

## CHRISTMAS 1968

Date of issue: 25 NOVEMBER 1968



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The Post Office first issued Christmas stamps in 1966, then again in 1967. It was probably following the success of these that the Postmaster General (PMG) decided to issue Christmas stamps in 1968.

After becoming PMG in 1966, Edward Short disbanded the Stamp Advisory Committee, which was dominated by the Council of Industrial Design, to form a new committee whereby the Post Office would have more control over the process of design and production of stamps. This was seen as especially important as a change of status to public corporation was imminent. The old committee was disbanded in February 1967; the new Committee, however, did not meet until 21 February 1968. By this time the process of designing the Christmas stamps had started.

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### ARTISTS INVITED

The Post Office had, over the years, created a list of artists invited to submit designs on a regular basis. If additional names were required the Post Office sought advice from the Council of Industrial Design (CoID). In 1964 the newly appointed PMG, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, announced that the public would in future have the opportunity to be actively involved in stamp design and as such invited suggestions for future issues. This resulted in unsolicited designs being submitted on a fairly regular basis. Such designs, if felt worthy by the Post Office, 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 received a payment equal to that given to the commissioned artists. Having proved their ability some of these artists 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, but despite this they were not regarded as commissioned artists. The official files contain no record of which artists were invited for the Christmas issue and the following list is of submitted designs only (the numbers are those allocated to the designs for reference purposes):

Commissioned artists –

Mary Grierson (received 20 December 1967) (1, 2, 3)

Geoffrey Trenaman (received 5 February 1968) (4, 5, 6)

Bradbury Wilkinson (received 5 February 1968) (12 to 15)

Clive Abbott (received 5 February 1968) (16, 17, 18)

Harrison and Sons Ltd (Rosalind Dease) (received 9 February 1968) (19, 20, 21)

Arnold Machin (received 5 February 1968) (22 to 27 \*)

J Norris Wood (received 14 February 1968) (28, 28A, 29, 29A, 30)

Unsolicited designs –

T Devereux (received 12 January 1968) (1A – snowflakes; 2A – Three Kings; 3A – Mail coach of 1784)

T H Barben (received 16 January 1968) (4A – 3d; 5A – 9d; 6A – 1s 6d)

Keith Hensby (7A – 3d coloured tinsel; 8A – 6d coloured ribbon; 9A – 9d coloured balls; 10A – 1s 0d bronze star)

H St John Harrison (received 6 February 1968) (11A – 3d The Windmill; 12A – 9d St Paul's Cathedral; 13A – 6d church at West Ham)

A R Hundleby (14A to 22A)

S Doubtfire (received 14 February 1968) (23A – 3d robin; 24A – 9d bells; 25A – 1s 6d inverted holy leaf)

\* A further design by Machin is held in the albums at the British Postal Museum & Archive, a vertical 3d design, featuring a statue of Mary and child in a bower.

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## DELIBERATIONS OF THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

At its meeting on 21 February 1968 the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) discussed the artwork for the Christmas issue. After some consideration it recommended the set by Rosalind Dease, commissioned by Harrisons, as the first choice. The Committee recommended that the Queen's head should be the new commemorative version, in gold, and that the horizontal design should be used for the low value stamp. (It was thought that horizontal stamps were preferred at Christmas because many card-senders wrote the name and address near the top of the envelope before affixing the stamp.) For its second choice the Committee recommended the set by Geoffrey Trenaman featuring angels, wise men and a crib scene. The only other set considered to make good stamps was that of flower designs by Mary Grierson.

The PMG accepted the recommendations and subsequently Harrison and Sons were instructed to produce essays of the designs by Rosalind Dease. The essays were ready by the beginning of April, sent on 9 April to Don Beaumont, Postal Services Department (PSD).

These essays were shown to the SAC at its meeting on 10 April 1968, chaired by G R Downes (Director of Operations and Overseas). These were considered very satisfactory; however it was agreed that the following changes should be made:

(a) the words 'Christmas 1968' should be replaced by some jollier message such as 'Happy Christmas'

(b) on the 3d stamp the girl's feet appeared to be tied together; this should be remedied

(c) on the 1s 3d stamp the words on the box that contained the bricks should be removed.

Some members felt that the stamps would be improved if the red rules along the bottom were removed. It was agreed that this view should be put to the artist, but the decision in the matter must be hers. In the event the artist was reluctant to remove the rules and the Post Office dropped the matter.

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## **PROGRAMME FOR 1968 ANNOUNCED**

The special stamp programme for 1968 was announced in Parliament on 27 July 1967 by Edward Short, followed up with a Press and Broadcast Notice (PB191). The values and dates were announced in Parliament on 20 November 1967, and in a Press and Broadcast Notice (PB319) where it was said that three Christmas stamps were to be issued on 25 November 1968 with the following values 3d, 9d and 1s 6d.

On 24 September 1968 the Post Office issued a Press and Broadcast Notice (PB253) giving updated details of the Christmas stamps, to be issued on 25 November while the designs emphasised that Christmas was very much a festival for children as all three showed children playing with their Christmas toys. The values of the stamps were now to be 4d, 9d and 1s 6d (following the introduction of the two tier postal system on 16 September 1968 the second class rate was 4d and first class 5d). The Post Office felt that Christmas cards were most likely to be sent at the second-class rate.

Further essays were produced with the amendments as recommended by the SAC in April. All feature 'Happy Christmas' while the 3d design was now produced showing a 4d value. The 1s 3d design was also produced showing a 1s 6d value.

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## THE QUEEN'S APPROVAL

The files give no indication of essays being sent to the Queen for approval, although this must have happened.

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## CHRISTMAS STAMPS ISSUED

On 23 November 1968 Press and Broadcast Notice (PB353) was issued stating that Christmas postage stamps were to be available from Monday, 25 November until 24 December; it was felt that the public would not wish to use these stamps after Christmas. The stamps remained available from the Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh for the normal one year period, until 24 November 1969.

The stamps were printed by Harrison and Sons on coated unwatermarked phosphor lined paper in sheets of 120, using the photogravure process on sheet fed rotary machines. The colours used were:

4d – black, brown, blue, orange, red, gold.

9d – yellow, cerise, orange, black, brown, olive green.

1s 6d – green, cerise, orange, blue, black, gold.

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## QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold were:

4d (Boy and Girl with Rocking Horse) – 326,078,360

9d (Girl with Doll's House) – 17,102,520

1s 6d (Boy with Train Set) – 21,344,760

Presentation Pack (English) – 72,474

Presentation Pack (German) – 7,298.

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## THE DESIGNS

The stamps featured children playing with toys. Rosalind Dease, the designer, undertook thorough and methodical research of dolls and toys during the process of designing these stamps. The 4d stamp featured a rocking horse with curved cradle bars serving as a rocker and was typical of those popular in the 1880s. The design of the stamp was a composite picture from illustrations in Leslie Daiken's 'Children's Toys Through the Ages'. The dolls shown on the 9d stamp were an English wax doll of about 1820 and a modern fabric doll

based on 19th century rag dolls. The doll's-house was an early Georgian example known as 'The Elegant Cousin' and was taken from Vivien Greene's 'English Dolls' Houses of the 18th and 19th Centuries'. Rosalind's daughter, Fenella Jane, was the model for the girl with the dolls on this stamp and she was also a source of inspiration for the girl on the rocking-horse on the 4d stamp. The boy on the 1s 6d stamp was a creation of Rosalind's imagination. The train-set featured on the 1s 6d stamp came from an old catalogue, 'American Toys, 1850 – 1890', reprinted as a pamphlet by an American publisher. Rosalind further developed the theme of dolls and toys for the presentation pack, which cost 3s 7d.

Rosalind Dease had already enjoyed success in partnership with her former husband David Gentleman on previous stamp designs, such as the Churchill and Battle of Britain both in 1965.

The stamps attracted a certain amount of criticism and 40 letters of complaint were received by the Post Office before the stamps were even issued. The complaints accused the Post Office of 'keeping Christ out of Christmas' and a number also vilified the artist. When it came to deciding the theme of the 1969 Christmas stamps these complaints were taken into consideration and the decision was made by the PMG and OOD to 'go religious in 1969'.

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## FIRST DAY COVERS

The first day envelope issued by the Post Office featured an illustration of a doll's house by Rosalind Dease. Envelopes were available in advance from the Philatelic Bureau and from post offices having philatelic boxes at 6d each. The Philatelic Bureau provided a full first day cover service. The inclusive charge for a cover bearing the three stamps handstamped with the Bureau first day of issue postmark was 5s 7d. The Bureau also accepted customers' own addressed envelopes for stamping on 25 November: the charge for this service was 3s 7d per cover. In addition both services were available with a 'Bethlehem, Llandeilo, Carms' postmark. The rule that covers should bear the full set of new stamps was not applied for this issue.

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## AIR LETTER FORMS

The Post Office issued two special Christmas air letter forms on 1 November 1968, one designed by Geoffrey Trenaman and the other by Peter Gauld. This was the fourth successive year that the Post Office issued pictorial Christmas air letter forms.

The form designed by Trenaman featured a drawing of a stylised airship with Father Christmas as a passenger. To the left of the address panel Father Christmas was depicted firing a canon with the words '25 DEC, 1968' coming out of the barrel. Trenaman also designed the impressed 9d stamp featuring three Christmas trees on a red background. The stamp design incorporated the cameo portrait of Her Majesty the Queen adapted by David Gentleman from the coinage design by the late Mrs Mary Gillick.

The other form, designed by Peter Gauld, showed an angel in flight. To the left of the address panel a choir boy was depicted holding a hymn book. The 9d impressed stamp designed by Gauld incorporated the profile of the Queen by Arnold Machin and depicted the Star of Bethlehem on a blue background.

The forms were of the same dimensions as the revised ordinary air letter form issued earlier that year on 1 July. The new dimensions had been introduced to conform to the new standardised sizes for envelopes so that the forms would be fully capable of handling by the mechanised sorting offices.

There were 1,500,440 of each type of form printed by Charles Skipper and East, using lithography. Owing to an oversight by the printer its name appears only on the 'Angel' forms.

The forms were available from all post offices from 1 November until 24 December 1968. The price was 10d including 9d postage.

Andy Pendlebury  
June 1994

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## REFERENCES

British Post Museum & Archive files:

MKD/BS/1690 Christmas stamps 1968 - PO invitations to submit designs.

Post 54 SAC Minutes 1968 - 1970

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB191 issued 27 July 1967

PB319 issued 20 November 1967

PB249 issued 16 September 1968

PB253 issued 24 September 1968

PB316 issued 30 October 1968

PB332 issued 12 November 1968

PB353 issued 23 November 1968

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