

British Bridges

Date of issue: 29 APRIL 1968



There is no record as to why it was decided to issue a set of stamps depicting British bridges. Every year the GPO received many suggestions for the stamp programme, coming from the public and organisations celebrating anniversaries. Discussions would take place within the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD) at Postal Headquarters, London EC1. The recommendations of the OOD would be submitted to the Postmaster General (PMG), who would then decide the make-up of the annual stamp programme. During this process the PMG might add or remove subjects as he saw fit.

On becoming PMG in 1966, Edward Short MP disbanded the Stamp Advisory Committee that had been dominated by the Council of Industrial Design; the reason was that the Post Office wanted more control over the process of design and production of stamps, especially as a change of status to public corporation was imminent. Edward Short almost immediately started to form a new committee, the broad terms of reference being to advise the PMG on artists to be invited to submit designs, instructions to artists and give advice on the designs to be submitted for the Queen's approval. The committee was to be advisory in the sense that responsibility for final decisions on stamp design was to remain with the PMG. The inaugural meeting of this new committee was on 21 February 1968, one week after the British bridges designs had received Royal approval. For this series therefore the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) played no role and recommendations came from the OOD.

The special stamp programme for 1968 was announced in Parliament on 27 July 1967 by Edward Short. That day a Press and Broadcast Notice (PB191) confirmed for 1968, one series to mark three anniversaries, pictorial stamps depicting British bridges and British paintings, and a series of special Christmas stamps. Details of values and dates were announced in Parliament on 20 November 1967: the further information was given in a Press and Broadcast Notice (PB319). The PMG stated that four stamps, 4d, 9d, 1s 6d and 1s 9d, would be issued on 29 April 1968 showing British bridges.

ARTISTS INVITED

The GPO had, over the years, created a list of artists that were invited to submit designs on a regular basis. If additional names were required the GPO sought advice from the Council of Industrial Design (CoID). In 1964, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Postmaster General, announced that the public would be actively involved in stamp design in the future and as such invited suggestions for future issues. This resulted in unsolicited designs being submitted, which, if felt worthy of merit by the OOD, were examined by the SAC together with the commissioned artwork. Any artwork not selected for essaying was returned without payment. Unsolicited designs chosen for essaying warranted a payment equal to that given to commissioned artists: having demonstrated their ability some were sent details of designs required for forthcoming issues. This led to some artists, such as Peter Atwell and William Hardman, submitting artwork for several issues throughout the 1960s, although their work was still not regarded as commissioned. The official files contain no record of which artists were invited for the Bridges issue although the following list is of those that actually submitted designs (with the number allocated to each design for ease of identification):

Jeffery Matthews –

4d Monnow Bridge, Monmouth 1272 (1)

4d Tarr Steps Prehistoric (2)

9d Pulteney Bridge, Bath 1769 (3)

9d Clare Bridge, Cambridge, 1640 (4)

1s 6d Tower Bridge, London, 1894 (5)

Not held at British Postal Museum & Archive (6)

1s 9d Severn Bridge 1966 (7)

1s 9d M4 Viaduct, 1965 (8)

Andrew Restall –

9d Aberfeldy Bridge, 1733 (9)

4d Clapper Bridge, Dartmoor (10)

9d Iron Bridge, Shropshire (11)

Tower Bridge seen through London Bridge (12)

Albert Bridge, Chelsea (13)

1s 9d Kingsgate Footbridge, Durham (14)

Severn Bridge (15).

Leonard Rosoman –

4d Severn Bridge (16)

4d Monnow Bridge (17)

1s 6d Menai Suspension Bridge (18)

Wilton (19).

Harrison and Sons (David Gentleman) –
4d Severn Bridge, 1966 (20)
9d Winch Bridge over the Tees, 1741 (21)
9d Ironbridge Shropshire (22)
Telford's Menai Straits Bridge 1819–24 (23)
1s 6d Ancient Clapper Bridge Devon (24)
1s 6d Ashness Packhorse Bridge near Derwentwater (25).

Non-commissioned artists:

Maurice Laban (Grafton Artists Ltd) (1A to 4A)
William Hardman (5A to 8A)
Peter Atwell (9A to 12A)
Brian Moore (13A to 15A)
Richard Daynes (16A to 19A)
H St John Harrison (20A and 21A).

DESIGNS SUBMITTED TO PMG

The date when the artwork was received by OOD is unknown; however, all the designs, with recommendations, were submitted to the PMG on 28 November 1967. On submitting these designs Downes informed the PMG that the artists had been instructed to develop the theme of a history of British bridges throughout the ages, in a series of four stamps, and showing an ancient or medieval bridge, a 17th century bridge, a Victorian bridge, a modern bridge. Downes suggested to the PMG that the Severn Bridge should be shown in one of the chosen designs as previously the Post Office had refused to issue a stamp featuring this bridge. The recommendations put forward by OOD were:

Matthews – 1, 3, 5, 7

Restall – 9, 10, 11, 13.

It was noted that some of the non-commissioned designs were also good, particularly those by Laban (Grafton Arts Ltd)

In addition to the artists' drawings, a sheet of essays featuring bridges from the album of experimental designs that David Gentleman had prepared for Wedgwood Benn were submitted for consideration.

The PMG discussed the matter with Downes and on 13 December made his choice of designs for essaying. It was agreed that none of the Severn Bridge designs were satisfactory. It was felt that this bridge was possibly not a very good subject considering the number of

unsuccessful designs submitted and therefore it was agreed not to seek further designs. A design showing the Severn Bridge would have satisfied the Welsh interest and, being a modern bridge, would have completed the historic theme. It was therefore decided to include Welsh interest with the Menai Bridge design by Rosoman (18), and for a modern use the M4 Viaduct by Matthews (8). The PMG also chose the Tower Bridge by Matthews (5), Wade's Bridge Aberfeldy by Restall (9) and Tarr Steps, Stone Age bridge by Matthews (2). The PMG requested that all five be essayed. The final choice would be made from the essays, with one design dropped to bring the series to four stamps.

OOD submitted the five essays to the PMG on 5 February 1968. The PMG was reminded that in order to stick to the original brief, as given to the artists, it was necessary to make a choice between Menai Bridge and Tower Bridge. It was suggested that the choice was between politics and popularity in that Menai Bridge would meet Welsh aspirations, although Tower Bridge was one of Britain's best known. At that time it was considered more important to meet Welsh aspirations and as such OOD recommended that the Menai Bridge design be retained and the Tower Bridge design be discarded. It was suggested to the PMG that the values be chronological,

4d Tarr Steps – Stone Age

9d Wade's Bridge – 1733

1s 6d Menai Bridge – 1826

1s 9d M4 Viaduct – 1965.

Also that the type and figures used on Tarr Steps and M4 designs be used on the other two, and that dates be added to the Wade and Menai designs.

The PMG considered the essays and made the following decisions:

discard Tower Bridge,

dates to be on all bridges,

Queen's head to be in gold,

Wade's Bridge to be called 'Aberfeldy Bridge',

denomination to be more prominent on Aberfeldy Bridge,

chronological order for values.

The PMG asked whether it was correct to refer to Tarr Steps as 'Stone Age' and suggested 'Prehistoric'. OOD had been advised by the British Museum that the origin of the Tarr Steps was not known for certain but it was almost certainly before the Roman occupation. It was therefore decided to amend the inscription Tarr Steps, Stone Age to read 'Tarr Steps, Prehistoric'.

ROYAL APPROVAL

The essays were sent to the Queen for approval together with a letter giving details of slight modifications to be made, subject to her views. The modifications were as follows: The Queen's head to be featured in gold on all the stamps, the inscription 'Tarr Steps Stone Age' to be amended to 'Tarr Steps Prehistoric', the inscription 'Wade's Bridge, Aberfeldy' to be amended to 'Aberfeldy Bridge 1733' and the value of that stamp to be 9d, the inscription 'Menai' to be amended to 'Menai Bridge 1826', the value and lettering on the 'Aberfeldy Bridge' and 'Menai Bridge' essays to be in bold type as shown on the 'Tarr Steps' and 'M4 Viaduct' essays.

A letter to the PMG on 16 February 1968 stated that the Queen had noted the modifications to the designs and was pleased to give her approval.

ESSAYS

The first five essays were submitted to the PMG on 5 February 1968. The next group of essays were seen by the Queen and approved subject to modifications. A further essay of the Menai Bridge design was produced after the modifications had been made.

The stamps were printed by photogravure on non-watermarked paper by Harrison and Sons Ltd. and issued by the Post Office on 29 April 1968.

The Menai Bridge stamp was inscribed 'Pont Menai' and 'Menai Bridge' and was the first British stamp to include a Welsh inscription.

Values, subjects and designers and quantities sold were as follows:

4d Tarr Steps, Somerset (Jeffery Matthews) – 97,458,120

9d Aberfeldy Bridge (Andrew Restall) – 8,773,080

1s 6d Menai Bridge (Leonard Rosoman) – 9,451,400

1s 9d M4 Viaduct (Jeffery Matthews) – 5,924,800

Presentation pack – 69,646.

The stamps were withdrawn on 28 April 1969.

PVA GUM

From this issue onwards until 1973 all special stamps issued printed by Harrisons were on paper with PVA gum. Polyvinyl alcohol (PVA) was introduced by Harrison and Sons in place of gum arabic in 1968: it is almost invisible and therefore Harrisons introduced a small amount of pale yellow colouring to make it possible to see the stamps had been gummed.

FIRST DAY COVERS

The following artwork is held at the British Postal Museum & Archive:
design by Restall featuring a combination of bridge types;
design by Matthews featuring Tamar Bridge (Plymouth) alongside the Severn Bridge;
design by Matthews featuring Tower Bridge;
accepted design by Matthews featuring Severn Bridge.

The Post Office issued Press and Broadcast Notice PB89 on 9 April 1968 giving details of the arrangements for first day covers.

The GPO Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh provided a full first day cover service using an envelope with an illustration by Jeffery Matthews of the Severn Bridge. The Bureau offered a full service at 7s 4d, or would stamp and cancel customers' own addressed envelopes for 5s 4d. Collectors were also able to buy unstamped envelopes in advance from the Bureau and from post offices having philatelic posting boxes. Such boxes were available at 15 London offices and at offices in 123 towns and cities throughout the country. The GPO used a pictorial postmark at Bridge, Canterbury, Kent and at the Philatelic Bureau, depicting a section of a viaduct.

Available in Wales was a cover designed by Leonard Rosoman that depicted the Menai Bridge. The design incorporated a short poem, in Welsh, about the bridge, written by Dewl Wyn, the North Wales farmer-poet (1784-1841). The filler card in Welsh and English gave detail on the stamp, bridge, artist and poet.

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March, 1994

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive file:
Special Series - MKD/BS/1757

British Bridges - Submission to PMG

'Royal Mail Stamps a survey of British stamp design' by S Rose. Phaidon Press 1980
Stanley Gibbons Great Britain Specialised Stamp Catalogue Vol. 3 Queen Elizabeth II Pre-decimal issues. Stanley Gibbons Publications
'Collecting British First Day Covers' by N C Porter. A G Bradbury

Philatelic Bulletin: Vol. 5, no. 8, p.4; Vol. 16, no. 11, p. 13.

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB191 issued 27 July 1967

PB319 issued 20 November 1967

PB52 issued 12 March 1968

PB89 issued 9 April 1968.