

British Wild Flowers

Date of issue: 24 APRIL 1967



One of the first tasks facing Edward Short on succeeding Anthony Wedgwood Benn as Postmaster General (PMG) in 1966 was to finalise the 1967 stamp programme. The Deputy Director General (Posts), A Wolstencroft, wrote a memorandum on 1 August 1966, explaining the policy changes affecting special stamp issues first outlined by Wedgwood Benn in December 1964: the commemoration of anniversaries was no longer confined to those with royal or postal significance; a new category of special issue reflected the British contribution to world affairs including art and science; and last but not least, the fostering of 'minuscule' design in the form of postage stamp art had been an aim. A combination of the last two objectives led to three special issues in 1966 that were purely pictorial celebrations of indigenous themes - British Landscapes in May, British Birds which was about to appear (8 August) and British Technology, scheduled for 19 September. Wolstencroft made a particular recommendation that there should be a similar number of pictorial issues in 1967.

The PMG, Wolstencroft, and the Director of Postal Services (G R Downes) discussed the 1967 programme further on 5 August; it was agreed that the total number of issues should be limited to six. Of these, it had already been accepted that there would be a EFTA issue early in the year and that Christmas stamps should again be issued in 1967 (the first such issue, for 1966, had yet to appear). Proposals for the remaining issues were for the time confined to three more 'British' themes, on the subjects of paintings, transport, and 'native trees'.

This outline programme was put to the Queen, and approved on 14 August. On 25 August Wolstencroft wrote again to the PMG, urging for a swift finalisation of the 1967 programme as 'this would meet the designers' pleas for more time to develop their ideas, and enable us to give the new issues more effective advance publicity than has been practicable in recent years - a point of special importance in our philatelic export trade which we aim to expand next year'.

A A Mead of the Postal Services Department (PSD) reiterated this point in a note to Wolstencroft on 7 September:

The key to this export business is a firm programme and early advertising with illustrations of the approved designs. Ideally these should be available at least three months before the issue date, for publication in philatelic journals, etc. We are told that the countries which exploit this market most effectively make a point of doing this.

KEBLE MARTIN DESIGNS PROPOSED

Replying to Wolstencroft's minute the PMG wrote: 'I have had another idea. I don't know whether you have seen the Rev. Keble Martin's remarkable book of British wild flowers. These beautiful drawings would make an excellent series of stamps - and it would go down well at the Palace. HRH [the Duke of Edinburgh] was instrumental in getting the book published.'

The book to which Edward Short referred was 'The Concise British Flora in Colour', by the Rev. W Keble Martin, published by Michael Joseph Ltd in 1965. A copy of the book was obtained by A A Mead of the PSD, who pointed out that the popular Botanical Congress series had only been issued two years previously - 'another wild flower series so soon would be gilding the lily'. Replying to the PMG on 1 September, Wolstencroft agreed that the material was excellent - taking up Mead's point on the Botanical Congress issue of 1964, he wrote, 'I wonder whether it is not just a little soon for another flower set as such ... but one could get from the illustrations in the book an attractive set depicting [either] the flowers and fruit of well-known shrubs and small trees ... or the leaves and blossoms of trees', suitable for the proposed 'British native trees' issue as currently approved. Alternatively a set of the Keble Martin designs might be held over until 1968. However, in a discussion between Wolstencroft and the PMG on 7 September, it was agreed the question of a special issue depicting either flowers or trees could be left open - 'we have already cleared the broad theme with the Palace, and could vary it to include flowers as well as trees without having to consult the Palace in advance'. On 29 September the PMG and DPS met with James Fitton, Chairman of the Stamp Advisory Committee of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), and Mr White, the CoID's Deputy Director; it was agreed with little discussion

that there should be a 'British Flora' issue, which would include a block of four stamps, and for which the Rev. Keble Martin would be invited to submit designs. The 'native trees' proposal was postponed (it was not until 1973-74 that the idea was revived, and stamps depicting the oak and horse chestnut were issued).

FIRST APPROACHES TO ARTISTS

At the next Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting on 20 October David Gentleman and Richard Chopping were suggested as suitable artists; it was felt that the Rev. Keble Martin should also be approached, but that as he was getting on in years (approaching 90) he should be given the option of choosing three or four of his own illustrations for other artists to 'work up' into stamp designs if he did not feel able to undertake this himself. Gentleman and Chopping were contacted informally by the GPO over the next few days and asked to start 'getting their ideas on paper'.

On 26 October the issue was among the themes for the 1967 programme announced by Short to the House of Commons. By 10 November it had been agreed that the stamps should consist of a block of four 4d (the inland letter base rate), a 9d (overseas surface and European airmail) and a 1s 9d (airmail letter to Zone C, namely the far East and Australasia). This last denomination seems to have been chosen because the other 1967 special issues were to include four separate 1s 6d stamps (Zone ' , covering the majority of airmail destinations) and one 1s (Zone A for the Middle East and North Africa). It was considered important that the values issued cover a wide range compatible with the rates most often used. The values and issue date of 24 April 1967 were given by Short in answer to a Parliamentary question on 30 November.

The Rev. Keble Martin was contacted by telephone on 4 November and was willing to attempt the designs personally, although it had been the intention of PSD to adopt the SAC's recommendations that he should choose examples of his own work which could subsequently be developed by the stamp printers, Harrison & Sons Ltd, or an established stamp artist. A set of instructions was sent the same day, while a formal invitation and set of instructions went to both Chopping and Gentleman on 7 November. The instructions largely allowed for a free hand apart from the following stipulations: the format should be horizontal; the treatment should be pictorial; the subjects should be indigenous to Britain, and exclude those depicted in the 1964 Botanical Congress stamps; only six colours should be used in total on the block of four 4d, and no more than six each on the 9d and 1s 9d; and a minimum of six designs should be submitted. A payment of 60 guineas would be made for each piece of submitted artwork up to 360 guineas maximum, thus effectively discouraging artists from submitting more than the minimum number of designs, although extra or alternative pieces would be accepted for viewing. An extra 190 guineas would be payable for

each design adopted. Attached examples of the most recent stamps (Landscapes and Birds) were intended to indicate current idiom, it being stressed that artists were free to work in their own style. The artists were given the names of those SAC members who were themselves practising designers, from whom they might seek advice if the need arose. The deadline was 12 December.

OFFERS FROM OTHER DESIGNERS

The announcement of the issue inspired a number of unsolicited approaches to the GPO. On 7 November Sir George Taylor, Director of the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew, who had previously assisted the GPO over the Botanical Congress issue, wrote to Edward Short recommending the Gardens' official artist, Miss Mary Grierson. On 30 November Don Beaumont of PSD telephoned Miss Grierson with details of what was required; she was permitted a later deadline of Christmas by which to submit her work, and was advised to refer to Keble Martin's book, although no mention had been made of it in the instructions to Chopping and Gentleman. Miss Grierson sent in four designs on 12 December and two on 18 December; two more were received between 28 and 30 December after PSD asked her for designs in contrasting colours to those she had used up to that point.

On 8 November Mrs Barbara Everard wrote to the GPO; she was a botanical illustrator of long standing whose work was regularly exhibited and won medals at events of the Royal Horticultural Society, and was currently being shown in Belfast. She was also a stamp collector and had won a bronze medal for a thematic entry on flowers at that year's Stampex. Miss M G Mantz of PSD replied on 17 November giving her a deadline of 13 December, and asking her to contact Beaumont for further details. Mrs Everard sent one set of six and one of five designs on 5 December, and two more designs in time for the SAC meeting on 22 December.

On 5 December William Hardman, an architectural designer with an interest in postage stamp art, sent three designs for the floral issue to Miss Mantz, which were accepted for subsequent viewing by the SAC. He had been corresponding since the previous October, when his local philatelic society had urged him to approach the GPO in the interests of better stamp design. He modestly explained: 'Having looked at the collection of new British stamps, and then compared them with good & continental designs, I decided that someone must at least try a rescue operation.'

On 9 December Mr and Mrs Mervyn and Valerie Benford, who had contacted Beaumont previously and received an encouraging reply, sent in a set of designs that they hoped might be considered for the block of four 4d stamps – 'we think continuity of design makes

a great contribution to the impact'. This was the couple's first foray into the field of stamp design; the set was seen by the SAC.

SUBMITTED ARTWORK VIEWED

The designs were seen by the SAC on 22 December. The following list of submitted artwork is based on that produced for the Committee's reference on that occasion, with additional information from the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA). Commissioned designs were listed by number and unsolicited alphabetically.

Chopping (received 12 December):

Common dog violet – 4d (1)

Daisy – 4d (2)

Meadow buttercup – no value (3)

Field poppy – no value (4)

Wild strawberry – 4d (5)

Bramble (blackberry) – 4d (6)

Variant of above – 4d (7)

White waterlily – no value (8)

Yellow waterlily – no value (9)

Keble Martin (received 12 December):

Primrose and bird's eye primrose – 4d (10 – or 15)

Hawthorn, bramble – 9d (11)

Larger bindweed, viper's bugloss – 4d (12)

Ox eye daisy, coltsfoot, buttercup – 4d (13)

Bluebell, red campion, wood anemone – 4d (14)

Heather – 1s 9d (15 – or 10)

Gentleman (received 16 December):

Wall pepper, rock speedwell, bog pimpernel, purple, saxifrage – 4d (block of four) (16, 17, 18, 19)

Bell heather, crossleaved heath – 9d (20)

Leave bellflower – 1s 9d (21 and 22)

Grierson

(sent 12 December):

Dog violet – 4d (A)

Pasque flower – 4d (B)

Sea bindweed (convolvulus) – 4d (C)

Sea pea – 4d (D)

(sent 18 December):

Wild strawberry – no value (A1)

Celandine – no value (A2)

(sent 28 to 30 December):

Thrift – 9d (-)

Primrose – 1s 9d (-)

Everard (sent 5 December):

Five designs on coloured backgrounds – 4d (E to I)

Six designs on white backgrounds – 4d (J to M), 6d (N), 1s 6d (Q)

(the above have the value panels in colour)

Two designs on coloured backgrounds with no value panels as alternatives to N and Q – 6d (O) and 1s 6d (P) (received on 22 December)

(the subjects on the above designs include snowdrop, oxytropis, halleri, linnaea borealis, saxifraga oppositifolia)

Hardman (received 12 December):

Three designs submitted, but only two seen by SAC – no value (R and S)

The Benfords (sent 9 December):

Four designs sent, showing wild arum, dandelion, cornflower, violet – no value (T, U, V, W)

The values given are those on the original artwork in the BPMA. The Everard, Benson and Hardman designs were returned to the artists in March 1967 and are not in the BPMA. All the designs by Chopping, Grierson, Keble Martin and David Gentleman listed have been identified with those in the BPMA, except for no. 6 by Chopping which has not been found.

FIRST RECOMMENDATIONS OF COMMITTEE

The SAC's first choice was designs 11 to 14 by Keble Martin for the block of four 4d, together with Richard Chopping's designs 4 and 9 for the 9d and 1s 9d respectively; the second choice was designs by Chopping throughout, the block of 4d to be made up of nos. 3, 4, 8 and 9, and nos. 1 and 2 respectively for the 9d and 1s 9d. The suitability of gold for use on the Queen's head was considered; this had already been used for the Battle of Hastings 6d and 1s 3d and Christmas stamps in 1966, but not very impressively. However, R F York reported on behalf of Harrisons, the stamp printers, that the gold heads were being improved by constant experiment, and the committee thought it worth seeing the latest

results before coming to a decision. If the issue featured gold heads, there should not be a separate coloured panel for the head and value, although this style then tended to be in favour. It was felt the stamps should not include the names of the flowers, to avoid needless controversy; British wild flowers were often known by anything up to fifty different names in the vernacular, and the experts frequently disagreed on their names in Latin, as subsequent correspondence and articles in the 'British Philatelic Bulletin' would amply prove.

K Hind of the Postal Services Department (PSD) reported the SAC's findings to Edward Short on 28 December; PSD was opposed to the use of gold heads on the issue, but agreed that the names of plants should not be shown. Richard Chopping's designs were not favoured, and it was felt that Mary Grierson's would be more acceptable to the public. Hind suggested that either four Keble Martin designs be used for the 4d block, and Grierson's for the 9d and 1s 9d, or vice versa. A final decision could wait until the two or three designs additionally requested from Mary Grierson were to hand. Hind was able on 30 December to inform the PMG that she had now supplied two extra designs. He considered that these new designs, featuring the thrift and primrose, were attractive enough to be paired with designs A (dog violet) and B (pasque flower) to make up a set of four Grierson designs for the 4d block, and Keble Martin designs used for the two higher values.

The PMG's opinion, stated on 5 January 1967, was that Keble Martin's designs 11 to 14 should make up the block of four 4d, as had been the SAC's first preference; he agreed that Mary Grierson's designs should be used for the 9d and 1s 9d and suggested either C and A2 (bindweed and celandine) or A (dog violet) and the primrose. He supported the opposition to gold heads and the inclusion of flower names, and commented only that the artists' names should be shown. The Director of Postal Services, G R Downes, confirmed next day that the names would be printed in the gutters of the stamps.

FINAL SELECTION OF DESIGNS

By 19 January a total of fourteen designs had been essayed, and these were presented to the next meeting of the SAC on 2 February, made up into sets of cards as follows:

- A – designs 4 and 9 (Chopping), 11-14 (Keble Martin)
- B – designs 1-4, 8-9 (Chopping)
- C – designs C and A2 (Grierson)
- D – designs A and 'primrose' (Grierson), 11-14 (Keble Martin).

The first two cards were the first and second choices of the SAC; the members accepted the PMG's preferences as represented by the other two cards with reasonable equanimity. There had been some concern as to how the SAC would react to a second overruling of its

recommendations so soon after its choice had been dismissed for the EFTA issue as a result of Edward Short's decision; Downes thought there was a real danger that the SAC might resign en bloc. However, on this occasion there was a substantial area of agreement over the use of Keble Martin's designs. Downes' own suggestion to the PMG, on 7 February, was that the first preference should go to the designs on card D, since the subjects of the two Grierson designs contemplated for the 9d and 1s 9d on card C, bindweed and celandine, were already included in Keble Martin's designs 12 and 13. (In fact the 'celandine' in the latter was an incorrectly identified buttercup, while the two 'bindweed' designs portrayed different members of a botanical genus including some 200 species.) The DPS also suggested a second choice that the PMG might convey to the Queen if he wished, which consisted of Chopping's designs 1-4 and Mary Grierson's C and A2, as on card C. Meanwhile the only changes required to the essays were to correct the artists' names where Harrison had mis-spelt them, and (on Grierson's designs) to remove the plant names and print the values in white instead of black. Up to this point the 9d and 1s 9d essays had a separate grey panel with the Queen's head in white and the value in black, with the remainder of the design on a white background; the 4d designs in contrast had no separate panel, but the head in grey and value in black on the same white background as the rest of the design. In retrospect Stuart Rose, the PMG's Typographical Adviser, felt that it would have been better to preserve complete uniformity of background, head, and value colouring throughout the set. In his book 'Royal Mail Stamps' published in 1980, he wrote 'The drawings of the Rev. Keble Martin and Mary Grierson are so similar in style as to make the difference in treatment of the Queen's head and value numerals quite unnecessary ... in spite of Mary Grierson's most sensitive drawing, the typographical treatment is so heavy-handed as to let down the whole issue.'

APPROVAL BY THE QUEEN

Short wrote to the Queen on 10 February, confining himself to the GPO's first choice of the designs, those as on card D: essays were enclosed with explanations of the changes still to be made. The Queen sent her approval on 13 February. The choice of the four Keble Martin designs for the block of 4d was apposite, as each represented one of the four major groups of wild flowers, hedge plants were typified by the hawthorn and bramble, weeds by the bindweed and vipers' bugloss, meadow plants by the ox eye daisy, and woodland plants by the bluebell. Meanwhile Sir George Taylor of Kew Gardens assisted in resolving some residual uncertainties over the identity of a few of Keble Martin's subjects: the last of these was cleared by a telephone call to his wife, Mrs Flora Keble Martin, confirming the 'celandine' was a buttercup. Harrison was able to produce final essays of all the stamps for showing at a press launch and publicity release on 22 February. Initial essays were supplied on 1 and 2 February, and final essays on 22 and 23 February.

The guests at the press launch included Mr and Mrs Keble Martin, Miss Grierson, and James Fitton on behalf of the SAC, as well as various representatives of the GPO, Harrisons, and the CoLD. In March the artists received payment for their work as follows: Rev. Keble Martin, £1,176 (four accepted designs at 250 guineas each, plus two unaccepted at 60 guineas each); Mary Grierson, £777 (two accepted, plus four unaccepted); Richard Chopping, £378 (six unaccepted). David Gentleman had already been paid £378 for his unaccepted designs the previous month. The remaining artists (Hardman, Everard, and the Benfords) received no payment for their unaccepted and unsolicited designs. Mary Grierson's identical treatment, as regards fee, to Keble Martin, Chopping and Gentleman, is somewhat anomalous as her work had been offered rather than commissioned by the GPO in the first instance, and the usual practice was that the GPO's fee arrangements only applied to those artists it approached itself. However, it would have been embarrassing not to have rewarded Miss Grierson at the full rate.

STAMP ISSUES AND SALES

The stamps were issued as scheduled on 24 April 1967. The 1s 9d was the first stamp of that value, predating the definitives (5 June). The stamps were printed by Harrisons on chalk-coated paper with multiple crowns watermark in double definitive size (0.95 inches by 1.60 inches) at 120 to a sheet; about 36 per cent of the stamps were issued with three phosphor bands while the remainder were non-phosphor. The 4d was printed in se-tenant blocks on Rembrandt sheet-fed equipment, and the 9d and 1s 9d on Thrissell reel-fed rotary machines. The following colours were used:

4d (hawthorn & bramble) - grey, lemon, myrtle-green, red, agate, slate-purple

4d (larger bindweed, etc) - grey, lemon, myrtle-green, red, agate, slate-purple and violet

4d (ox eye daisy, etc) - grey, lemon, myrtle-green, red, agate, slate-purple

4d (bluebell, etc) - grey, lemon, myrtle-green, red, agate, slate-purple, reddish-purple, violet

9d (dog violet) - lavender-grey, green, reddish-violet, orange-yellow

1s 9d (primrose) - lavender-grey, green, reddish-violet, orange-yellow, greenish-yellow, orange.

The totals printed and sold were as follows.

4d non-phosphor

Total printed excluding waste - 79,203,480

Unsold at 23 April 1968 - 871,702

Sales - 78,331,778

4d phosphor

Total printed excluding waste - 39,870,720

Unsold at 23 April 1968 – 2,736,768
Sales – 37,133,952

9d non-phosphor
Total printed excluding waste – 7,382,040
Unsold at 23 April 1968 – 1,508,998
Sales – 5,873,042

9d phosphor
Total printed excluding waste – 6,300,720
Unsold at 23 April 1968 – 599,112
Sales – 5,701,608

1s 9d non-phosphor
Total printed excluding waste – 7,246,080
Unsold at 23 April 1968 – 3,986,559
Sales – 3,259,521

1s 9d phosphor
Total printed excluding waste – 6,408,000
Unsold at 23 April 1968 – 1,478,352
Sales – 4,929,648.

By the time the stamps were finally withdrawn from sale on 23 April 1968, by which time 92.4 per cent of the ‘good’ stamps supplied by Harrisons had been sold. Detailed figures of stamps made waste are not recorded, but were reported as unusually high in the case of the 9d, to the extent of affecting supplies to some offices – ‘the wastage of imperfectly printed stamps far exceeded the printer’s expectation and even a second printing run did not provide us with a reserve’ (Assistant PMG Joseph Slater to Sir Dingle Foot, 31 May 1967). Difficulties were also reported in the production of the 4d stamps, but unfortunately it is not recorded what the problems were in either case.

PHILATELIC AND MISCELLANEOUS ITEMS

The first day cover and presentation pack were both designed by David Gentleman in three colours, for which he was paid 100 guineas (£105) on 17 April. There were 300,000 covers bearing a honeysuckle motif printed by HM Stationery Office, although the number sold is unknown. Harrisons printed 60,000 presentation packs of which 53,446 were sold: these included descriptive text by Desmond Meikle of Kew Gardens. Both items were printed using lithography. A large number of covers were distributed as gifts by the PMG: these went as

usual to the Queen, Princess Margaret, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Commons, members of the SAC, former PMGs and APMGs serving in either House of Parliament, and to PMGs or the equivalent in the independent Commonwealth; also included on this occasion were the two successful artists and Sir George Taylor of Kew Gardens. Sir George had given valuable advice on the proper identification of plants both in the course of this issue and with the earlier Botanical Congress stamps; he had recommended Miss Grierson's work in the first instance and secured the services of his colleague Mr Meikle to write the text of the pack.

The usual first day of issue facilities were provided, with post boxes for the special handstamp available at 109 offices: this was the first use of a new 1 inch datestamp with fast drying ink for first day covers. Another special handstamp on 24 April was for the Royal Society for Health Congress, Eastbourne (24-28 April). Several ordinary circular datestamps for which there was a collector demand included Bluebell Hill (Nottingham), Flore (Northants), Hawthorn (Wilts), Kew Gardens, and Primrose Street, Alloa. Slogan postmarks which came into use on this day were 'York Races 16th, 17th, 18th May' (24 April - 14 May) and 'Redbridge Arts Festival' in the East London / Essex border postal districts (24 April - 20 May).

A small number of cases of premature release were noted, particularly in the Dundee and Bristol areas, and a commercial cover with the stamps was intercepted which had been posted on 21 April; this was one of a number produced by the Rev. Keble Martin's publishers Michael Joseph Ltd, featuring the artist's autograph and a reproduction of one of his paintings, which were sent out bearing the block of 4d stamps.

THE ARTISTS

REV. KEBLE MARTIN, MA, FLS, DSc, was born in 1877; he went to school at Marlborough and later studied at Oxford. He was a lifelong botanist, taking a degree in the subject at university, and being elected a Fellow of the Linnaean Society in 1928. His 'Concise British Flora' was described as 'the triumphant outcome of 60 years of meticulous and devoted study, research, notetaking and draughtsmanship'.

MARY GRIERSON was born in North Wales and attended Bangor County School before training in domestic science. Following wartime service as a flight officer in the WAAF, she took up a career in aerial survey work from 1947. In her spare time she studied drawing (under John Nash, among others) and was awarded the Diploma of the Royal Drawing Society. She also won the very rarely awarded Gold Medal of the Royal Horticultural Society for an exhibition of her botanical drawings and in 1961 became official artist at Kew. She later submitted stamp designs for the Christmas issue of 1968 but was not successful on that occasion.

REFERENCES

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- P52/71 (Special stamps 1967)

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