

## SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

# England's World Cup Football Victory

1966



While internal GPO correspondence in the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) files refer to the idea of a World Cup victory stamp as being suggested by the Postmaster General (PMG), further evidence would suggest otherwise. A memorandum of 3 August states that the idea, then passed to the PMG, came from Paul Adorian, Managing Director of Rediffusion Ltd, who broached the idea to the Deputy Director General, A Wolstonecroft, when the two had met at a lunch during the Summer.

On 30 July 1966, England beat West Germany 4-2 at Wembley Stadium in the World Cup Final; plans for producing a World Cup Victory stamp, however, were already well in hand. A memorandum to the PMG on 29 July states the GPO's intention to produce the 4d World Cup stamp with the wording 'England-Winners' in the white space at the head of the stamp. Although the files refer to the stamp as being an overprint, this is not technically accurate as new cylinders were prepared with the stamps specially printed in photogravure: there was no overprinting. To minimise the delay between the victory and the issue, it was intended that the print-run of the stamp be limited to 100,000 sheets or 12,000,000 stamps. This would produce roughly three or four days supply of stamps to be distributed only to offices in England. It was aimed to release these stamps as soon as possible after England's victory; it was originally thought this would be 22 August but was later revised to 18 August.

In a Press and Broadcast Notice of 1 August the PMG announced there was to be a World Cup Victory issue.

A further press announcement of 6 August 1966 stated that the overprinted Victory stamp would not be phosphor-treated. Offices that, in the normal course of events, received phosphor stamps would be issued with non-phosphor stamps in this instance.

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## DISTRIBUTION DETAILS

Owing to the limited quantity of stamps issued Postmasters were not required to follow the normal procedure of submitting requisitions. The GPO had decided that the stamps would be allocated to offices by the Supplies Department. Quantities received by offices would be determined by the classification granted it as follows:

Class A offices: 1,000 sheets (120,000 stamps)

Class B offices: 800 sheets (96,000 stamps)

Class C+D offices: 400 sheets (48,000 stamps)

Class E+F offices: 150 sheets (18,000 stamps).

In addition the Philatelic Bureau was allocated 10,000 sheets, a tenth of the total production. At first the GPO considered this quantity would be 'in excess of their requirements', but by 12 August orders for over 12,000 sheets (1,440,000 stamps) had been accepted by the Bureau.

The stamps were printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd. at its High Wycombe plant and delivered to the Supplies Department at Hemel Hempstead. From there they were distributed to Head Offices and District Offices between 11 and 13 August. Postmasters were to then make 'suitably scaled distribution' to sub-offices.

While intended that the stamp be only available at post offices in England (including the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man), it was sold at Army Post Offices abroad and was put on sale in Edinburgh on 22 August to mark the opening of the Edinburgh Festival. The files show that the Director of the Wales and Border Counties Region personally requested that the stamps be put on sale in his Monmouthshire offices, namely Newport, Pontypool and Abergavenny, as it was normal practice to sell all English definitives as well as the Welsh Regionals in these offices. There is some indication that the allocation to these offices was: Newport – 400; Pontypool – 150; Abergavenny – 150.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 120 on ordinary paper with the multiple crown watermark appearing sideways. Although the planned production had been twelve million stamps, the actual sales total was 12,452,640. This stamp sold out soon after issue.

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## PHILATELIC SERVICES

The Philatelic Bureau did not service first day covers for this issue. It had been originally intended to withhold pre-release facilities, but it was realised that such a decision might lead to mailing companies purchasing the entire stock of local offices. Given the limited distribution of the stamps it was decided to allow pre-release provided the stamps were obtained through the Philatelic Bureau.

Special philatelic posting boxes were provided at 68 selected offices throughout England: items posted in these boxes were cancelled using special first day of issue handstamps.

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## POST OFFICE GIFT CARDS

The GPO regarded this as a new stamp in its own right, so it was suggested on 12 August that the PMG follow the normal practice of sending gifts. It was decided to send a specially-produced card containing a mint copy of the 4d stamp.

Thick white card was used; opened out it measured 347mm wide by 151mm but was folded twice to measure 116mm wide. The front featured the wording 'Postage stamps of the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II' and the Royal Coat of Arms embossed in gold while, in the bottom half, appeared 'World Cup Victory issue 18 August 1966' in a rectangle. A mint copy of the stamp was mounted on the centre panel, while the third panel was inscribed on both sides. The inner part was inscribed 'The stamp was designed by David Gentleman and photogravure printed by Messrs. Harrison & Sons, Ltd.' while the outer part read:

'With the compliments of  
The Postmaster General  
The Rt Hon Edward Short MP  
18 August 1966  
General Post Office  
London.'

Apart from the embossing, all the print was in black.

The recipients of these cards were those who had earlier received the World Cup stamps, but in addition cards were sent to Paul Adorian, Sir Stanley Rous (President of Federation of International Football Associations), Harold Mayes and Dennis Follows (Football Association), Alf Ramsey (England football team Manager), England team members (22), Medical and Coaching staff (3). It is believed 80 cards were distributed, on 18 August.

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## COMPLAINTS ABOUT SHORTAGE OF STAMPS

The demand for the stamps was understandably high, so much that the press reports described it as 'exceptional' with large queues at a number of offices. Given the demand, supplies were swiftly exhausted. Internal correspondence shows that the GPO had not anticipated the public response and, only a few days after the stamps had been issued, felt the need to defend its actions. A note to the PMG of 25 August admitted that the twelve million stamps were only about one-tenth of the normal quantity that would be printed for a 4d special stamp. However, it argued that 'Twelve million stamps seemed a reasonable number at the time' and was a sufficient quantity to last three or four days under 'ordinary sale conditions'. It claimed that press speculation of a shortage of the stamps had the effect of stimulating the demand from philatelists and 'speculators' to such an extent that many offices sold out in hours.

There was, predictably enough, what the GPO described as a 'mass of complaints from people who were disappointed'. Many people were extremely dissatisfied with the GPO for producing what was felt to be an insufficient quantity. The GPO realised it had made a serious error of judgement in this instance: a memorandum of 25 August states 'I am sorry none of us foresaw the dangers of so limited an issue.'

SIMON BATES  
17 FEBRUARY 1993.

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## REFERENCE

British Postal Museum & Archive file:  
P29 / 72 - 1966 World Cup Football.