

## European Free Trade Association

Date of issue: 20 FEBRUARY 1967



In May 1960 an agreement known as the Stockholm Convention established the European Free Trade Association among eight member European nations. These were Britain, Austria, Denmark, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, and (as an associate member) Finland. The Principality of Liechtenstein was also part of EFTA by virtue of its customs union with Switzerland, rather than as a separate member. Britain had been the founder member of EFTA (and, with Denmark, would be the first to leave and join the EEC, in 1972). The main aim of EFTA was the mutual reduction of tariff barriers, and by early 1965 it was clear that this would be attained, three years ahead of schedule, by the end of the following year: 1 January 1967 would therefore mark the 'achievement of free trade', or more precisely, 'the abolition of import duties on industrial goods of EFTA origin traded within the area'.

On 18 March 1965 P G A Wakefield of the Foreign Office wrote to the GPO suggesting a special stamp to mark the achievement of free trade on 1 January 1967. The idea had been considered by a Board of Trade working party the previous year but dismissed without being brought to the GPO's attention; at that time no specific dates had been available with which the issue could be linked, as was deemed necessary. However, the Postmaster General (PMG), Anthony Wedgwood Benn, had relaxed this last requirement in December 1964. Wakefield hoped that something 'a little beyond the simple commemorative issue' might be produced, and included a number of suggestions:

One would hope the design would be adopted by all member countries. If we arrange a design competition for the stamp the winning design would be accepted more easily by members and the competition itself will generate further publicity. If it is necessary to include the head of the reigning monarchs or presidents of member countries, the design of the stamp could allow for this ... would it be possible to adopt a general EFTA stamp which would be current to the extent of the value marked on it in any EFTA country?

T P Hornsey of the Postal Services Department of the GPO was not enthused, 'this is the typical FO approach - supporting any idea, however wild or vague', and suggested 'a mild dose of cold water' in the response to Wakefield's letter. Despite this A A Mead of PSD replied to the Foreign Office on 2 April, cautiously conceding that the achievement of free trade merited a special issue within the PMG's criteria, and asked for the dates of any other special events that might be held to mark the occasion. He pointed out that the 1967 stamp programme would not, however, be settled for at least a year, namely at the beginning or middle of 1966.

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## **PRESSURE FOR 'INTERNATIONAL' DESIGN**

The Board of Trade, however, had warmly welcomed the Foreign Office's suggestions, of which they had been notified, and pressed the GPO to meet other postal administrations within EFTA with a view to securing agreement by the autumn that a stamp issue of 'agreed uniform design' be selected by international competition. The GPO had to decline any commitment at this stage as it was already under pressure to earmark dates for commemorative stamps as far ahead as 1970; there was no readiness to make an exception for EFTA. Meanwhile the Board of Trade was no more able than its colleagues in the Foreign Office to furnish details of any events with which an EFTA issue might be associated; the official starting date of 1 January 1967 was generally acknowledged as unsuitable for any special occasion to be organised. On 20 June A A Mead wrote to Mrs G D J Steel at the Board of Trade emphasising that as far as the GPO was concerned the whole period December 1966 to January 1967 was unsuitable for a special issue because of the Christmas pressure period and the necessary aftermath.

On 14 October Douglas Jay, President of the Board of Trade, wrote to the PMG that other EFTA countries, including the Swiss, were known to support the idea of a special stamp issue, and it was important that Britain should not be seen to lack enthusiasm. He asked if a firm commitment could be made to an issue during the early part of 1967. By this time the Department of Economic Affairs was also bringing pressure to bear on the GPO. On 18 October the Director of Postal Services, G R Downes, wrote a minute requesting that the dates of special events should once more be sought from the Board of Trade, and that the other EFTA postal administrations should be contacted for a pooling of plans and views on the proposed issue, if only to insure against the potential embarrassment of Britain acting alone. He felt that an adaptable common design could be attained by a competition similar to that organised for the annual CEPT issues of many European countries (in which the GPO had participated in 1960 and 1961).

At the beginning of November it was decided to defer a decision until the outcome of the EFTA meeting to be held in Geneva on 15 and 16 November; Austria, Norway, Portugal,

Sweden and Switzerland were ready to co-operate with Britain, while Denmark and Finland were sympathetic in principle. On 19 November it was reported that Sir John Coulson, the Secretary General of EFTA, would formally ask the GPO to play host to a design competition and take the lead in organising co-operation among the postal authorities of the member countries; the PMG thus received a letter from Coulson on 24 November, albeit it was somewhat vague.

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## **BREAKDOWN OF DESIGN COMPETITION**

A failure of communication seems to have taken place between the PMG and the GPO. On 20 December Wedgwood Benn wrote to Douglas Jay that the matter was in hand – ‘my officials are consulting their postal colleagues in the EFTA countries on the details of the project’. This was not, however, how his officials understood the situation; on 23 December Don Beaumont of PSD wrote in reply to a letter from the Swedish Post Office, asking when action was to be taken, that ‘we are still awaiting a formal communication from the EFTA Secretariat requesting us to go ahead ... we shall be getting in touch with members [of the other EFTA postal administrations] as soon as the official request is received’. From January through until March 1966 the PSD’s activities with regard to the international stamp design competition, that Britain had undertaken to host, were seemingly confined to a protracted correspondence with the Public Relations Department, Accountant General’s Department, Board of Trade and others about who was going to pay for it. Meanwhile Wedgwood Benn did not show his usual enthusiasm in pursuing or even checking on the project’s progress. Perhaps he was distracted by the General Election campaign. Perhaps there was another reason. In his letter of 24 November Coulson had warned that the Swiss considered the whole principle of stamps of ‘common design’, such as were envisaged, to be overdone, aesthetically monotonous and philatelically unappealing; the PMG responded that ‘our attitude towards the use of a single design for all the stamps is similar to Switzerland’s’. However, this remark was deleted from the final draft of his reply to Coulson, sent at the same time as his letter to Douglas Jay.

On 25 February 1966, Michael Young, head of the EFTA Information Centre at the Board of Trade, received a letter from the organisation’s Secretariat in Geneva indicating its concern at the apparent absence of any developments concerning the proposed postage stamps: ‘It may be, of course, that under this silence there is a busy hive of activity. If so, one would like to know a little more about it.’ Concern was also expressed in a letter to the GPO from the Finnish postal authorities sent on 1 March, while the other countries were similarly awaiting the lead from Britain. It became clear that the GPO’s commitment had been completely misappreciated by its officials, and during March and April strenuous attempts were made by the Postal Services Department to retrieve the situation. However, it was apparent that there was now no prospect of achieving a common design; Sweden was

already working on its own design by 8 March, while Switzerland had chosen the issue date, denominations and selection panel for its own EFTA stamps as early as 7 December 1965. On 13 May Eric Anglin of the Foreign Office agreed, in a reply to an earlier letter from A A Mead of PSD, that Britain should go ahead with a special stamp issue of its own and encourage its EFTA partners who were still uncommitted or awaiting a lead to do likewise. Ultimately nearly all the EFTA nations (including Liechtenstein but excepting Austria) issued stamps in the course of 1967 marking the achievement of free trade.

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## DESIGNERS CHOSEN

On 23 July the proposed issue was announced by A A Mead to the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID); the names of Jock Kinneir, Nicholas Jenkins and Peter Wildbur were put forward as suitable designers. It was agreed that designers might use either the official EFTA symbol (a ring of the eight flags with the ends enclosing an octagon shape, as used on the covers of publications such as 'EFTA Bulletin' and 'Trading with EFTA') or one of their own devising. There was some wariness within the GPO over the use of other countries' national flags on stamps since their forced rejection of a design including the North Korean flag in the course of producing the World Cup issue, some four months earlier; on this occasion, however, the Foreign Office when approached were positively eager that the EFTA nations' flags should be used.

Discussions on the timetable for the issue began at the end of July in consultation with the Supplies Department, who pointed out that a major new issue of National Insurance stamps was due in January 1967 and that this rendered a 'normal sized' issue of special postage stamps in late January or early February out of the question. It was thus decided that the values should not include the inland letter base rate of 4d, which would reduce the issue to manageable proportions, and that the issue date might then be Thursday, 2 February or Monday, 6 February; the issue date was ultimately moved up to 20 February when the National Insurance issue was scheduled for Monday, 30 January.

Edward Short took over the role of Postmaster General, Wedgwood Benn having moved into the Cabinet as Minister of Technology in July. One of his first moves was to state that special issues would be limited to an annual maximum of six (there had been nine in 1965 and eight in 1966). A draft programme for 1967 was drawn up, although not finalised for some time, this included the proposed EFTA issue. The Deputy Director General, A Wolstencroft, pressed for an early announcement so that artists could begin work with ample time in hand and also to facilitate advance publicity and assist marketing, rather than waiting to make a statement when Parliament reassembled in mid-October. In the event there was no public statement until Edward Short announced an outline of planned stamp issues to the House of Commons on 26 October; however, instructions had gone out

to selected artists on 9 September, although it had been hoped to do this as early as 22 August. Invitations went to the artists named at the SAC meeting in July: Peter Wildbur of BDMW Associates Ltd, Nicholas Jenkins, and Jock Kinneir of Kinneir Associates. The stamp printing firms were also approached via the Supplies Department; Bradbury Wilkinson declined due to outstanding commitments, but Harrison & Sons Ltd accepted, and commissioned an outside designer, Clive Abbott.

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## INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

The instructions left the selection of themes to the artists, and made few stipulations other than that the designs should be horizontal, colours limited to six, with the Queen's profile in either black or white. It was suggested that designs should be in the denominations of 9d (base letter rate to Europe and surface mail elsewhere) and 1s 6d (base airmail letter rate to most countries). A minimum of two designs was required from each artist; more might be produced as alternatives or extra sets, but it was made clear that the payment for each piece of submitted artwork was 60 guineas, up to a maximum of 120 guineas. Artists were thus discouraged from producing more than one design for each denomination. The materials accompanying the instructions included the Landscape series 4d and World Cup 1s 3d stamps of 1966, which had both shown a larger sized profile of the Queen as a white silhouette on a coloured background, in a separate panel to the right of the main design. The EFTA flags logo was also attached. Designers followed these indicators in the majority of cases, exceptions being noted in the list of designs received. An additional feature was a list of those members of the SAC who were themselves practising designers and were willing to act as advisers on a one-to-one basis with individual artists throughout the design process if required. This was an initiative of the new PMG, which it was hoped would enhance the role customarily played by the SAC; the names listed were those of James Fitton, Milner Gray, Professor Richard Guyatt, Abram Games, F H K Henrion and Cecilia, Lady Sempill.

Jock Kinneir's designs were supplied by 3 October and the remainder in time for the deadline of 10 October. The designs subsequently seen by the SAC were numbered as follows.

Kinneir

9d - portrait profile, not silhouette; no flags; not in 'panels' format (design 1)

1s 3d - as above (design 2)

Jenkins

9d - smaller profile (designs 3, 4 and 5)

1s 6d - smaller profile (designs 6, 7 and 8)

Harrisons

9d – artist unknown (design 9)  
9d – by Clive Abbott: small black profile; no flags (design 10)  
9d – by Clive Abbott: small black profile; not in ‘panels’ format (design 11)  
1s 6d – as design 10 (design 12)  
1s 6d – as design 9 (design 13)  
1s 6d – as design 11; caption interchangeable with flags (design 14)

Wildbur

9d – black profile (design 15)  
1s 6d – black profile (design 16)

On the artwork for design 10 held in the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA), the Queen’s profile is shown as a portrait rather than a silhouette; this was replaced by a silhouette in the stamp size bromide version. Designs 9 and 13 appear to be the work of the same unidentified Harrison’s staff artist.

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## DESIGNS SELECTED AND ESSAYED

At its meeting on 20 October the SAC’s sole choice for the 9d was Nicholas Jenkins’ design 3; Peter Wildbur’s design 15 was first choice for the 1s 6d (the value would need to be changed) and Jenkins’ design 7 second choice. These were now recorded as A1, A2 and B. Don Beaumont of PSD wrote to Harrisons the same day requesting these designs be essayed. Shortly after the chosen designs were shown to the Board of Trade; it was pointed out that the Scandinavian flags on Jenkins’ designs had centred vertical bars, rather than left of centre as was correct, while the Finnish flag on the Wildbur design did not display the necessary central lion motif. Essays reached Beaumont at the GPO on 21 November, although of Wildbur’s design still bore the value 9d, although intended for the 1s 6d.

On the following day the essays were seen by Eric Anglin of the Foreign Office and Michael Young and Alan Reynolds of the Board of Trade; no comment was recorded other than to reiterate the previous observations concerning the flags. The printers confirmed that the placing of the vertical bars on Jenkins’ Scandinavian flags could be corrected when preparing the cylinders. The insertion of a lion motif into the Finnish flag on Wildbur’s design was more problematical, with a decision on this deferred. On 25 November, however, Reynolds advised Beaumont that the Finnish flag had only to display the lion in the presence of the Head of State; this meant that Wildbur’s plain blue cross on a white background was correct but that the lions would now have to be removed from the flags on Nicholas Jenkins’ designs.

The same day G R Downes, the Director of Postal Services, wrote to the PMG informing him of the SAC's selections and enclosing essays of A1, A2 and B. On 28 November, however, Edward Short stated he wished to see all the designs submitted before making a decision, a wish he had already expressed during a visit to Harrisons when he had seen the recommended designs undergoing essaying. The remaining designs were made available the following day, and on 30 November the PMG informed Downes that his preference was for the two pictorial designs by Clive Abbott (designs 11 and 14) rather than those recommended by the SAC; Abbott's designs depicted a cargo ship being loaded from rail wagons (9d) and an air-freighter being loaded from road vehicles (1s 6d). The same day Short announced full details including issue dates and values of the 1967 stamp programme to the House of Commons. Subsequently both the Foreign Office and Board of Trade registered their disappointment that the issue was not to include a 4d, but accepted the reasons without further comment.

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## COMMITTEE CLASHES WITH PMG

It was established that the Abbott 1s 6d design depicted a BEA Argosy air-freighter, while the colours of the ship's funnel on the 9d 'could be regarded as composite' rather than necessarily associated with any one shipping line. The PMG took the decision to recommend the Abbott designs to the Queen as best conveying the real significance of EFTA – 'the movement of trade within the Association which is one of its prime objectives'. On 7 December Short wrote thus to the Queen, enclosing the original artwork and stamp sized bromides in the absence of essays; he additionally suggested that the caption 'European Free Trade Association' should be replaced on the 1s 6d by the strip of EFTA flags as on the 9d - both the strip and the caption occupied a similar space and area and were in fact meant to be interchangeable. No mention was made of the differing preferences voiced by the SAC. Her Majesty notified her approval the following day.

James Fitton, Chairman of the SAC, and Mrs C G Tomrley, Secretary, had been warned by Downes that the PMG might overrule the original choices, and were informed on 12 December that this had happened. Fitton seems to have gained the impression that the EFTA issue was being 'dropped for political reasons'; this, exacerbated by the absence of any recorded consultation prior to Short's decision, led to an uneasy meeting of the SAC on 22 December. The committee was not pleased to learn that, although the issue would take place, it was to consist of designs it had rejected. On 2 January 1967 Beaumont of PSD spoke with Fitton, the latter warning that the SAC might feel compelled to resign en masse, which would effectively terminate the Council of Industrial Design's direct role in stamp selection as formalised in 1962. In a memorandum summarising the discussion, Beaumont wondered if this might be an opportunity for the GPO to disentangle itself from the SAC and avert continued confrontations over stamp design and issue policy. Downes spoke to Paul

Reilly, Director of the CoID, on 4 January, and was at pains to explain that the SAC's preferred designs had been rejected on the grounds of content rather than for artistic reasons; however, it was clear that both the CoID and individual committee members felt they had at least been inadequately briefed as to the factors bearing on the issue, and some suspicion of a 'political' motive behind the PMG's decision remained.

Relations with the SAC did not improve and it was shortly afterwards dissolved. The situation was partly brought to a head by Edward Short's seemingly brusque and dismissive attitude towards the committee - Wedgwood Benn had various differences of opinion with the SAC but tried to resolve these by personally attending several of the meetings. In February 1968 the GPO would reconstitute its own 'new' SAC, on which the CoID had some representation. Meanwhile the stamps were announced at a press launch on 11 January 1967 and payment to the artists made by the end of the month, Harrisons receiving 500 guineas (£525) for Abbott's two successful designs, and Jenkins, Wildbur and Kinneir 120 guineas (£126) each.

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## STAMP SALES AND PHILATELIC ITEMS

The stamps were issued on 20 February 1967, printed in sheets of 120 on chalk-surfaced paper with multiple crowns watermark, both without phosphor and with three phosphor bands. The phosphor was applied to the 1s 6d by letterpress, and to the 9d by flexography, a method of letterpress using flexible rubber or plastic plates for which applying phosphor was virtually the only use. The stamps were double definitive size, and in the following colours:

9d - red, lilac, green, brown, yellow, dark blue, light or 'new' blue, and black

1s 6d - violet, red, dark blue, brown, green, blue-grey, 'new' blue, yellow and black.

In both cases the finished stamps were printed in more colours than the six maximum required by the original instructions to artists. Figures for totals printed and sold were reported after the final withdrawal from sale on 19 February 1968.

9d non-phosphor

Total printed excluding waste - 9,182,040

Unsold at 19 February 1969 - 2,628,302

Net sales - 6,553,738

9d phosphor

Total printed excluding waste - 8,340,720

Unsold at 19 February 1969 - 2,783,616

Net sales - 5,557,104



1s 6d non-phosphor

Total printed excluding waste – 9,122,040

Unsold at 19 February 1969 – 2,758,557

Net sales – 6,363,483

1s 6d phosphor

Total printed excluding waste – 7,920,720

Unsold at 19 February 1969 – 3,682,776

Net sales – 4,237,944.

As can be seen, just over a third of the ‘good’ stamps to reach the Supplies Department from Harrisons remained unsold after a year, an unusually high proportion that suggests that the issue had little public appeal.

The first day cover and presentation pack that accompanied the issue were both designed by David Gentleman. There were 60,000 packs ordered printed in litho, delivered from Harrisons on 6 January 1967, and 42,906 subsequently sold. An initial order for 270,000 first day envelopes was placed with HM Stationery Office on 29 November 1966, followed by a further 5,000 on 1 December and 50,000 on 2 January; how many were sold is not recorded. There were 51 sets of packs and covers sent to those on the PMG’s official presentation list, to the Queen, Princess Margaret, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Commons, and Clive Abbott, nine to members of the CoID, 15 to former PMGs and Assistant PMGs, 22 to the PMGs or equivalent in the self-governing Commonwealth nations.

There was the usual provision of the official ‘First Day of Issue’ handstamps via special posting boxes, with Hull, Yorkshire, Newcastle upon Tyne, and Grimsby and Cleethorpes, Lincs of particular interest because of their status as EFTA trading ports. No other special postmarks were associated with the issue, although three unrelated cancellations came into use the same day as the stamps: a special handstamp for the Radiation Biology Conference, Portmeirion, Portmadoc, Caernarvonshire (20 to 22 February), a slogan postmark for the Leicester Students’ Carnival (20 February to 10 March) and another in use at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley and Perth for ‘Scottish Stamps and First Day Covers 1st March 1967’ (20 to 28 February).

Practically no cases of premature release were reported, although a ‘Philart’-brand cover bearing both stamps was intercepted in Sutton Coldfield as early as 17 February.

The successful designer, Clive Abbott, was also responsible for the Post Office Tower issue of 1965, three of the British Anniversaries set in 1968, and the General Anniversaries 9d depicting Ralph Vaughan Williams in 1972. He also designed air letters and greetings telegrams, in addition to many other unaccepted stamp designs. He was born in 1933 and

attended Wimbledon Art School. In 1967 he was the art director of a London advertising agency.

GILES ALLEN  
8 March 1994

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## REFERENCES

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