 1s 3d Ariel design to be altered. It decided that as the designs already selected were of such good quality, requiring only minor changes, a further meeting of the full Committee was not necessary, and it was left for the Post Office to liaise with Sir Kenneth Clark on any matters that might arise.

PRODUCTION AND FINAL APPROVAL OF DESIGNS

On 13 September, Harrison and Sons was asked to proceed with final essays of the Ironside designs already to hand, while waiting for the new designs the brothers had been asked to produce. The only amendment required to the other three designs was that the white crown above the Queen's head be replaced by another suitable emblem. Bradbury Wilkinson was asked to produce line engraved essays of the Hamlet and Othello designs from this set on 1 October. Meanwhile discussions had taken place within Postal Services over the denominations, with the suggestion that, as these stamps were expected to have a great deal of international appeal, one ought to be for an overseas postcard rate. It was therefore proposed to substitute an 8d for the planned 6d. Instructions were passed to the printers to produce essays of each of the selected 6d designs as an 8d in addition, should such an option be finally decided. The Ironside new design for the low values was finished in mid-October and featured Romeo and Juliet. Harrison and Sons were asked to provide essays of it as 3d. At the same time it was suggested by the Supplies Department of the Post Office that essays of the line engraved stamp should be printed on new coated paper which Bradbury Wilkinson had used in trials of the high value Castles definitives. This was the same paper as used in the photogravure process and it was feared that a line engraved stamp printed on normal paper would compare badly when seen alongside the gravure

stamps on the coated paper. T P Hornsey agreed and the printers were asked to produce essays on both normal and coated paper.

Further essays of the low value designs were received from Harrison and Sons on 22 October together with the original artwork for all of David Gentleman's designs and the Ironside designs for the 1s 3d and 1s 6d values, their two lower value designs having been sent to Bradbury Wilkinson for essaying as line engraved designs. These were approved by Sir Kenneth Clark in November and final essays of Gentleman's designs for submission to the Palace were sent to the Post Office by Harrison and Sons on 25 November:

3d Puck and Bottom

6d Feste

8d Feste

1s 3d Romeo and Juliet

1s 6d Henry V.

A letter from F J Langfield to the Public Relations Department enclosing four essays of the Gentleman designs indicates that those produced in September had denominations in black, so presumably the essays listed above were identical to those with the colour wash over the Queen's head apart from the change to denominations in white. There is no record of further photogravure essays of the Ironside designs.

The first proofs of the line engraved versions of the Ironside 'Othello' and 'Hamlet' designs were received on 14 November, closely followed by a second set on 18 November. These were trials of various colours and both sets were printed on both normal and coated paper with those on coated paper designated set A and those on normal paper, set B:

Othello vignette in blue, deep ochre or purple

Hamlet vignette in green, deep brown or grey.

Bradbury Wilkinson pointed out that, as their printing plates each printed only 40 stamps, they used two plates to print a full sheet of 80 as required by the Post Office, so it would be possible to print both the Hamlet and Othello designs on the same sheet at no extra cost. The only problem was that both stamps would have to be printed in the same colour. Despite the possibilities of this idea there is no indication that it was ever seriously considered at the Post Office.

SUBMISSION TO THE PALACE

Precisely who made the final decision on the colour of the line engraved design is not clear; it is probable that the Post Office, in consultation with the artists, sought the opinion of Sir Kenneth Clark in late November. On 4 December Brigadier K S Holmes (Director of Postal

Services) drafted a letter to the Palace for final approval of the stamps reflecting the strong recommendation for the SAC's first choice. He stated that his department now felt that the original value of 6d was more appropriate. The total cost of the set with an 8d value would be 6s 2d, whereas with a 6d value it would be 6s 0d 'a rather more convenient amount to deal with especially when it comes to converting it into foreign currencies' and although would 'act to reduce philatelic receipts' this would be offset by extra sales of the 6d whose use was much wider than that of the 8d. (The 6d was the basic 'all-up' letter rate to Europe, and the basic surface letter rate to all extra-European non-Commonwealth countries. In 1962 there had been 235 million 6d stamps sold as compared with 15 million 8d stamps, 8d being the postcard airmail rate for places like USA and Canada.)

A minute for the PMG from the Deputy Director General, W A Wolverson, indicated that, for the line engraved stamp, the Committee preferred the Othello design; however, it was suggested the Hamlet design be recommended as first choice to the Palace. The letter to the Palace put the matter as delicately as possible, but the inescapable conclusion is that there was a fear that the portrayal of a black character might be regarded as controversial by 'some extremists'. (It is of note that the same Post Office officials insisted on the inclusion of a design from the white countries of the Commonwealth on the occasion of the Commonwealth Arts Festival issue in 1965.) As regards Shakespeare's head appearing on the stamps, there is no indication that this was formally pursued with the Palace prior to the final submission of the designs: the letter merely pointed out that this would be the first occasion the head of a person other than the reigning Monarch or Royal Consort had ever appeared on a British stamp.

The PMG forwarded essays of all of the designs to the Queen on 17 December, recommending the set by David Gentleman as first choice for the photogravure set and the Ironside 'Hamlet' design as first choice for the line engraved stamp:

Photogravure:

Set A - Designed by David Gentleman

3d - Midsummer Night's Dream; Puck and Bottom wearing the asses head

6d - Twelfth Night; Feste

1s 3d - Romeo and Juliet; The balcony scene

1s 6d - Henry V; Henry prays in his tent on the eve of Agincourt.

Set B - Designed by Robin and Christopher Ironside

3d - Hamlet; Hamlet contemplating Yorick's skull

6d - Othello; Othello the Moor

1s 3d - The Tempest; Ariel

1s 6d - Henry IV; Falstaff Falstaff

3d - Romeo and Juliet; The balcony scene.

Line-engraved:

Set C - Designed by Robin and Christopher Ironside

Othello – deep ochre

Hamlet – grey.

The Queen approved the first choice designs on 18 December finding them ‘striking and of high quality’, but the letter from Sir Michael Adeane, Her Majesty’s Private Secretary, indicated that while the 400th anniversary of the birth of Shakespeare represented a worthy occasion to break with tradition over the matter of the head, this was a tradition she wished to preserve in future. Her approval of the designs should not therefore be regarded as setting a precedent for the future.

ISSUING THE STAMPS

Just before Christmas 1963 the Assistant Postmaster General announced in the House of Commons that the denominations of the Shakespeare Festival issue would be 3d, 6d, 1s 3d, 1s 6d and 2s 6d. The designs were announced to the public on 24 February 1964 at a press conference held at Postal Headquarters London, and although only black and white photographs were available, the designs were well received by the press. Both the successful and unsuccessful designs were put on display at Stampex on 13 March: this was the first time that designs not chosen were put on public view.

The stamps were released on 23 April 1964, Shakespeare’s birthday. The colours were:

3d – Violet background, characters grey

6d – Olive green, character orange and yellow

1s 3d – Grey-brown, characters turquoise and deep pink

1s 6d – Deep blue, character pale purple

2s 6d – Light brown.

The denominations were chosen to ensure a wide postal use both nationally and internationally as it was hoped that the ‘outstanding quality of the stamps’ and the ‘universal appeal of the topic’ would generate worldwide interest. At the time 3d was the inland letter rate and the basic surface letter rate to Commonwealth countries; 6d was the basic letter rate for Europe and the surface letter rate to the rest of the world; 1s 3d was the basic airmail letter rate to the United States; 1s 6d the basic airmail letter rate to Australia, New Zealand and the Far East; 2s 6d was widely used on parcels both inland and overseas and also on heavier airmail items.

The 2s 6d stamp, designed by Christopher and Robin Ironside, was line engraved by Bradbury Wilkinson Ltd. and was the first special stamp to be produced by this process since the 1929 £1 Postal Union Congress. It was printed in sheets of 40 (4 by 10) on ordinary 'multiple crowns' watermarked paper. Variations in shade were identified early in the printing run and was said to be due to the time taken for sheets to dry. This was overcome by altering the quality of the ink. Only a few thousand sheets were affected, but there was no means of knowing the precise number. The other four stamps in the Shakespeare Festival issue were all designed by David Gentleman and printed by Harrisons using the photogravure process. They were printed in sheets of 120 (6 by 20) on both ordinary and phosphor band versions with multiple crowns watermark.

Original calculations on how many stamps would be required were said to be 'grossly out' by the APMG. Demand, thought to be greater than for any previous special issue of British stamps, was increased by the fact that Post Office counters had been instructed to offer the Shakespeare stamps in place of the ordinary issue for a period of four weeks and it had been decided to keep the issue at the Stratford-upon-Avon post office during the whole of the Festival season. The original printing was:

3d – 156,000,000
6d – 19,000,000
1s 3d – 7,000,000
1s 6d – 7,000,000
2s 6d – 2,500,000.

A reprint was ordered comprising 2,400,000 of the 6d, 1s 3d and 1s 6d and 800,000 of the 2s 6d. Final sales figures following the reprint of the stamps in May 1964 were as follows:

Non-phosphor:

3d – 133,670,000
6d – 19,238,200
1s 3d – 7,067,200
1s 6d – 6,910,120
2s 6d – 3,664,920

Phosphor:

3d – 10,427,880
6d – 1,318,560
1s 3d – 727,800
1s 6d – 657,120.

The stamps were withdrawn on 31 March 1965, although the 3d non-phosphor had sold out earlier.

There were 108,541 presentation packs containing a full set of ordinary stamps sold, the first issued by the Post Office. The specially designed pack was embossed in scarlet with the Royal Arms and contained photographs of the designers and the printing processes, together with technical and artistic details of the stamps. The packs cost 7s each, but for orders of 100 or more there was a special price of 6s each, the face value of the stamps, with the pack itself being provided free.

THE STAMPS' SUBJECTS

Gentleman described his designs as 'centrally a conventionalised stage with a suggestion of scenery, and figures from the plays flanked on one side by the Queen's head and on the other by that of Shakespeare'.

The 3d stamp showed Puck and Bottom from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. Puck was clothed in the leaves of Robin Goodfellow – 'the medieval wood spirit who appears in several guises on the sculptured Gothic capitals of Southwell Minister'. Bottom was shown wearing the Weaver's ass head which comes from the animal headdresses worn by medieval mummers. References for this were Millia Davenport's 'The Book of Costume' and an old manuscript.

The 6d showed Feste from 'Twelfth Night' and was a composite clown from a number of sources including a watercolour by Rosalind Dease and Allardyce Nicoll's 'The History of Harlequin'.

The 1s 3d showed Romeo and Juliet in the well-known balcony scene, derived from the two-storey Elizabethan stage, wearing Renaissance-Italian costumes, from 'Romeo and Juliet'.

The 1s 6d showed a kneeling figure of Henry V in his tent on the eve of Agincourt, from 'Henry V', it was based on a rubbing from an ancient brass.

Gentleman had been anxious to reproduce Shakespeare's head from an original source and not redraw it. The possibilities were reduced to two – the bust at Stratford, thought to date from only a few years after his death, and the engraving ultimately chosen, both of which could have been the work of people who had seen Shakespeare. The several other portraits that exist were discounted as being of 'extremely doubtful provenance'. The likeness used was based on the First Folio portrait. This came from an engraving by Martin Droeshout on the title page of the first collected edition (or 'folio') of 36 plays published after Shakespeare's death (1616) in 1623. In describing how he made his choice Gentleman said: 'The bust at Stratford has a rather plump, slightly pudding-faced look and I preferred the engraved head – partly for its rather stylised, flat qualities (which help to distinguish it

clearly from the photographic nature of the Queen's portrait), and partly because the nervous intensity in the deeply shadowed eyes convey so well a powerful and intense mind.'

Gentleman acknowledged that the portrait had been 'the target for scholarly comment including a persistent belief that it has two right eyes', which he considered 'a contention rich in symbolic possibilities but ... visually quite groundless'.

The portrait was reversed (as in a mirror) to show his head turning in to the design, towards the Wilding portrait of the Queen.

The 2s 6d stamp, with its scrolled vignettes of unequal dimensions, was reminiscent of the George VI high values from the 1940s. Contained in the left-hand vignette was 'Hamlet contemplating Yorick's skull' in the graveyard from 'Hamlet'. The other vignette featured a new engraving of the Wilding portrait of the Queen.

The stamps were not without detractors. Stuart Rose, the Post Office Design Advisor, later recalled that 'the concept of a unified issue was beginning to become established' and cites the intrusion by the 2s 6d stamp, as good as it was, into the set as difficult to justify. Rose believed that 'whatever the photogravure set looked like, the line-engraved value could not possibly be en suite'.

The stamps were, however, well received by much of the public, with queues forming outside the Stratford-upon-Avon post office at around 4.30 in the morning. Despite every counter position being fully staffed all day, queues stretched for 100 yards. It sold a quarter of a million stamps, ten times the normal figure, with one man said to have bought £500 worth of the stamps. The philatelic posting box was emptied every ten minutes with 40,000 covers posted there. In addition 10,000 air letter forms and 2,000 presentation packs were sold at Stratford.

FIRST DAY COVER

The provision of official GPO first day covers on this occasion marked the first time the Post Office had entered the market for covers. In the past it had provided special handstamps for private or commercial covers. The change of policy may well have been because the Post Office felt these were 'the most dramatic [stamps] we have ever issued'. Although it was thought that providing an official envelope would not have a great effect on overall sales in the UK, the overseas market, particularly in North America, held great potential.

It had been proposed as early as June 1963 to produce first day covers, referred to by the Post Office in subsequent publicity material as 'decorative covers', and a great deal of

planning went into the matter. The prime concern of the Post Office was to increase the philatelic sales of this issue, particularly overseas where the stamps appeared to have 'sales appeal'. The sales of special envelopes were not seen as a profit-making venture because 'there is not much money in it'. It was recognised that such envelopes provided a major source of revenue for the BPA (British Philatelic Association) and the PTS (Philatelic Traders' Society). Although the Post Office was 'anxious to support the spread of philately' there was a desire not to 'harm the main organisation promoting this'. Several possibilities were considered, including having an envelope designed by the artist who designed the stamp and printed and passing the distribution over to the BPA/PTS. Alternatively if the BPA/PTS could produce an acceptable design the envelope could be left entirely in their hands.

A scheme was eventually evolved that would avoid alienating the philatelic trade, but at the same time would not give the BPA/PTS a monopoly. Previously the BPA and PTS had jointly produced a cover for each issue and the new scheme was to give them the opportunity to produce the same income in that they were given a further discount of 3d per cover which was equivalent to the profit they made on their own covers. However the BPA and PTS continued with tradition by jointly producing their own cover for this issue.

Once the design of the stamps had been more or less finalised, David Gentleman was asked to produce designs for the first day envelopes. A formal written invitation, 'merely for the record', was not actually sent to Gentleman until 18 February 1964, although he received 'Instructions' in November that gave him a remarkably free hand, the main stipulation being that the design should be Shakespearean: even the printing method was left to the artist. The design was to be confined to the left hand side of the envelope and to allow room for the five stamps. The designer could allow for the stamps to be affixed in any pattern, but were to be confined to the top and right hand sides of the envelope, as far as practicable. The preferred size of the envelope was 6½ inches by 4 inches, but the 6½ inches dimension could be enlarged to 7½ inches if necessitated by the design. A maximum of three colours could be used. The fee for the design was 50 guineas (this fee was reached as being the current fee paid by the Public Relations Department for designing a poster).

Gentleman's design featured the figures of Feste and Bottom, from the 3d stamp, on stage in an Elizabethan Theatre. The backcloth was replaced by a picture of the Globe Theatre in Southwark taken from the famous 16th century panoramic print of London by Wencelas Hollar. The 'Philatelic Bulletin' (no. 5, February 1964) described this as an ingenious modern photographic 'double-take' technique that gave 'a simultaneous impression of the stage and exterior of the Globe Theatre'.

A special post office counter was provided in the reception hall of the Shakespeare Exhibition at Stratford-upon-Avon and was open throughout the Festival season. Covers

posted on the first day of issue at this counter were cancelled with the special exhibition handstamp designed by Levi Fox, Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

The press advertisements stated that a full philatelic service was being offered by the Post Office to the trade and individual collector. The first day cover service involved the affixing of all five ordinary or four phosphor-lined stamps, hand-cancelled with first day of issue Stratford-upon-Avon postmark. The charge for servicing and provision of the specially-designed envelope was 1s 2d; for 20 or more covers to one address there was a reduced charge of 6d. For servicing customers' own covers there was a charge of 6d.

Special philatelic posting boxes were provided in 40 post offices throughout the country. All items posted in these boxes were handstamped with a special rubber 'First day of issue' cancellation of the town concerned. A slogan postmark was also in use at Stratford-upon-Avon.

PICTORIAL AIR LETTER FORMS

On 8 November 1963 a proposal for a special Shakespeare Festival air letter form was put to the Assistant Postmaster General (APMG), R Mawby, by the Postal Services Department (PSD). The APMG was reminded that on two previous occasions a 'commemorative' air letter form had accompanied a special issue, namely the Olympic Games in 1948 and the Queen's Coronation in 1953. It was felt within PSD that the international interest likely to be aroused by the Shakespeare celebrations would be reason for a special air letter. There was, however, one major disadvantage in merely reproducing a special stamp on the forms as on the previous occasions. Whereas the ordinary air mail letter made a profit, the Post Office lost money on the two 'special issues'. It was claimed that the special 'stamp' enticed people to use the forms instead of sending a letter, thus costing the Post Office money, even taking into account the philatelic sales. To overcome this, it was suggested issuing pictorial air letter forms selling at 10d each, including 6d postage. These would be the first pictorial air letter forms on sale everywhere in the country: 1963 had seen trial pictorial air letter forms known as 'London Views'. These were on sale only in London post offices and considered somewhat of a failure with only a quarter of the production actually sold. To an extent the poor sales could be attributed to inadequate promotion, and that the forms had neither a special 'stamp' impressions nor designs associated with a special event. The prospects for proposed Shakespeare forms were considered much better as they would be sold over the whole country and given much more publicity. It was additionally hoped they would help to popularise the idea of pictorial forms and provide useful experience from the public reaction.

On 15 November a meeting at Post Office Headquarters decided that 'The date of issue would be 23rd April, 1964. Two pictorial designs would be provided, each incorporating the same special 6d stamp design. The price would be 10d. Since a new stamp design was involved, the forms would have to go to the Queen for final approval.'

Those present were T P Hornsey and M H King, both of Postal Services Department, and F B Savage of the Public Relations Department. The meeting agreed the procedure for obtaining designs. It was stated that the artist's task was essentially three-part:

The stamp - the instructions for the stamp would be based on the standard brief used for special stamp issues;

The address panel - the address panel wording and layout would be in accordance with the relevant International Postal Regulations;

The pictorial element on the half-page adjacent to the addressee's and sender's panel - the pictorial element would take account of the fact that the form would be folded and so should be in two separate parts. It had been suggested that the two parts should be respectively a photograph and a drawn design but it was agreed that the decision on this should be left to the artist. Two complete pictorial elements would be required.

It was agreed that only one designer be commissioned to facilitate close collaboration with the printers. David Gentleman was the obvious choice, his stamp design being considered 'quite outstanding' by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID).

It was recognised the project would involve more work than designing a single stamp, but it was agreed that the fee paid for an accepted stamp design, 250 guineas, would be appropriate. The artist was asked for finished roughs of preferably two sets of designs by the middle of December. This would enable a final choice to be made, proofs obtained and submitted to the Queen for approval in time for printing by early January 1964.

It was normal for the CoID SAC to give advice on the production and design of special stamps. The timetable for the air letter did not allow for formal consultation with the Committee, but Hornsey undertook to seek informal advice from its Secretary and, if possible, from a member of the Committee once the designs were available.

David Gentleman was very willing to take the commission. The stamp artwork was to be four times stamp size, but the size and make-up of the artwork of the pictorial element had not been specified: this was discussed later with the printers. It was provisionally agreed that Gentleman produce three or four roughs within a fortnight, at which point he would be given the go ahead on two designs.

THE STAMP

The design of the stamp, symbolic or pictorial, was left to the artist, but it was mandatory to include 'Shakespeare Festival', together with the value, once only, in clear Arabic numerals. The design was to include the Queen's head: twelve approved photographs (six with dark background and six with light background) were enclosed. One of the photographs was to be fixed to the design: the artist was asked to indicate alongside the design the colour and background (if any) for the Queen's head.

The instructions stated that the printed surface of the stamp was to be 1.5 inches by 0.86 inches and the drawing was to be four times up, 6.04 inches by 3.44 inches exclusive of any mounting. It was stressed that great care be taken to ensure the stamp was drawn in exactly the right proportions and the photographs had been provided at the correct size for designs of these dimensions. The stamp was to be in horizontal format, and would be printed in two basic colours, left to the choice of the artist.

THE ADDRESS PANEL

The instructions stated that the design should be of 'the same general appearance as that of the stamped forms sold in post offices'. Further stipulations were:
the exact wording which appears on the outside of the official form must be used and no other wording may appear on the address side, except that a suitable design may appear in the bottom left-hand quarter;
the printed airmail label indication in the top left hand corner of the address panel must show the words 'BY AIR MAIL' printed in reverse type on a blue ground and the remainder of the word printed in blue.

THE PICTORIAL ELEMENT

The design adjacent to the addressee's and sender's panel was left to the artist. Up to four colours could be used, including those used for the stamp.

METHOD OF PRINTING

The whole form was to be printed by lithography. Specimens of a form so printed were enclosed, but these were not intended as an indication of the type of design sought. The Post Office intended to produce two forms, identical in all respects except for the pictorial element.

Gentleman was informed that the fee for completing the designs was to be 250 guineas, of which 125 guineas would be paid on completion of the artwork and the remainder paid once the Post Office had accepted the designs.

A meeting on 29 November 1963 at McCorquodales at Wolverton discussed the form. Present were T P Hornsey of Postal Services Department, E Williams and J Howard-Smith both of Post Office Supplies Department, and David Gentleman, plus G McCorquodale and K C Carter representing the printers, and D Ensor of the McCorquodale subsidiary Skipper and East.

The following timetable was agreed:

Approved designs to McCorquodales - 30 December 1963;
Final proofs to Post Office - 27 January 1964;
Approved proofs to McCorquodales - 6 February 1964;
Deliveries complete - by 20 March 1964;
Sale date - 23 April 1964.

Between 30 December and 27 January any further rough proofs submitted to Postal Headquarters would require consultation between Headquarters, Gentleman and McCorquodales to agree any necessary modification. Between 27 January and February the proofs of the stamp design were to be submitted for Royal approval.

As a result of Skipper and East relocating from London to Basingstoke since the previous pictorial air letter had been produced, it was necessary for representatives from the Supplies Department to visit the new site to draw up suitable control arrangements for printing. It was also agreed there be collaboration between the artist and the printer during the preparation of the designs and thus Gentleman should visit Ensor at Basingstoke.

A proposed timetable in more detail is also in the files.

Designs to McCorquodale - 13 January;
Proofs to Post Office - 3 February;
Approved proofs to McCorquodale - 6 February;
Post Office 'Circular' notice - 12 February;
Initial requisitions - 2 March;
Deliveries complete - 20 March;
Transfers to SCD complete - by 1 April;
Head sheets to Warehouse - by 1 April;
London sheets to Warehouse - by 8 April;
Distribution to Head Offices - 8 to 10 April;
Distribution to London offices - 15 April;

Sale date – 23 April (Thursday).

DETAILS OF THE FINISHED DESIGNS

Proofs of the air letter forms and essays of the stamp were sent by the printers to the Postal Services Department on 27 January, and on 7 February four Shakespeare pictorial air letter form designs were submitted to the APMG by PSD. Two of the designs were by David Gentleman. One, labelled C, featured wood-engraved characters in scenes from six of Shakespeare's plays:

Falstaff and Mistress Quickly (Merry Wives of Windsor)

Ophelia and Hamlet (Hamlet)

Puck, Titania and Bottom (A Midsummer Night's Dream)

Romeo and Juliet (Romeo and Juliet)

Brutus and Caesar (Julius Caesar)

Caliban, Prospero and Ariel (The Tempest).

The other design by Gentleman, labelled D, showed the following individual characters: Falstaff, Hostess (Mistress Quickly), Ophelia, Hamlet, Feste and Bottom. With the exception of Feste (the jester in Twelfth Night) the portraits were as in design C apart from size and colour.

In addition PSD had asked the printers to prepare two pictorial forms (labelled A and B) using colour photographs as in the 'London Views' forms. Design A showed the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, and design B showed Anne Hathaway's Cottage.

The Gentleman designs were in the same style as his photogravure stamps and thought to be equally striking. Sir Kenneth Clark, Chairman of the SAC, was 'warmly enthusiastic as to their merits, particularly in the case of C'; when he heard that colour photographs might be used he commented that it would be highly unfortunate since 'however well produced, photographs could not compare with the effectiveness and quality of a special design'. At a meeting with Gentleman, Sir Kenneth remarked that it was the Committee's *raison d'être* to prevent the Post Office from making mistakes of this kind. Although recognising the force of Sir Kenneth's views, PSD was in some doubt as to the commercial appeal of designs of this nature and thought it would be advisable to put one special and one photographic design on sale and suggested designs A and C. This would also allow for the comparison of the market for the two types of designs and possibly serve to introduce the idea of pictorial air letter forms to a wider public. This was agreed to by APMG and designs A and C were chosen.

The air letter form proofs and stamp essays were submitted for the Queen's approval the following week.

R C Caterson (of PSD) wrote to the Supplies Department on 14 February saying that the Queen had approved the proposed air letter forms and would now arrange with McCorquodales for the printing of 1,000,000 of each of the forms. There were 3,000 of each form requested with the word 'Cancelled' printed in small letters across the right-hand side of the stamp impression. These were for display purposes and to be handed out to the press when the APMG performed the opening ceremony of the Stampex on 13 March 1964. Caterson then explained that Gentleman had requested the following minor amendments be made.

Modifications to Shakespeare 'Scenes' air letter form:

Falstaff – fill in with green white outline to left-hand side of his left boot

Mistress Quickly – fill in white line at bottom of dress

Hamlet – no changes

Bottom – extend the olive brown colour over the stonework of the tomb. Darken the right-hand of the archway interior

Caesar – no changes

Prospero – fill in green strip of arch at end of wand with blue

General – move blue and pink plates 1/64 inches to right. The pink should be a brighter colour. The 'BY AIRMAIL' block to be printed from the new artwork supplied by the artist on 17 February 1964.

Gentleman put verbally to the printer one or two other points about registration.

Almost half a million of each form were sold in the first two weeks of issue; Supplies Department then released the remaining half a million of each to post offices. With no supplies in stock the printing of a further 1,000,000 'Theatres' and 500,000 'Scenes' was requested on 27 April. These were to include the agreed revised wording, changed from 'Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Stratford-on-Avon Warwickshire' to 'The Royal Shakespeare Theatre Stratford-upon-Avon Warwickshire', after it was discovered that the official name of the town is Stratford-upon-Avon (Stratford-on-Avon is the district), and the theatre's name had been changed to 'Royal Shakespeare Theatre' in 1961. Altering the legend did not necessitate much extra work as new plates had to be made for the reprint anyway. The 'Memorial Theatre' air letter was withdrawn on 19 May 1964 while the reprint with corrected inscription was issued at the same time. However, the amended form went on sale at post offices as and when initial stocks ran out.

With limited experience the Post Office had not anticipated how quickly the sales would decline and only a total of one and a half million forms were sold. Of these comparatively few were the revised 'Royal Shakespeare Theatre' version.

Having printed the first 100,000 Theatre forms, it was discovered that the word 'The' had been omitted from 'The Royal Shakespeare Theatre', but as stocks were low Supplies Department was anxious to use the forms, it was decided to produce the balance of the reprint without this correction.

On 6 May 1964 a Post Office 'Circular' advised that a small number of Shakespeare air letter forms may have been issued on which the view or the scenes had been badly printed, namely poor colour registration or only one or two colours, or where the postage stamp impression had been omitted. Counter clerks were instructed to examine the forms and any with imperfections to be returned to Supplies Department. A few of the faulty forms were sold in the normal way.

The stamp on the forms depicted the Globe Theatre as shown on the print by Wenceslaus Hollar. The Post Office was informed on 'very good authority' that Hollar labelled his engraving incorrectly and what is shown is in fact the Bear Garden. The engraving is, however, extremely well known and so it was thought only right to use it without amendment. The address panel was common to both designs and featured an engraving of Shakespeare's head designed by Gentleman that also appeared on the adhesive stamps.

The forms were printed in sheets of eight with each uncut sheet comprising eight 'Theatre' or eight 'Scenes' forms separately.

A report analysing the sales of the forms was presented to the Director of Postal Services (DPS), Brig. K S Holmes, by K Hind, Assistant Secretary PSD, on 28 October 1964.

Theatre:

23 April to 7 May – 479,835

8 May to 31 May – 163,031

June – 77,641

July – 34,457

August – 21,334

September – 12,509

October – 6,597

Total – 795,404

Scenes:

23 April to 7 May – 430,040

8 May to 31 May – 135,629

June – 65,248

July – 30,201

August – 18,681
September – 10,979
October – 5,933
Total – 696,711

Total for both designs – 1,492,115.

The figures gave no indication of a 'levelling-off' but suggested that sales would continue to dwindle until becoming negligible. Conclusions drawn were that –

The ordinary week-to-week public demand for Pictorial Air Letter forms, either by residents or tourists, appeared to be relatively small. The reasons for this small demand were said to be:

most private users of air letter forms were thought to write to only one or two correspondents overseas and that they might only send one pictorial air letter form;
The wide difference in selling price of 6d for the ordinary form and 10d for a pictorial form, was seen as an influencing factor especially as the pictorial form offered one-third less writing space;
the pictorial forms had not proved popular with tourists, possibly because the picture postcard trade and habit was deeply entrenched and possibly because the tourists did not know about the pictorial form

The financial statement produced on 31 October 1964 showed that a profit of £5,129 20s 11d had been made by the Post Office:

Gross expenditure (3½ million forms printed) was £67,041 18s 3d;

Gross revenue on sales up to 31 October 1964 (1,492,115 forms at 10d each) was £62,171. 9s. 2d;

Net profit was £5,129. 10s 11d.

Although the publicity material made no mention of first day servicing of the forms by the Philatelic Bureau it was prepared to provide this service. D Lidman, the Stamp News Editor of 'The New York Times', wrote to the Post Office enquiring about this matter. The reply dated 24 March 1964, by K J Ley, the Chief Press and Broadcast Officer, explained that it had not been mentioned in the advertisements as the Bureau would be extremely busy with orders for FDCs of the Shakespeare Festival stamps and the forms were time-consuming to handle in large quantities. The service was, however, available and the charge for addressing, folding and posting, with the cost of the form, was 1s 6d.

The forms were withdrawn on 17 July 1965.

PROMOTION AND PUBLICITY

The Shakespeare Festival stamps were considered a particularly good issue on which to base a sales drive, partly because of the widespread interest that they were likely to arouse and partly because of the comparatively high value of the set. In order to maximise the revenue potential of what the Post Office expected to be a very popular stamp issue, it was decided to undertake a massive publicity drive prior to release. A series of meetings at the Public Relations Department (PRD) discussed the project. The first appears to have been on 18 October 1963, with representatives of the PRD, the Postal Services Division and Mr Ramsden of Highams Ltd, the press advertising agency used by the PRD.

Ideas were thrashed out and by 17 January these were sufficiently advanced to put to the Assistant Postmaster General:

- Press Conference in February on the designs of the stamps, of the first day covers, the handstamp and the pictorial air letters;
- Publicity campaign in March featuring the first day cover service;
- Publicity campaign in April and May featuring the stamps and the presentation pack;
- Supporting publicity in selected Head Post Offices;
- Poster and information leaflet to schools.

The publicity campaign included extensive advertising in philatelic magazines, both at home and abroad. However, it was recognised that many philatelists did not read these magazines and that many non-philatelists, 'because of the intrinsic interest of the topic and of the designs', might buy FDCs and mint stamps if made aware of their existence. It was thus decided to advertise in those national newspapers that had regular philatelic articles including 'The Times', 'The Daily Telegraph', 'The Sunday Times', 'The Sunday Telegraph' and 'The Observer'. The advertising agency advised the Post Office that the public would be deterred if it had to write a letter of application and therefore, at Higham's suggestion, the advertisements included an order form.

The campaign was on a grander scale than anything carried out previously by the Post Office. An internal memo refers to 'The Shakespeare Earthquake - breaking so much new ground' listing the innovations:

- Five value shot, line engraved and photogravure;
- Head of known person other than Royalty;
- First Day Cover service to suit all requirements - full, servicing only, philatelic posting boxes;
- Guaranteed handstamping on all FDCs - specially designed handstamp in rubber for first time to ensure top quality;

Poster, designed by Gentleman, to 8,000 schools, special display exhibit for Post Office and Shakespearean events;
Extensive publicity campaign in UK and abroad;
Mint display packs.

THE DESIGNERS

DAVID GENTLEMAN - Gentleman first entered stamp design with the National Productivity Year stamps issued in 1962. He followed this success with the Ninth International Lifeboat Conference stamps issued in 1963.

He was born in London in 1930 and studied in the School of Graphic Design at the Royal College of Art. He subsequently taught at the Royal College of Art and went on to become a freelance artist. Since 1955 he had been working on design for display, fabrics, wallpaper, book-jackets, posters and murals, together with illustrations for books, magazines, etc.

Gentleman was married to Rosalind Dease, an illustrator and designer. His wife worked in studio partnership with him and they worked together on research into the figures and settings to be featured on the stamps.

ROBIN AND CHRISTOPHER IRONSIDE - The two brothers were born in London in 1912 and 1913 respectively. Robin was for eight years Assistant Director of the Tate Gallery. He had written various books on art and at the time of designing the stamp worked as a painter and freelance designer. Christopher studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and at the time of designing the stamp worked as a painter, medallist and teacher. The brothers had worked together on stage designs for the Royal Ballet, the Ballet Rambert, and the Old Vic. They also collaborated on a number of design projects including clocks, wall mirrors, fire grates and tapestries. The 2s 6d stamp represented the only success they had in British stamp design.

Andy Pendlebury
National Postal Museum
September 1995

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