

Sir Francis Chichester's World Voyage

Date of issue: 24 JULY 1967



On 27 August 1966 Francis Chichester left Plymouth in the 53-foot ketch 'Gipsy Moth IV' to sail around the world single-handed. After an outward journey of 107 days via the Cape of Good Hope he reached Sydney, Australia, on 12 December, greeted by cheering crowds and whistling ferries. His departure for the return leg around Cape Horn seven weeks later was even livelier, yachts, launches, dinghies, tugs and boats of every description having gathered to see him on his way, with surfboarders, three boatloads of armed police, at least one bagpiper, and (to quote 'The Times') 'lithe girls in bikinis'. Two days previously, on 27 January 1967, he had been knighted for his record of achievement in the navigation and handling of small craft - he had already made several solo Atlantic crossings, been named Yachtsman of the Year in 1960, and awarded the CBE in 1964. By May 1967 he was once more approaching British waters amid growing public excitement.

Edward Short, the Postmaster General (PMG), had stated that there would be no additions to the 1967 stamp programme already announced; however on 15 May he contacted the Director of Postal Services, G R Downes, to investigate whether a suitable design for a single stamp might be ready by the time of Sir Francis' return, which it was thought would be about 26 or 27 May. It was suggested that David Gentleman might be able to produce something in the time, in 'the grand Sir Francis Drake manner', by which the PMG meant a fully pictorial and dramatic depiction of the occasion. David Gentleman proved to be on holiday in India until mid-June; however, two other artists were contacted on 15 May, and both agreed verbally to submit designs. They were Michael Goaman, and Peter Gauld should Goaman's design fail expectations. The stamp printers Harrison & Sons Ltd were also approached on 15 May; the company claimed it could start providing stamps to the Supplies Department 14 days after receiving approved designs, although this was dismissed as 'over-

optimistic' by Don Beaumont of the Postal Services Department. His own estimate was that if Harrisons received approved designs by 29 May, cylinders would be prepared by 16 June, deliveries to Supplies completed by 30 June, and stocks supplied to counter offices by 13 July: the issue date might therefore be set for 17 July.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

Formal invitations in writing went to both designers on 17 May. The instructions stated the treatment should be dramatic and pictorial; no more than four colours should be used, the Queen's head to be the cameo profile now standard, and no wording or value should be shown as these were still awaiting a decision. A flat fee of 60 guineas was payable for work submitted, plus 190 guineas if a design was accepted. Both artists were encouraged to submit alternative designs as an extra precaution; Goaman was offered an additional 50 guineas to design a first day cover in two colours. A deadline of 22 May was given. In the meantime a decision was reached on the value of the proposed stamp; the 4d and 1s 6d denominations were briefly considered, but by 19 May the PMG had decided that a 1s 9d be issued. This was not welcomed by the Public Relations Department, on whose behalf Toby O'Brien warned in a memorandum of 22 May that 'the PMG is likely to experience considerable public criticism' if the stamp was not issued in a 'more popular' denomination. The PSD, however, under Mr Downes and J R Baxter with particular responsibility for stamp policy, were firmly behind the PMG, and outlined their arguments in their own memorandum of the same date:

Apart from the practical difficulties of producing enough stamps in a 4d value to meet demand - which would lead to a repetition of the 'World Cup - England Winners' situation - we will of course shortly be producing the 4d stamp in the new definitive series and a 4d stamp in the 'Paintings' issue [the two last factors applied to the 1s 6d value also] ... The best thing would be to produce the Chichester stamp in the 1s 9d value - which would have the merit of (a) bringing in as much philatelic revenue from a much smaller production run, (b) giving the stamp wider circulation because the 1s 9d value is used internationally, (c) linking the occasion especially with Australia, to which 1s 9d is the basic airmail letter rate.

It was anticipated that the issue would enjoy popular appeal, and the PMG's own viewpoint was that the opportunity to maximise philatelic revenue should be taken - 'the higher we could make the value of the Chichester stamp the better' - and at the foot of O'Brien's note of the PRD's misgivings he commented 'We want to make money!' The value could also be justified to emphasise the Antipodean connection; Chichester had lived in New Zealand between the wars and made several historic flights to and from Australia and New Zealand as a pioneer of aviation between 1929 and 1936.

PRESENTATION OF DESIGNS

On 22 May the designs were to hand. Goaman had been unwell and had only been able to complete four preliminary sketches; Gauld produced three comparatively finished designs. The PSD listed these as A, B, C, D and E, F, G respectively although not all can be identified with absolute certainty.

A – ‘Gipsy Moth IV’ from port and slightly aft in high seas

B (or D) – Starboard in calm seas, sun and clouds on horizon; rough version on reverse

C – Port in high seas; Chichester on deck

D (or B) – ‘Close up’ from starboard aft; yacht on side of wave

E (or G) – Starboard in stormy green seas

F – Port and slightly aft; sea grey-blue, sky black/grey/white/blue left to right

G (or E) – Yacht as ‘F’ but smaller; sky and sea in lurid purples and violets.

All designs were in the horizontal format, except for A which was vertical. C included the caption ‘Gypsy [sic] Moth IV’ - this was against the written instructions, but Goaman may have been recalling his earlier verbal briefing in this instance. Gauld’s designs all include the value, suggesting that the artist had possibly been in communication with PSD since 19 May: F was reportedly the best of the three.

In a minute to the PMG dated 22 May Baxter gave his opinion that A and C by Goaman would both make good stamps with the addition of colouring and more detail - he particularly favoured C as this would include a figure representing Chichester himself (the figure was too minute to be recognised without prior knowledge). Gauld’s designs were more nearer completion; they were also dramatic as urged by the instructions, but for this reason encountered a problem which Baxter described as follows: ‘It would invite derisive comment from yachtsmen to show a combination of mountainous seas and the boat under full sail; we must therefore keep the seas within limits if an interesting picture of the yacht is to be shown.’ In Gauld’s designs ‘the setting of the sails and other details seem to be inaccurate’, although F was certainly the best of his set. Goaman had reconciled drama with nautical accuracy more successfully, which Baxter attributed to his experience of the sea, although it is not certain whether this was more recent than wartime naval service. Baxter’s own commitment to strict accuracy was not total, as he wondered whether the designs might be refined to include ‘an imaginary headland’ representing Cape Horn, where it was believed the vessel had passed out of sight of land (although Chichester’s own radio log records that he sighted Cape Horn Island 30 miles north-east). In conclusion Baxter reported that Goaman was being asked to complete his designs A and C.

REVIEW OF FINISHED ARTWORK

Working in collaboration as usual with his wife Sylvia (an equally experienced designer of stamps) Goaman was able to supply practically finished artwork for both designs by 25 May, plus a partly finished version of his 'close up' sketch to which Chichester's head and shoulders emerging from 'Gipsy Moth IV' cockpit had been added. The artist felt that this last design should be ruled out, as in stamp form the white of the boat's deck, hull and sails would overwhelm the blue and green colours of the sea to an unacceptable degree. The two designs were submitted to the PMG for his consideration as A (as in the original list) and B (originally C). Edward Short's Assistant Private Secretary, T Scott, commented: 'B can be faulted technically on the ground that there is too much sail for the type of sea'; however, Sylvia Goaman assured him that both the sea and sails could easily be modified as necessary 'without spoiling the general impression'. Photographs of both pieces of artwork were taken, and the originals returned to the Goamans for the finishing touches to be applied - these consisted of adding the caption 'Gipsy Moth IV' to both designs (this had only been finally decided the previous day) and placing the value and Queen's head on B. The tiny figure of Chichester was given white instead of dark trousers to make it stand out more clearly.

On the same day, 25 May, the photographed designs were submitted to the Queen for her consideration, the PMG's covering letter making it clear that the GPO wished to retain its freedom of choice out of the two on the grounds of 'technical suitability for reproduction in stamp form', although The Queen's opinion was nonetheless sought; colour essays would be submitted when available. This unusual approach to the Palace was agreed between Scott and Baxter, so that the design on which the forthcoming stamp would be based could hopefully be announced immediately on Sir Francis' arrival. The Queen replied the following day, indicating a clear preference for design A; however, although the PMG had also preferred A in the first rough version, he had changed his mind on seeing the more completed artwork and now agreed with PSD that B was the better option of the two. A telephone call to Sir Martin Charteris, a senior official in the Royal Household, soon brought the reply that the Queen would in fact find B acceptable.

Two days later, on the evening of Sunday, 28 May, Sir Francis sailed into Plymouth Sound after covering 29,600 miles in 226 days; the rapturous welcome with which he was greeted included an escorting armada of one aircraft carrier and 400 to 500 assorted small craft, an estimated crowd of 250,000 well-wishers on land, a 10-gun salute from the Royal Artillery, telegrams from the Queen and Prime Minister, and Lady Chichester with two bottles of champagne. The duty officer at GPO Headquarters was immediately alerted by prior arrangement and telephoned the prepared text of a press release through to the Press Association, while copies of the photographed design were made available from the London Chief Office, EC1. A written press announcement was released on 30 May.

Meanwhile the original artwork of the two designs had been returned to the Goamans on 27 May; Scott reported to Baxter in a minute of 2 June that a finished version of B had been produced, seen and approved by the PMG, 'subject to such comment as Stuart Rose, the PMG's Typographical Adviser, might have on the lettering, especially of the value which looks a bit lopsided'. It was additionally decided that the Queen's head should be grey rather than black. The Goamans also completed A, presumably as a precaution against the PMG's reversion to his original preference.

COLOUR ESSAY APPROVED BY QUEEN

At this point the projected issue date of 17 July had still not been announced; originally it had been on this date that Chichester was to be made a Freeman of Barnstaple, but on 7 June this was indefinitely deferred on account of his illness following his return. At a meeting on 9 July, however, it was decided to announce an issue date of 24 July. This would allow 'a little more time to give effective publicity for first day covers and other philatelic arrangements', while any later announcement would mean a delay beyond 24 July and a clash with the new definitives being issued in early August. The announcement was duly made in answer to a Parliamentary question on 15 June. In the meantime the first proofs had been received from Harrisons, and were displayed at a special press showing on 20 June. A total of 18 essays was supplied by Harrisons on 13, 20 and 25 June.

A colour essay was forwarded to the Queen for approval on the same day as the press launch, with the advice that the head on the issued stamps would be in a lighter shade of grey than shown on the example; the Queen's acceptance was notified the following day, 21 June.

Michael Goaman submitted his artwork for the first day cover, and a print order for 500,000 covers was placed with HM Stationery Office on 5 June. The first 100,000 reached Supplies on 19 June and the rest by the end of the month. On 5 July payment was authorised of 60 guineas (£63) to Peter Gauld for his unsuccessful designs and 300 guineas (£315) to Goaman for his work on the accepted stamp and first day cover.

STAMPS SOLD (AND UNSOLD)

The stamps were issued on 24 July, in sheets of 120 on chalk-coated unwatermarked paper, with three phosphor bands applied by flexography (a form of letterpress used mainly for this purpose). As usual they were printed in photogravure by Harrisons, the colours being black, brown-red, light emerald, and blue. They were in double definitive size (1.6 inches by 0.95

inches), the actual design size excluding the gutter being 1.5 inches by 0.82 inches. Total sales were:

Total printed excluding waste - 24,362,040

Unsold - 14,301,173

Net sales - 10,060,867.

When the issue was withdrawn on 23 July 1968 nearly 60 per cent remained unsold. This was because of the excessive number printed rather than poor sales – more were actually sold than of the two other 1s 9d special issues of 1967 (8.2 million British Wild Flowers, 7.5 million British Discovery, but these had each achieved just under 60 per cent of the totals printed, which were 13.7 million and 13.3 million respectively). In the case of the Chichester 1s 9d, however, the total issued was nearly twice this level (the quantity of first day covers ordered was also abnormally high). The most obvious explanation seems to be a belief that on this occasion the normal selling patterns of higher value special stamps would be overturned by public excitement. The general rule of thumb was that the higher the face value of special stamps, the slower the rate at which they sold. Edward Short may be forgiven for assuming that a 1s 9d stamp would automatically bring more revenue than a 4d, but the feeling remains that those in the PSD should have been able to give him better advice than the uncritical support he received.

FIRST DAY COVERS AND POSTMARKS

Sales figures for the first day cover are unknown and no presentation packs were produced on this occasion. A total of 44 covers were prepared for the PMG's gift list, which on this occasion included John Grant of the Council of Industrial Design, Stuart Rose, and Sir Francis himself. Another special order of 170 covers was prepared for Sir Francis' own company (Francis Chichester Ltd, navigation specialists and map and guide publishers) which he had set up in 1945 on return from wartime air force service. Sir Francis also undertook to autograph collectors' covers at 10s a time, the proceeds going to the Outward Bound Trust. The Trust also produced its own covers for the issue and arranged for these to receive the House of Commons cds postmark. A handstamp of special design was produced for use by the Philatelic Bureau, and two others of similar design were available from Greenwich, London SE10, and Plymouth, Devon. Elsewhere the ordinary 'First Day of Issue' handstamp was as usual provided through special posting boxes; one of these was exceptionally made available at Barnstaple, Devon, Sir Francis' birthplace. FDI handstamps from Gosport, Hampshire (another centre of the yachting world) and Chichester, Sussex would also prove of particular interest.

Another special handstamp, available on the day of issue, was that provided at Colchester, Essex from 22 July to 19 August for the Essex International Youth Camp, East Mersea.

Various slogan postmarks came into use on 24 July, though none had any connection with the issue. Later that year, however, Barnstaple used the slogan 'Barnstaple Salutes its Famous Freeman Sir Francis Chichester' throughout October, plus a special handstamp on 12 October – 'Barnstaple Devon Honours Sir Francis Chichester'. It was on that day that Barnstaple finally accorded Sir Francis the honour of Freeman.

There was as usual a scattering of premature releases, none reportedly earlier than 22 July, and too widely scattered to occasion any special action, apart from the case of one individual who acquired six stamps and posted them all to himself on separate covers in his local letter box.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

MICHAEL GOAMAN, MSIA, was born in 1922. After wartime naval service he attended Reading University Art School and the Central School of Arts & Crafts, where he met a fellow student, Sylvia Priestley, whom he married in 1950. Both worked as freelance graphic designers: originally Michael Goaman specialised in packaging, publicity and display, and Sylvia Goaman in textile design, but after contributing a successful stamp design to the 1953 Coronation issue, the pair went into partnership as stamp designers. By 1967 they had designed well over 100 stamps, mainly for the Commonwealth, a set of new definitives for Fiji in 1959 winning the medal of the International Philatelic Art Society the following year. Michael Goaman was also employed as a design consultant by several postal administrations overseas. Between the Coronation and the end of the '60s, the Goamans produced an impressively large body of designs for the GPO for special and definitive stamps and other philatelic material, and their work was frequently issued. The two artists worked in close collaboration, although Sylvia Goaman tended to take responsibility for the depiction of flowers and other plants.

SIR FRANCIS CHICHESTER was born on 17 September 1901 and performed most of his feats of seamanship at an age when most men would have been contemplating retirement. He still had one more feat to perform - in 1971 he broke a speed record by sailing 'Gipsy Moth V' 1017¾ miles in five days. He died on 26 August 1972.

GILES ALLEN
20 April 1994

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