

## British Technology

1966



A memorandum from the Postmaster General (PMG), Anthony Wedgwood Benn, dated 21 September 1965, contained a draft programme for special stamps in 1966. It listed nine possible issues, four of which were intended to be pictorial rather than commemorative. Until 1966 special stamps had been issued by the GPO to commemorate a specific event or anniversary; now, with the encouragement of the PMG, it was proposed to have stamps illustrating themes rather than events. The third such pictorial issue was tentatively scheduled for 12 September 1966, the theme being 'British technology with perhaps special emphasis on aviation', as 1966 marked the centenary of the Royal Aeronautical Society: this memorandum proposed that the 'British Technology' stamps correspond with this centenary, while the PMG remarked that 'the Concorde might be an appropriate subject for one of the stamps'.

A meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 11 November 1965 was told that none of the themes for the pictorial issues in 1966 had been decided. However, it is clear the PMG had a firm idea what these themes would be, and by early February 1966 preparations for the British Technology stamps were well in hand. A memorandum to the PMG on 11 February 1966 referred to four separate stamps, 4d, 6d, 1s 3d and 1s 6d. These denominations were chosen, rather than a se-tenant block of one value adopted for the British Bird issue, because it would 'provide greater variety and, more important, more philatelic revenue'.

The files include a draft production timetable for the British Technology stamps:

Invitation to Artists - 7 April 1966

Design to Printer - 13 May

Essays to GPO - 6 June

Approved essays to Printer - 24 June

Requisitions by - 15 July

Completion of Deliveries to Supplies Department - 5 August

Dispatch to Head Offices - from 30 August to 1 September

Issue Date - 12 September.

---

## INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

On 3 March 1966 the SAC was asked to nominate artists for the stamps. The names of Andrew Restall, David and Ann Gillespie, and Henry and Joyce Collins were put forward and invited to submit designs that same day.

On 4 March the GPO wrote to both Harrison & Sons Ltd and Bradbury Wilkinson also inviting them to submit designs. These stamp printing firms were instructed to submit artwork as the collective effort of their design departments rather than the work of individual artist. All those invited confirmed their acceptance.

Enclosed were 'Instructions to Artists' designed to assist artists in the preparation of designs. The requirement was to prepare a set, or sets, of four designs of 4d, 6d, 1s 3d and 1s 6d, the finished stamps to be double the definitive size, while artwork was to be four times linear stamp size; designs could be horizontal or vertical.

They were to include the denomination 'in clear Arabic numerals' and to include the artist's own profile portrait of the Queen in either white or black. The designers were advised that this might, at some later stage, be replaced by an approved profile portrait still in development at that time.

The stamps would be printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd. using photogravure. The address and telephone number of the printer was provided and artists were encouraged to consult directly on any technical matters.

The designs were to be in no more than five colours on 'good-quality white board'. The final date for submissions was Monday, 25 April 1966. The fee for each design was 60 guineas with a maximum of 240 guineas to any one artist. For adopted designs there was further payment of 190 guineas giving a total per design of 250 guineas. All designs would become 'the absolute property of the Postmaster General' upon submission.

While artists were told that the theme, or themes, was at their discretion, a number of suggestions were listed:

The building of the Severn Bridge;  
The electrification of the Euston-Manchester-Liverpool railway line;  
'Aviation', specific recommendations included Concorde;  
the invention of the jet-engine;  
'Any other subjects which emphasise Britain's contribution to world technology.'

It was stated that although designs could be symbolic or pictorial, it was preferable that they be pictorial.

---

## SUBMITTED DESIGNS

A total of 37 designs were received:

Henry & Joyce Collins - 8 (received 25 April);

Bradbury Wilkinson - 6 (received 25 April);

David and Ann Gillespie - 14;

Harrison & Sons - 5 (received 26 April);

Andrew Restall - 4.

The files also list a number of 'non-commissioned' designs, presumably the work of members of the public and/or artists who were not officially invited. There are 14 such designs listed:

N and M J Rogers - 5 designs;

W G Rumley - 5 designs;

Kitson-Fowler - 1 design;

R J Dymond - 2 designs;

M Couch - 1 design.

---

## SELECTION PROCESS

A meeting of the SAC was held on 3 May 1966: present were James Fitton (Chairman), Sir John Wilson, Prof. R Guyatt, M Gray, F H K Henrion, Mrs C G Tomrley, Miss C McFarlane, plus the PMG and D H Pentecost, A A Mead, D H Beaumont and Miss Mantz representing the GPO, and R F York of Harrisons. The meeting saw the 37 commissioned designs; it is not clear whether the unsolicited designs were seen.

The Collins' designs were rejected. Restall's design showing Windscale was selected as a first choice. The Committee felt, however, that Restall had used an 'unorthodox' representation of the Queen's head which was too dark for use on a dark background. It was agreed that Harrisons be instructed to alter this design. Of the 14 designs from the Gillespies' three were selected as first choice, 'Aviation', 'The Radio Telescope' and 'Exports' (Jaguar E-type, Mini).

The second choice again included 'Aviation' plus a further three Gillespies' designs, 'Jodrell Bank', 'Power Stations' (Windscale) and 'Electrification'.

Restall was also asked to make modifications to two further designs, showing Severn Bridge and the Hovercraft, to serve as alternatives to the Gillespies' designs.

The feeling of the SAC was one of disappointment at the quality of the designs. The PMG suggested turning to the album of stamp designs produced at his request by David Gentleman as a number had a technological theme so he arranged that they be submitted to the following meeting. The designs suggested by the PMG included:

four stamps showing connected 19<sup>th</sup> century railway carriages;

A stamp featuring the Severn Bridge;

Aviation designs featuring Concorde, VC-10, the Trident and Lightning jet-fighters.

The GPO forwarded a total of nine designs, six by the Gillespies, three by Restall (presumably Restall had modified two of his designs as requested), to Harrisons on 9 May 1966 to prepare essays. The GPO asked that essays of the Gillespie designs show the approved Gentleman portrait of the Queen's head in white, whilst essays of the Restall designs were to have the profile in a variety of shades specified in an enclosure to the printers.

On 23 May, Supplies Department asked that the issue date of the British Technology stamps be delayed until 19 September. It pointed out that the delay in issuing the British Bird stamps (originally 15 July, now 8 August), the introduction of a new range of 23 National Insurance stamps and an issue date of 12 September for the Technology stamp would very probably create problems in the warehouse. This request was passed to the PMG on 3 June and the new issue date of 19 September was announced in Parliament on 22 July 1966.

---

## ESSAYS

The essays were sent to the GPO between 9 and 13 June 1966. A number were still outstanding and these were delivered to a meeting of the SAC on 15 June.

---

## INDEPENDENT ADVICE

The GPO took the precaution of checking the accuracy of technical aspects of the designs with various outside agencies.

The Atomic Energy Authority considered the two designs that depicted their facility at Windscale in Cumbria (by Gillespie and Restall). It rejected the Gillespie design on the grounds that the representation of multiple chimneys gave Windscale the appearance of a coal-fired power station. It disliked the 'pear-shaped' appearance of the Nuclear Reactor on

Restall's design but remained keen that the set feature a stamp featuring atomic power: it therefore asked that this design be modified.

Five representatives of the Ministry of Aviation inspected the relevant Gillespie design. Four of the representatives failed to recognise the cross-section of Frank Whittle's jet-engine; it was suggested this be presented at an angle of 30 to 45 degrees. The officials were similarly unimpressed by the depiction of Concorde, the other feature of this design. A number of inaccuracies were noted:

the tail of the aircraft was felt to be too thick and too long;  
the nose of the aircraft was not pointed enough;  
curve of the wing was incorrect.

The Ministry representatives mentioned that the whole Concorde project was being reviewed, which the GPO interpreted as a possibility that the project might be cancelled.

---

## FINAL SELECTION

The SAC met again on 15 June 1966; present this time were J Fitton (Chairman), P I Fellows, Lady Sempill, Prof. R Guyatt, A Games, M Gray, F H K Henrion, Mrs C G Tomrley (Secretary), J N White, Miss Mantz, plus the PMG and D P Wrattton (Private Secretary to the PMG), and A A Mead and D H Beaumont of the GPO, and R F York of Harrisons.

This meeting was informed of the comments from outside authorities. As a result the Gillespie Windscale design was rejected. The suggestions regarding the Gillespie design were conveyed but the Committee felt that altering the angle of the plan of the jet-engine would have too radical an effect on the design. The PMG showed an alternative, unsolicited Concorde design by Michael E J Merry, but this too was rejected. The four first choice designs agreed were:

4d by Gillespie

6d by Gillespie

1s 3d by Restall (the land element to be removed, and the hovercraft to be made horizontal)

1s 6d by Restall (reactor to be re-designed, and Queen's head amended).

The Committee also considered the designs to be presented to the Queen as second choice. The minutes reveal that Gentleman's designs were shown to the Committee but 'none were thought appropriate'. The only design which was selected as a reserve was Restall's depicting the Severn Bridge.

The PMG was not impressed with the designs chosen by the SAC; immediately following the meeting there was a possibility he would 'decline the Committee's recommendations'. In the event he approved the decisions of the SAC.

---

## ROYAL APPROVAL

The PMG wrote to the Queen on 28 June 1966 enclosing five designs, all subject to listed amendments:

Gillespie 4d - the Jodrell Bank radio telescope - Her Majesty's profile will be moved further to the right.

Gillespie 6d - the Jaguar E Mk2 and the Mini - Her Majesty's profile will be moved to the right and the denomination to the top left hand corner; we also propose to leave a more unimpeded silhouette of the Jaguar by eliminating the Mini immediately behind it.

Restall 1s 3d - the SRN6 Hovercraft will not be shown landing but the sea area will be extended across the base of the design and the cloud effect eliminated.

Restall 1s 6d - the advanced gas-cooled reactor at Windscale - Her Majesty's head to be replaced by a silhouette in black, and the shape of the reactor to be spherical.

Restall's Severn Bridge design was presented as a second choice for the 4d value and possible alternative to any of the other values.

A reply sent from the Palace of Holyroodhouse on 30 June 1966 contained Her Majesty's approval of the four first choice designs.

---

## PRODUCTION DETAILS

The approved essays were delivered to Harrisons on 25 July 1966. The artists were paid in full for their work on 9 August as follows:

A Restall (successful) - £651

D Gillespie (successful) - £651

H and J Collins (unsuccessful) - £252

Harrison & Sons (unsuccessful) - £252

Bradbury Wilkinson (unsuccessful) - £252.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 120, on white paper with the multiple crown watermark. Phosphor lined stamps were also produced.

In late August it was discovered that a number of sheets of the 1s 6d had been printed with one of two errors:

either the top of the Queen's head protruded above the top edge of the stamp onto the white margin; or

the head dropped causing the legend at the bottom of the design ('Advanced gas-cooled reactor, Windscale') to cut into the white margin at the bottom of the stamp.

It was not known how many sheets included these flaws, nor have many had already been included in deliveries to offices. A memorandum was circulated to all Head and District Postmasters on 2 September 1966 asking them to check all stocks of the 1s 6d stamps and to return any faulty sheets. This memorandum pointed out that on some sheets only the tail of the 'g' in 'gas-cooled' in the lettering cut into the margin, and they were told not to regard such sheets as faulty.

The stamps were put on sale on Monday, 19 September 1966. The following sales are reported.

#### Ordinary

- 4d – 79,112,278
- 6d – 11,087,516
- 1s 3d – 5,199,900
- 1s 6d – 5,284,069

#### Phosphor

- 4d – 12,737,520
- 6d – 2,388,720
- 1s 3d – 1,431,000
- 1s 6d – 1,414,320.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 18 September 1967, although the 6d phosphor stamps were reported as selling out prior to that date.

---

## SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

The GPO produced both first day envelopes and presentation packs for this issue. On 5 July the Public Relations Department invited Harrison & Wilkinson Associates to submit designs for both the envelope and the pack for a fee of 100 guineas.

The envelope measured 6½ inches (165mm) by 4¼ inches (108mm) and was printed in three colours. Goonhilly Aerial is shown in blue on a grey background with 'GPO Commemorative

Cover Technology Pictorial Issue' in black. Initial orders were for 100,000 covers though the GPO later increased the quantity to 140,000. The cost of a cover was 6d; the Philatelic Bureau provided a full first day cover service for an inclusive price of 6s 6d.

The presentation packs contained mint stamps and information about aspects of the stamps. The Ministry of Technology provided a write-up on 'Achievements of British Technology'. These packs were priced at 4s 2d. The GPO ordered 100,000 packs; sales are recorded of 35,437.

Special philatelic posting boxes were provided at 83 major offices around the UK. Items bearing the stamps posted in these boxes were cancelled with rubber handstamps with 'First day of issue'.

A special press showing of the stamps was held at GPO headquarters on 9 August 1966: the Gillespies and Andrew Restall were invited to attend. A Press and Broadcast Notice was published the same date.

---

## GIFT SCHEME

Gifts comprising a first day cover and presentation pack were sent to the Queen, Princess Margaret, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the House of Commons, members of the SAC (8), the designers (2), former Postmasters and Assistant Postmasters General (15), Postmaster General, or equivalent, of self-governing countries of the Commonwealth (19).

---

## COMPLAINTS

The 6d stamp featuring the Mini and Jaguar E-type attracted a wave of protest, particularly from those connected with the Ford Company in the UK. Ford dealers around the country were highly critical of the stamp and even the Managing Director of the company felt compelled to write on 12 August.

The protests were united in the belief that the stamp represented a 'free plug' for the two cars. The Managing Director pointed out that Government sponsorship of the car industry would normally be very welcome. However, in his view, this stamp publicised 'a minority portion of our total national effort' to the detriment of other manufacturers.

The majority of protests argued the relative merits of Ford and its products compared to the cars and companies represented.

S BATES  
8 March 1993



---

## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive file:  
P28/72 - Pictorial Issue (British Technology) 1966