

## British Paintings

Date of issue: 12 AUGUST 1968



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On 10 July 1967 the Post Office issued a series of stamps reproducing famous British paintings and such was the popularity of this issue that the Post Office felt another would meet with similar approval.

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### SPECIAL STAMP PROGRAMME FOR 1968

The content of the stamp programme was the responsibility of the Postmaster General (PMG). Many suggestions were put forward by the public, interested bodies and organisations celebrating anniversaries, these were considered together with ideas generated within the Postal Headquarters. Recommendations would be put to the PMG who would subsequently decide on the annual stamp programme, adding and removing subjects as he saw fit.

On 27 July 1967 the PMG, Edward Short, announced in Parliament that there would be four special stamp issues in 1968. The programme was to include one set to mark three anniversaries, pictorial series depicting British bridges and British paintings, and Christmas stamps. The Post Office issued a Press and Broadcast Notice, PB191, that day confirming the programme. It was not until 20 November 1967 that the PMG announced in Parliament the values and dates of the stamps for 1968, again followed up with a Press and Broadcast Notice, PB319. The British paintings would be issued on 12 August and comprise four stamps, 4d, 1s 0d, 1s 6d and 1s 9d.

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## DELIBERATIONS OF THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

On 21 February 1968 the reconstituted Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) held its inaugural meeting chaired by G R Downes, Director of Operations and Overseas. It discussed the 1968 stamp programme. The Chairman stated that the Post Office was committed to a set of stamps reproducing British paintings in 1968 but there were no plans at that time for further such sets. It was acknowledged that although reproductions of paintings were currently very popular with philatelists and had considerable public appeal there were difficulties involved. The problems lay in obtaining a satisfactory reproduction of the artist's original painting at stamp size coupled with including the Queen's head and value. Mr Lousada, a member of the Committee and a Trustee of the Tate Gallery, said that he and his fellow Trustees felt strongly that the Queen's head did not fit well into reproductions of paintings. The Committee suggested that if there were future such issues, it might be preferable to place the Queen's head in a medallion.

Essays of five paintings had been produced and were examined by the Committee together with three essays from 1967. In January 1967 three essays had been produced as an experiment to establish whether paintings were a suitable subject for stamps. The three paintings essayed were: The Painter's Daughter by Gainsborough, Mr and Mrs Andrews also by Gainsborough and The Fighting 'Temeraire' by Turner. These were never considered for the 1967 paintings issue. The five paintings essayed for the 1968 issue were: Queen Elizabeth I by an unknown artist, The Hay Wain by Constable, Pinkie by Lawrence, Portsmouth by Turner and St Mary le Port by Piper. The Committee recommended four in the following order of preference:

- (1) Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I, artist unknown,
- (2) St Mary le Port, by Piper,
- (3) The Painters' Daughters by Gainsborough,
- (4) The Hay Wain by Constable.

The fifth essay, Pinkie by Lawrence, was held in reserve.

The Committee recommended that the Queen Elizabeth I should be the 4d stamp and that Stuart Rose, the Post Office design advisor, be asked to consider the position and form of the Queen's head and value on the stamps. It was also recommended that the painters' names shown on the stamps be followed by their dates.

The recommendations of the SAC were put to the PMG who subsequently made the following choice:

- (a) Portrait of Elizabeth I,
- (b) Piper's St Mary le Port,
- (c) Constable's The Hay Wain,
- (d) Lawrence's Pinkie.

The SAC was told of the PMG's decision at its next meeting on 10 April. Stuart Rose had in the meantime produced mock-ups of the original essays with his proposals for the Queen's head and values. Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, had not had time to produce further essays. To ease production schedules it had been agreed that the designs would go straight to printing cylinders. Rose had suggested keeping the two elements clear of the painting image but was instructed to make the painting fill the entire space. Rose was far from happy on this matter and in an effort to limit the interference to only one corner of the painting he had decided, wherever possible, to place them together. This was suitable for three of the paintings but not the Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen's head was to be embossed in gold and the value was also in gold. After discussion the Committee suggested that for the Constable design two proofs should be produced, one with the Queen's head and value in the top right hand corner and the other with the head and value in the bottom right hand corner: a choice could then be made. The Committee agreed that for the Piper stamp the Queen's head should be slightly more to the right. A slight colour change would be necessary in the bottom right hand corner where the head and value were to be positioned: this would require the artist being consulted.

When the choice between the two 'Hay Wain' designs was made, the one with the Queen's head and value in the top right hand corner was favoured.

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## ESSAYS AND PROOFS

Within the material held in the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) are the following:

### Portsmouth by Turner

On the essay the Queen's head is top right and the 1/- value is top left. There is no date on the stamp, which suggests it was one of the first essays produced. The painting by Turner dates from 1824, one of twelve produced for a sequel to 'Rivers of England' with a mezzotint by Thomas Lupton. Six, including this one, were issued under Lupton's name as 'The Ports of England', between 1826 and 1828. They were reissued in 1856 with the remaining six as 'Harbours of England' by Turner and Rushkin.

### Queen Elizabeth I

An essay and an imperforate proof without phosphor bands, both as the issued stamp. This portrait is by an unknown artist and is thought to have been painted around 1575.

### Pinkie

An essay with 4d value in top left hand corner and Queen's head bottom right. This is one of the paintings first seen in 1967. A proof, as modified by Stuart Rose, imperforate and

without phosphor bands, with the Queen's head and 1/- value at the bottom right hand corner. The date of the painting has been added to the painter's name in the guttering as on the issued stamp. Pinkie was Miss Sarah Moulton-Barrett and painted by Sir Thomas Lawrence in 1795 when he had just been elected RA and had become the most fashionable painter of the day.

#### St Mary le Port

Essay with value bottom left and Queen's head top right. An imperforate proof without phosphor bands and a final essay, both with value and Queen's head bottom right and date of painting added. St Mary le Port is an historic old church in Bristol. This picture was painted by John Piper immediately after the church sustained extensive damage from enemy action during 1940.

#### The Hay Wain

Two versions, both with date of painting, one with Queen's head and value top right and one with Queen's head and value bottom right. No mock-up was made of this design. The Hay Wain is one of John Constable's most famous paintings. The date on the stamp is 1821; however, some records indicate that the painting was shown at the Royal Academy in 1820. In 1824 it was awarded a gold medal with another painting, View on the Stour, at the Paris Salon.

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### ROYAL APPROVAL

The four recommended essays were sent for approval to the Queen by Roy Mason, the new PMG. The next day the Queen gave her approval.

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### STAMPS ISSUED

The stamps went on sale on Monday, 12 August 1968. The 4d was vertical and featured a three-quarter length painting of Queen Elizabeth I by an unknown artist, circa 1575. The colours used were yellow, red, grey, black and gold. The 1s 0d stamp was also vertical and featured the painting by Sir Thomas Lawrence of Pinkie, Miss Sarah Moulton-Barrett. The colours used were yellow, red, pink, blue, black and gold. The 1s 6d stamp, vertical, reproduced a painting by the contemporary artist John Piper of the church St Mary le Port after a bomb raid on Bristol in 1940. The colours used were yellow, orange, grey, red, blue, black and pink. The 1s 9d stamp was horizontal and featured The Hay Wain by John Constable. The colours used were yellow, red, blue, black and gold. On each stamp the Queen's head was embossed in gold. The stamps were printed in photogravure on non-watermarked coated paper by Harrison and Sons Ltd on sheet-fed rotary machines and all

had phosphor bands. They were issued in sheets of 60. The name of the artist and the printer appeared under the design of each stamps.

At the time of issue the paintings were located as follows:

Queen Elizabeth I - National Portrait Gallery, London.

Pinkie - Henry E Huntingdon Library and Art Gallery, San Marino, California, USA.

St Mary le Port - Tate Gallery, London.

The Hay Wain - National Gallery, London.

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## **PAYMENTS**

For the 1967 British Paintings issue the Postal Services Department (PSD) sought advice from the Tate Gallery regarding copyrights. It was informed there was no copyright on paintings where the artist had been dead for 50 years and over. This was verified by the Post Office Solicitors Department who added that as a matter of courtesy the concurrence of the owners should be sought. Of the artists whose work was reproduced for the 1967 series only L S Lowry was still alive at the time and he was offered 250 guineas by the Post Office as a payment of royalty for reproducing the painting Children coming out of school. This amount, acceptable by Lowry, was equal to that given to designers who had work accepted by the Post Office. For the 1968 series John Piper was the only artist alive at the time; although the files offer no evidence, it is extremely likely that Piper received a similar payment to that paid to Lowry.

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## **REMOVAL WITH SOLVENT**

On 29 July 1968 Post Office Supplies Division wrote to Postal Headquarters saying that the Government chemist had reported that tests on the Paintings (1968) special stamps showed it was possible to remove the Queen's head, which was in gilt, and the figures using acetone without removing any of the other pigments. The matter was taken up with the printers who carried out their own tests and reported that 'in every case it was possible for us to see it had been done' and that 'all printing inks, particularly if it is a colour standing on its own, can with a certain amount of care be removed using solvents'. However the company confirmed it would continue to make these metallic inks more permanent. No further correspondence on this matter exists.

## THE ARTISTS

Sir Thomas Lawrence (1769-1830) was born in Bristol, the son of an innkeeper. At the age of 18 he exhibited at the Royal Academy and from then on was extremely successful. He was made ARA in 1791, appointed Painter to the King (George III) on the death of Reynolds in 1792, and elected RA in 1794. He went on to be knighted in 1815 and became President of the Royal Academy in 1820.

John Piper was born in Epsom, Surrey in 1903. Before entering the Royal College of Art in 1928 he worked in the office of his father, a solicitor. Piper became a distinguished painter of modern times. In 1941 he was commissioned by the Queen to do a series of watercolours featuring Windsor Castle. He was Official War Artist to the Ministry of Information during the Second World War, during which time he painted St Mary le Port. He was made an Honorary ARIBA in 1957, Honorary ARCA in 1959. His success continued through the 1960s when he designed the windows and interior of Nuffield College Chapel, Oxford, which was completed in 1961, the window of Coventry Cathedral in 1966 and the tapestry for Chichester Cathedral in 1966. In 1967 he became a Trustee of the Tate Gallery, where St Mary le Port is on show.

John Constable (1766-1837) became one of the greatest English landscape painters. Although his father had originally intended him to have a career in the Church, encouraged by Sir George Beaumont, a distinguished painter and connoisseur of the arts, it was agreed that he should go to London, where he was admitted to the Royal Academy schools in 1799 and exhibited his first landscapes in 1802. He went on to be made an ARA in 1819 and an RA in 1829. He painted many fine landscapes until his sudden death in 1837.

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## FIRST DAY COVERS

The Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh provided a full first day cover service. The inclusive charge for an official cover, designed by David Gentleman, with all four stamps was 7s 7d. Envelopes were available in advance at a cost of 6d each from the Bureau and the 145 post offices having philatelic posting boxes for this issue. Presentation packs containing a full set of stamps together with background information were also available at 5s 7d each.

Queen Elizabeth I is associated with Hatfield House and on the day of issue there was a bulk posting of covers at Hatfield, Herts bearing 4d stamps. The items were cancelled by a machine slogan that read 'First Day of Issue'. Slogan postmarks were also in use at London SE1, the birthplace of Queen Elizabeth I and London W1, home to London's art galleries.

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## PRESENTATION PACKS

In 1968 there was the launch of an overseas philatelic sales drive by the Post Office and starting with the British Paintings series a presentation pack with German inset notes was introduced. Presentation packs had not at that juncture penetrated the overseas market to any extent.

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## QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold of the four stamps were:

4d – 185,034,000

1s – 17,953,440

1s 6d – 8,878,440

1s 9d – 5,739,000

Presentation Pack (English) – 93,829

Presentation Pack (German) – 7,880.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 11 August 1969.

Andy Pendlebury  
June 1994

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## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

MKD/BS/1760 Special series - British Paintings 1968 - Submission to Palace.

MKD/BS/2425 General - British Paintings - removal of Queen's head and figures with solvent.

MKD/BS/1900 Special Series - British Paintings 1967

Post 54 SAC Minutes 1968-1970

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB191 issued 27 July 1967

PB319 issued 20 November 1967

PB195 issued 29 July 1968

Weekly Newspaper Feature

WNF 27 issued 6 July 1968

Stanley Gibbons Great Britain Specialised Stamp Catalogue Vol. 3 Queen Elizabeth II Pre-decimal. Stanley Gibbons Publications

Philatelic Bulletin

Vol. 5, no. 11, July 1968, pp 8-9

Vol. 17, no. 2, October 1979, pp 30-31