

STAMP HISTORY

International Telecommunications Union Centenary

Date of issue: 15 NOVEMBER 1965



The creation of the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) resulted from the joining of the Conventions of the International Telegraph Union (created in 1865) and the International Radiotelegraph Union (created in 1906) at Madrid in 1932. In 1947 at Atlantic City the ITU entered into an agreement with the United Nations as a Specialised Agency, the oldest of the specialised agencies of the UN. The aims of the Union are to promote, maintain and extend international co-operation in the field of telecommunications.

FIRST SUGGESTION

On 13 August 1962 the ITU circulated all member countries following a decision by the Administrative Council in May/June 1962 regarding possible celebrations in 1965 of the Union's centenary. It felt that 'as an international agency, the Union itself could do no more than publish a historical booklet or work and ... [had] made arrangements for the preparation of such a publication'.

The Council realised however that some administrations would wish to mark the centenary in their own way, believing this would draw the attention of the public to 'the results of a hundred years of uninterrupted universal co-operation in the field of telecommunications'. The ITU therefore recommended members and associate members 'to study as soon as possible the measures which might be taken to this effect at the national level, when formulating their programme for 1965, as regards, for example, the issues of commemorative postage stamps, their calendar of events, their programme of

publications, etc'. It was emphasised that the issue of commemorative stamps would be of particular interest.

Following this, on 17 August 1962 the Radio Services Department (RSD) of the GPO wrote to the Postal Services Department (PSD) suggesting 'preliminary consideration to the feasibility of issuing a commemorative postage stamp during 1965'. On 23 August PSD replied that so far the list of possible subjects for 1965 was:

- 700th anniversary of the founding of the House of Commons;
- 750th anniversary of Magna Carta;
- Centenary of discovery of antiseptics (by Lister in Glasgow);
- Centenary of ITU;
- Golden Jubilee of Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) (later became the Science Research Council, and then the Science and Engineering Research Council);
- Golden Jubilee of National Federation of Women's Institutes;
- 300th anniversary of the Great Plague.

PSD aimed to obtain the approval of the Postmaster General (PMG) to the programme for special issues in any year by August of the preceding year. So, until the programme was approved in 1964, the most PSD felt able to say was it would 'give very serious and sympathetic consideration to the possibility of a commemorative stamp'.

At the time only two or three sets of special stamps were issued each year and the policy was to issue stamps to mark outstanding current national or international events or notable royal or postal anniversaries. RSD was told that since the ITU was not a postal organisation the policy would have to be stretched to justify a special issue, unless the centenary was marked by a really outstanding event in this country or abroad.

On 11 January 1963 RSD wrote again to PSD, saying that the Administrative Council of the ITU was to meet in March to discuss the preparations for the centenary, for which a small working party had been set up of members of the Administrative Council (including the UK member). RSD suggested it would be very helpful if the UK representative could give an indication that the GPO would issue a stamp, especially as there was little doubt that administrations all over the world would be issuing commemorative stamps in 1965. PSD was reminded that the PMG was 'the Minister responsible for the telecommunications and radio services, and the Post Office the Department responsible for the UK Membership of the ITU'.

PSD replied on 15 January that since 23 August, the special stamp programme for 1963 had been approved and announced. There were five special issues and, although this did not indicate a change in policy for determining events to be commemorated, it did provide a precedent for going beyond the previous highest number of issues (three in 1948 and 1961).

It therefore seemed less likely that other more worthy subjects might prevent the inclusion of the ITU Centenary in the programme for 1965. PSD noted that the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the sister organisation of the ITU, had asked members to consider special stamps in support of a number of UN Agencies but did not feel bound to comply. RSD was told that a special issue was highly likely to be approved, but until the PMG made an announcement in Parliament it would not be proper to make a public statement. It was therefore suggested that the most that could be said at the ITU Administration Council meeting in March was that the UK was giving 'sympathetic consideration to this question', 'no less than any other ITU members would be able to give at this stage [as] Postal Administrations in general do not announce their special stamp programmes more than nine months before the start of the relative year'.

NEW POLICY FOR SPECIAL STAMPS

On 15 December the PMG, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, told the House of Commons that the policy regarding special stamps was to be changed and that in future the criteria would be:

- to celebrate events of national and international importance;
- to commemorate important anniversaries;
- to reflect the British contribution to world affairs, including the arts and science;
- to extend public patronage to the arts by encouraging the development of minuscule art.

The PMG said the number of special issues would be kept within reasonable bounds and he therefore intended to limit the number to eight in 1965, each probably consisting of two stamps. The PMG added that the programme for 1965 would have to be finalised by early January. He invited MPs and the public to submit suggestions to him as quickly as possible, adding that it would be helpful to receive the views of those interested in stamp design.

SUGGESTION ADOPTED

A meeting at Postal Headquarters, London on 22 December 1964 discussed the stamp programme for 1965, now a matter of some urgency as time was short. Despite this a timetable for only three of the special issues was agreed, with denominations not yet firm and issue dates open to slight amendment.

International Telecommunication Union Centenary:
Brief to artist – 24 December 1964
Designs to Post Office – 18 January 1965
Chosen designs to printer – 1 February 1965
Essays from printer – 12 February 1965

Approved essays to printer – 1 March 1965
80% stamps to Supplies Department – 9 April 1965
Date of issue – 17 May 1965
Provisional denominations – 9d, 1s 3d.

700th Anniversary of Parliament / 750th Anniversary of Magna Carta:

Brief to artist – 24 December 1964
Designs to Post Office – 18 January 1965
Chosen designs to printer – 1 February 1965
Essays from printer – 12 February 1965
Approved essays to printer – 1 March 1965
80% stamps to Supplies Department – 9 April 1965
Date of issue – 3 June 1965
Provisional denominations – 6d, 2s 6d.

25th Anniversary of Battle of Britain:

Brief to artist – 11 January 1965
Designs to Post Office – 22 February 1965
Chosen designs to printer – 8 March 1965
Essays from printer – 22 March 1965
Approved essays to printer – 12 April 1965
80% stamps to Supplies Department – 6 August 1965
Date of issue – 19 September 1965
Provisional denominations – 4d, 9d, 1s 3d.

On 23 December the printers Harrison and Sons and the PO Supplies Department were the timetable by D H Beaumont (PSD) and advised there was a real need to push ahead. Beaumont explained that confirmation of the complete programme would be given as soon as a decision was made, probably early in January.

STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

After the Second World War the Post Office Advisory Council was reconstituted, the first meeting on 26 January 1946 instigating the design of the 'Peace' stamps. The Council of Industrial Design (CoID) played an important role, which increased as time went by; in 1962 a memorandum was drawn up on relations between CoID and the Post Office regarding the design of stamps. Following this, at the invitation of the Post Office, the CoID appointed and administered the Committee, with the PMG being notified and given the opportunity to comment before changes in the membership or a change of Chairman was made. For each stamp issue the Post Office asked the Committee's advice on:

the names of artists to be invited to submit designs,
the instructions to be sent to invited artists, and
the designs to be selected for submission to the Queen.

The PMG was, however, free not to take any advice offered.

On 4 December Mrs Tomrley, CoID, was asked to suggest names for three of the 1965 special issues. Her recommendations for the ITU stamps were Andrew Restall and Michael Goaman, with Justin Todd and Peter Gauld as reserves.

On 23 December Beaumont duly wrote to Michael Goaman and Andrew Restall inviting them to submit designs. It was stressed that there was a need for 'early and close co-operation with the Post Office and the printer so that the final designs would be suitable for printing without any subsequent attention'.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

The artists were informed that a set of two designs was required but they could submit alternative designs for use in one set, or more than one set of two designs. The theme or themes was left to the artists. A copy of the ITU symbol was provided which could be incorporated in the design if wished.

The designs were to include the Queen's head as a dominant feature, with the size of the head being the same as that on the current 3d stamp or the smaller head on the ½d stamp. Eight photographs of the head were enclosed.

The designs could be either symbolic or pictorial, and form a set, with not more than three colours used. Black was not to be used as a background colour, but a white background was acceptable. The stamps were to be printed by Harrisons using photogravure and therefore care was to ensure the right tonal values.

The fee for each completed design was 60 guineas with a maximum of 120 guineas to any one artist. For each design selected an additional fee of 190 guineas would be paid, making a total of 250 guineas for each successful design. This payment would cover any modification to the original design that was considered reasonable.

The completed artwork was to reach Postal Services Department by the morning of Monday, 18 January 1965. All designs submitted and the copyright were to become the absolute property of the PMG.

ARTWORK RECEIVED

Within a few days both Restall and Goaman accepted the invitation. Two designs from each artist were received by PSD on 18 January 1965.

Restall:

symbolic representation of world telecommunication stations;
a radio or sound wave emanating from a source, and a symbolic representation of a switchboard.

Goaman:

graphic symbol illustrating the main types of modern telecommunications equipment, represented by an undersea cable section, the familiar telephone wires and insulators, VHF, directional aerials and a wireless mast;
drawing of the new satellite tracking station at Goonhilly.

SELECTING THE DESIGNS

On 26 January a meeting of the SAC at CoID viewed designs for the ITU Centenary and the 700th anniversary of Parliament. The members of the Committee were Sir Kenneth Clark, Lady Sempill, James Fitton, Milner Gray, Professor R Guyatt, Abram Games and Sir John Wilson; present were Beaumont and Mead, both from PSD, and R York of Harrison and Sons.

The two sets of designs had been photographed in black and white and reduced to stamp size, as was common practice to aid selection. Both sets were approved for essaying, with the PMG subsequently asking to see them before the next CoID meeting, which meant they had to be at Headquarters no later than 10 February.

Essays were sent to PSD on 9, 16 and 23 February.

ROYAL APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 8 March the PMG wrote to Sir Michael Adeane, Private Secretary to the Queen. The PMG had been granted an audience with the Queen on 10 March at which he intended to show designs for the next three stamp issues. As the designs for the ITU issue were ready the PMG thought it convenient for the Queen to see them in advance. The set by Restall was

unanimously preferred by the SAC and recommended as first choice by the PMG. Descriptions of the designs, as prepared by the artists, were enclosed.

The PMG explained that he had originally intended one of the stamps to be 1s 3d, but to avoid a clash with the Churchill set now likely also to appear in May, he had decided it should be 1s 6d. The alteration, from 1s 3d to 1s 6d, would be made at the printing stage.

The Queen was not attracted by any of the designs and thought Restall's were not at all striking. She felt that Goaman's might have been more attractive except for the lettering.

Concern within PSD was mounting as they were now working to a very tight schedule. The PMG therefore decided to resubmit the designs to the Palace, in case the Queen would now accept one of the sets.

On 15 March the PMG wrote to Sir Michael saying that it was his impression that neither set appealed greatly to the Queen. Normally fresh designs would have been obtained but time was the critical factor as the ITU had suggested that countries issue their stamps as near to 17 May as possible. The PMG felt the Post Office should follow this lead if at all possible but could only do so if the printers were given the approved designs straight away. He asked whether the Queen would feel able to approve one of the sets despite their imperfections.

The following day Sir Michael wrote to the PMG saying that 'the Queen was not as enthusiastic about these designs as she sometime is' but agreed with the PMG and the Committee in approving the Restall designs and gave her approval.

On 17 March Beaumont wrote to Harrisons saying that the Queen had approved the designs by Andrew Restall, and enclosed the essays approved for colour and design so that production could begin.

STAMPS DELAYED

On 7 April the Post Office issued a Press and Broadcast Notice stating that 9d and 1s 6d stamps would be issued on 17 May to mark the Centenary of the International Telecommunication Union. However, on 12 May the PMG announced with regret that an unofficial ban on overtime by staff at the Post Office Supplies Department made it necessary to postpone the issue. Revised dates would be announced as soon as possible. Similarly the stamps commemorating the life of Sir Winston Churchill had to be postponed; these were originally to go on sale on 24 May.

PAYMENT TO ARTISTS

On 13 April Beaumont wrote to Michael Goaman saying that unfortunately on this occasion his designs had not been accepted. He was therefore paid 120 guineas (£126). Beaumont also wrote to Andrew Restall with a payment of 500 guineas (£525) for his accepted designs.

PREMATURE ISSUE

On 5 May Mead of PSD sent a telex to the Postal Controller at Postal Headquarters (PHQ) Scotland, PHQ Northern Ireland, Post Office North West Region Manchester and Post Office North East Region Leeds. It stated that stocks of ITU stamps had been sent to their Head Offices from Supplies Department Edinburgh and asked that the Head Postmasters be instructed not to distribute these to sub offices until further notice.

On 23 July the Head Postmaster Staines wrote to PSD saying that the previous evening four envelopes were noticed with ITU stamps. Two bore the 9d and two the 1s 6d stamp. The sender was not known and the envelopes, although sealed, had no contents. All four were addressed to the same addressee in England.

On 25 October the Head Postmaster Hull wrote to PSD saying that a letter addressed to Denmark was noticed at that office with a 9d ITU stamp. The item was posted in the philatelic posting box at Hull: 25 October was the first day of issue of the United Nations 20th Anniversary stamps. The Head Postmaster added that the ITU stamps had not yet been received at his office.

In both cases the date was obliterated and the items sent to their destination.

Premature release on this small scale was not uncommon and on this occasion did not seem to be linked with the change of date of issue. However, it is known that the Philatelic Bureau sent supplies in error to reach a dealer on the original date of 17 May, and another dealer received his supply on 27 May.

THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

On 21 June the PMG announced in Parliament revised dates for several of that year's special stamps, including the ITU Centenary now to go on sale on 15 November 1965.

The two stamps were printed in five colours, pink, blue, red, black and violet, and included the Dorothy Wilding portrait of the Queen in the top right hand corner with the denomination below. The legend 'International Telecommunication Union' and the dates '1865 1965' also featured. The word 'Telecommunication' was in the singular, correct in the English text of the Geneva Convention.

Printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Ltd, the stamps were issued both with and without phosphor bands.

Six essays, of designs by Goaman and Restall, are held by the British Postal Museum & Archive.

FIRST DAY COVERS

Special philatelic posting boxes were provided at three London Offices, namely Trafalgar Square BO, London SWDO and London ECD0 (Chief Office), and at 61 provincial head post offices. Items bearing the stamps posted in these boxes received a 'First Day of Issue' cancellation applied by a rubber handstamp. The Post Office first produced covers for the Shakespeare issue the previous year, and continued to do so for all but a few subsequent issues: the ITU was one of the exceptions together with Salvation Army, Joseph Lister, Commonwealth Arts, UN and England Winners. These were all issued in 1965, except for England Winners in 1966.

THE POSTMASTER GENERAL'S GIFTS

As was usual practice, the PMG sent gifts of these stamps to the Queen, Princess Margaret, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons, previous Postmasters Generals and Assistant Postmasters General, the Postmasters General (or equivalent Ministers) of the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth, members of the PMG's Stamp Advisory Committee, and the designer.

QUANTITIES SOLD

Ordinary

9d – 5,321,880

1s 6d – 5,287,920

Phosphor
9d – 556,080
1s 6d – 589,800

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 30 June 1966. The 1s 6d phosphor sold out in December 1965.

Andy Pendlebury
February 1995

REFERENCES

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'Collecting British First Day Covers' by N C Porter. A G Bradbury.

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB 73 issued 7 April 1965

PB 119 issued 21 June 1965

PB 261 issued 10 November 1965.