

Notable Anniversaries

Date of issue: 2 APRIL 1969



On 5 December 1967 NATO's Director of Information suggested all signatories to the Treaty should issue a stamp for the 20th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April 1969. This had the full support of the Foreign Office and pressed the Post Office to respond positively. On 7 March 1968 G R Downes, Director of Operations and Overseas, wrote to the Postmaster General (PMG) recommending that a NATO stamp be included in the 1969 stamp programme. The PMG felt it could possibly be part of an 'Anniversaries' issue, as had appeared in 1968.

At the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting held on 21 February 1968 Downes, its Chairman, told the Committee that although the composition of the annual stamp programme did not figure in its terms of reference, on this occasion any views would be welcome. The Chairman told the Committee that so far special stamps had fallen into three categories, the commemoration of important events, the commemoration of anniversaries, and the more general or thematic issues. The choice of events and anniversaries could be affected by political as well as design or marketing considerations.

Over 100 suggestions for stamps in 1969 had been received by the Post Office. The Secretary, J R Baxter, informed the members of the more important ones. These were: The Investiture of the Prince of Wales (a stamp issue for this had already been agreed)

The 20th anniversary of NATO
The maiden voyage of the 'Queen Elizabeth 2'
The centenary of the 'Cutty Sark'
Aviation anniversaries - including the flight of Alcock and Brown
The 200th anniversary of James Watt's steam pump
The 200th anniversary of the Wedgwood factory
(a 'British Pottery' series was an alternative)
Stamps showing British architecture - cathedrals, stately homes, villages, etc.

The Chairman suggested the matter be discussed at the next meeting.

The SAC met on 10 April 1968 and discussed the 1969 stamp programme. The Chairman stated that the PMG had agreed to a stamp commemorating the 20th anniversary of NATO; and it might be part of an Anniversaries series.

After discussing the possibilities, the committee suggested the following special issues:

- (a) Anniversaries
- (b) Ships
- (c) Cathedrals
- (d) Christmas.

For the Anniversaries issue the Committee suggested including the NATO stamp, the Wedgwood anniversary, James Watt's steam pump and the Alcock and Brown flight. The members felt that international anniversaries did not on the whole make good subjects for stamps, and did not favour a stamp for the 50th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation, which the Minister of Labour had asked the PMG to commemorate.

SUGGESTION ADOPTED

At the SAC meeting held on 19 June 1968 the Chairman advised that the PMG had said there would probably be an Anniversaries series in 1969, but gave no details.

CEPT

The year also marked the tenth anniversary of the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT). On 25 August 1967 a circular was sent by the President of CEPT in Berne, Switzerland inviting member administrations to make a special effort to participate in future issues of Europa stamps.

A further circular was sent on 18 October 1967 noting that an assembly at Rome had decided that a jury would convene at the beginning of the following year to choose the design of the Europa stamp for 1969, 1970 and 1971. The subject matter would be decided during the special meeting of the Postal Committee on Thursday, 25 January 1968. All administrations were invited to produce essays.

The instructions that accompanied the circular stated that each administration taking part would be free to decide:

the number and denominations to issue,

the colour(s) of the stamp,

the format of the stamp - wherever possible, however, the format should be the same as (or near to) that of previous issues. In addition to the indication of country and value, the word EUROPA and the reference CEPT should appear on the stamp. The legend CEPT might appear either in the form of the emblem adopted or simply the letters themselves.

Essays showing maps were not to be entered.

The artist would receive 2,500 Gold Francs for each essay retained by the Postal Committee jury. This sum was to be met, in equal parts, by administrations used the essay for their issues. These designs were to be submitted by the end of December 1967.

Photographs of designs submitted by Iceland, the Netherlands and Italy are held at British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA). The design by Italy became the chosen design.

There was a strong feeling amongst CEPT members that all CEPT stamps should be issued on the same date (the Monday prior to the 5 May, the Council of Europe having designated 5 May as Europa day for 1969). This presented a problem for the British Post Office in that the stamp programme had already been decided with the Europa stamp to be included in the Anniversaries series to be issued 2 April 1969. The Post Office felt that to issue the stamp prematurely would be embarrassing to the other CEPT countries. On writing to the President of the CEPT on 16 October 1968, notifying him of the decision to issue the recommended design, mention was made of the dilemma the proposed issue date was creating. The President replied, on 18 October 1968, that rather than the earlier date being a hindrance, it would on the contrary be an agreeable surprise.

The value of the Europa stamp was 9d, the letter rate to Europe at that time.

The design was by Italian artists Luigi Gasbarra and Gorgio Belli and was common to all member countries that issued a stamp. The British issue was adapted by Michael and Sylvia Goaman to include the Queen's head.

NATO

The year 1969 was notable as the 20th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, an important political and military alliance, in Washington, USA on 4 April 1949. It was, moreover, of particular significance because that year and thereafter, under Article 13 of the Treaty, a country could, if it wished, give one year's notice of withdrawal. It was therefore believed that the signatories should take every opportunity of giving public recognition to their continuing support for the Treaty, and help to counteract any misrepresentations that the Treaty was to expire in 1969.

The fifteen members, in 1969, of the Alliance were Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Turkey, UK and USA. The stated aim at that time was to maintain adequate military strength and political solidarity to deter any aggression and to work to promote peaceful and mutually beneficial relations between East and West.

On 5 December 1967 B V White of the Foreign Office wrote to S Johns, Postal Services Department (PSD) at Post Office headquarters, explaining that all delegations to the North Atlantic Council had been asked by Director of Information, NATO to bring to the attention of the appropriate authorities the suggestion that the 20th anniversary in 1969 of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty be marked by a special NATO stamp. White went on to say that the idea had full Foreign Office support and would Johns therefore 'kindly place it before the Postmaster General with our recommendation'.

The United Kingdom was at that time one of the few signatories of the North Atlantic Treaty that had not issued stamps in commemoration, the others being Iceland, Denmark, Norway and Federal Republic of Germany. It was the view of the NATO Directorate of Information that these stamps provided an effective way of bringing the Organisation to public attention and the greatest impact would be achieved if all countries chose the same date for the day of issue, possibly 4 April 1969.

At the beginning of 1958 the idea of member countries bringing out a tenth anniversary stamp had been broached. While approving the basic idea, the United Kingdom stated that it could not agree on grounds of principle, since all United Kingdom stamps had to bear the effigy of the Head of State. Of the fifteen member countries, eight issued a stamp in 1959, while Portugal released a tenth anniversary stamp a year later in 1960. The stamps were all of different designs.

On 8 December 1967 S Johns of PSD replied to the Foreign Office saying that the PMG would probably not finalise the 1969 stamp programme for some months but the suggestion of a 20th anniversary stamp would be given full consideration.

The Foreign Office wrote back on 26 January 1968 enclosing a further memorandum from the NATO Secretariat that argued the need for a speedy decision in principle. The Foreign Office felt that the problems that caused the United Kingdom's non-participation on the tenth anniversary had presumably been overcome, in that the GPO now used a small Queen's head.

G R Downes, Director Operations and Overseas, wrote on 7 March 1968 to the PMG recommending a NATO stamp be included in the 1969 programme. The PMG responded by suggesting another anniversary series. On 14 March the Foreign Office was informed that the PMG had agreed in principle to a stamp to mark the 20th anniversary of NATO in 1969. It had not yet been decided whether to have an entire special issue (of three or four stamps of different values) devoted to NATO or to include one NATO stamp in a special series of three or four stamps commemorating different anniversaries.

The Director of Information, NATO on 23 July 1968 suggested that a meeting be held of postal experts in connection with the issue of commemorative stamps on the occasion of the 20th anniversary, proposing Friday, 20 September 1968. The GPO responded positively on the following grounds:

- a) courtesy to NATO;
- b) desire to show that the GPO plays a prominent role in stamp design;
- c) desire not to have a design circulated that the GPO found unacceptable;
- d) the fact that Michael Goaman had already been commissioned to prepare a preliminary design that was due to be ready by 20 September; it was felt that the GPO might be able to impose the design on the others which it felt would be convenient and good for design prestige.

By 28 August 1968 the Director of Information wrote again, this time cancelling the meeting as only Belgium and the UK had accepted the invitation.

ANNIVERSARY SERIES ANNOUNCED

On 5 August 1968, the PMG, John Stonehouse, announced his decision to commemorate the following in a series of four stamps to be issued in April 1969:

- 50th anniversary of Ross and Keith Smith's first flight from England to Australia;
- 50th anniversary of the first trans-Atlantic flight by Alcock and Brown;

10th anniversary of the founding of the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT);
20th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and the formation of NATO

Details of the values and the date of issue were to be advised later.

On 4 October 1968 a Press and Broadcast Notice, PB258, was issued, stating that a stamp to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation was to be issued in April 1969.

The PMG, having been asked by the Minister of Labour, had decided to include a stamp to mark this event in the Anniversaries series. The SAC had previously stated it did not favour this, but the final decision rested with the PMG.

ARTISTS INVITED

As previously noted, for the Europa stamp the Post Office felt duty bound to adopt the common design and Michael and Sylvia Goaman were commissioned to add the Queen's head and the value.

For the remaining stamps five artists were commissioned to prepare designs. They were Clive Abbott, Jeffery Matthews, Michael Goaman, Richard Negus and Philip Sharland.

ARTWORK SUBMITTED

The files contain no copies of the instructions issued to the artists. There is no record of when the artwork was received; however, the designs were shown to the SAC on 9 October 1968 and the following artwork is held by the British Postal Museum & Archive.

Clive Abbott – two at 5d for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic, two at 1s 9d for the first flight to Australia

Jeffery Matthews – one at 9d for NATO, one at 9d for the International Labour Organisation (ILO), one at 1s 9d for the first flight to Australia

Michael Goaman – one at 5d for the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic, one at 9d for CEPT, one at 1s 6d for NATO, one at 9d for ILO, one at 1s 9d for first flight to Australia

Philip Sharland – three at 5d for first non-stop flight across the Atlantic, four at 9d for NATO, five at 9d for ILO

Richard Negus/Philip Sharland – two at 1s 6d NATO, two at 1s 9d first flight to Australia.

DELIBERATIONS OF THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The designs were shown to the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 9 October 1968. While not particularly enthusiastic about any of the designs, it decided to recommend the work of Philip Sharland with certain modifications. None of the NATO designs was found acceptable and it was suggested that Sharland try again on similar lines to his 'spanner' design for ILO. Some members preferred Sharland's design for ILO showing the spanners but would have liked stronger colours used, whilst the Chairman and other members suggested the 'Globe' design with lettering be altered: it was decided to essay both. The SAC felt that the Alcock and Brown flight design should have different colours, whilst the design for the flight to Australia required no alterations. All felt that the CEPT design was unfortunate but recognised that there was no alternative but to accept the common design. As all the designs except CEPT would be by Sharland, it was agreed that he should be asked to make the lettering as consistent as possible.

On 23 October 1968 G R Downes, the Director of Operations and Overseas and Chairman of the SAC, submitted to the PMG the Anniversaries artwork together with the recommendations of the SAC. This included Sharland's further work on the NATO design. Of the two new designs one was a revision of his original with different colours and a slight change of design, the other constituted a new concept but was, in the opinion of Downes, unacceptable.

The PMG accepted the recommendations of the SAC and had essays prepared of the designs by Sharland.

However, the PMG asked for additional designs to be essayed. These are mentioned in the files as:

Matthews - NATO

Sharland - ILO

Goaman - Australia

Sharland - Atlantic.

The essays were ready for consideration by the SAC at its meeting on 20 November 1968.

The essays were then submitted to the PMG by G R Downes on 20 December 1968 along with the following recommendations from the SAC. The Committee felt that the additional essays requested by the PMG had not come out well, so their recommendation remained. For the Atlantic flight design the Committee preferred the brown/green colouring to the violet/blue. On a matter of detail it asked for the Queen's head to be lowered slightly and tinted the colour of the aircraft's wings, and for the value figure to be shown in white. Regarding the CEPT design, the Committee had asked for further essays in alternative

colours: these had been produced in blue and brown in addition to the original green. The Committee preferred the brown.

On submitting the essays to the PMG Downes wrote that for the Atlantic flight and CEPT designs the Committee's preferences (as regards colours) were not really acceptable on operational grounds. He explained that phosphor bars tend to give weak signals when placed against those colours; this would create a considerable risk that a large proportion of items would be incorrectly treated by the mechanised letter facing machines. Downes stated that he did not like going against the SAC's recommendations; however, he strongly felt that the operational needs had to have priority and therefore recommended that the blue backgrounds were chosen for both the 5d (Atlantic) and 9d (CEPT) stamps.

On 23 December Downes was notified that the PMG accepted his recommendations for the CEPT, ILO and NATO stamps; however, from the additional essays he had requested he chose the design by Michael Goaman for the 'Australia flight' and by Philip Sharland for the 'Atlantic flight' stamp.

On 28 November 1968 Press and Broadcast Notice (PB374) gave details of the Notable Anniversaries series to be issued in 1969:

50th anniversary of the first non-stop transatlantic flight by Alcock and Brown, 5d.

10th anniversary of the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunications Administrations (CEPT), 9d.

50th anniversary of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1s.

20th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty (NATO), 1s 6d.

50th anniversary of the flight to Australia (Ross and Keith Smith), 1s 9d.

THE QUEEN'S APPROVAL

On 1 January 1969 the essays were presented to the Queen for approval, which was sent on 3 January.

On 8 January the essays were sent to Mr York of Harrison and Sons Ltd, requesting the following amendments:

ILO – value to be 1s 0d.

NATO – value to be 1s 6d; the flag to be moved slightly right and the shades on the furls to be better defined; the flagpole to be thicker and in white; The Netherlands small flag (red, white and blue), horizontal stripes, at extreme right middle row should be deeper blue similar to the blue of the French flag in top row.

Australia flight – define more clearly the figure in the front cockpit.

It was hoped to see the amended essays prior to cylinder production. It was strongly suggested that Harrison and Sons Ltd be in touch with Sharland about the amendments to the NATO essay.

On the same date five identical essays were sent to Supplies Department, Hemel Hempstead, presumably as a record.

On 14 January 1969 Harrison and Sons Ltd sent a bromide of the revised NATO design to Don Beaumont of Postal Services Department. The bromide was shown to Stuart Rose, Director of Design and a member of the SAC, for approval. On 16 January 1969 Harrison and Sons were given that approval.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The five stamps were issued on 2 April 1969, designed by Philip Sharland (5d, 1s 0d, 1s 6d) and Michael Goaman (9d, 1s 9d).

The quantities sold were as follows:

5d – 82,285,680

9d – 9,823,200

1s 0d – 10,302,360

1s 6d – 10,512,480

1s 9d – 6,155,760

Presentation pack (English) – 90,282

Presentation pack (German) – 4,539.

The stamps were printed in photogravure on non-watermarked coated paper by Harrison and Sons Ltd.

For the first time all sheets had their total face value printed, once in the margin of each quarter sheet. All values were printed sheet fed gravure with the exception of the 5d which was reel fed gravure. All stamps had phosphor bands, those on the 5d printed in gravure, on the other denominations by flexography (letterpress).

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 1 April 1970.

FIRST DAY COVERS

The official Post Office first day envelope was designed by Philip Sharland.

The NATO headquarters was originally located in Paris, but moved to Brussels in October 1967. A British Forces Post Office began serving the headquarters in 1951. To commemorate the 20th anniversary the British Forces Postal Service produced a special first day cover on sale from the BFPO at NATO in Brussels and at SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe) in Casteau near Mons, Belgium. Special datestamps were used on 2 April 1969.

On 23 August a NATO Air Day was held and a special souvenir cover was produced by RAF Chivenor, Barnstaple, Devon. The cover bore a 1s 6d NATO stamp and was cancelled by a special BFPO NATO handstamp in use at RAF Chivenor and then flown on a special supersonic flight to RAF Leuchers and received suitable flown cachets.

Andy Pendlebury
November 1993

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

MKD/BS/2084 - Special series - CEPT EUROPA stamps

MKD/BS/1755 - Notable Anniversaries April 1969 submission to PMG

MKD/BS/2712 - Special series 20th Anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty - 1969

Post 54 - SAC Minutes 1968-1970

'Philatelic Bulletin' Vol 6, No. 6, February 1969

'Philatelic Bulletin' Vol 6, No. 12, August 1969

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB205 issued 5 August 1968,

PB258 issued 4 October 1968,

PB374 issued 28 November 1968

PB90 issued 31 March 1969

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