

Post Office Technology

Date of issue: 1 OCTOBER 1969



On 13 May 1968, George Downes, Director of Operations and Overseas as well as Chairman of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), submitted to the Postmaster General (PMG) the recommendations for the 1969 stamp programme. Although not strictly within its terms of reference, the newly reconstituted SAC had been consulted and the recommendations took account of its views.

Amongst the recommendations were the major events: The Investiture of the Prince of Wales and the maiden voyage of the 'Queen Elizabeth 2' liner. For the maiden voyage of the 'Queen Elizabeth 2' it was suggested it should be part of a series on British Ships, possibly including the 'Cutty Sark' as 1969 was the centenary year of its launching.

It was felt particularly appropriate to issue a set on Post Office events in 1969, with the introduction of Giro and the change to corporation status for the Post Office: the stamps could show various facets of the Post Office, for example, scenes from its history or contemporary activity, including one stamp at least devoted to Giro.

The following timetable was suggested if the PMG accepted the recommendations:

- January (date of maiden voyage of 'Queen Elizabeth 2') - British Ships - four stamps including the 'Queen Elizabeth 2' and possibly the 'Cutty Sark'.
- April (date of NATO anniversary) - Anniversaries - four stamps, commemorating NATO, ILO, Alcock and Brown, James Watt's steam pump.
- May - English Cathedrals - six stamps (three values) with a block showing four mediaeval cathedrals, plus St Paul's Cathedral and Coventry Cathedral
- July - Investiture of Prince of Wales - three stamps.
- October - The Post Office - four stamps, illustrating Post Office history and development, and Giro.
- November - Christmas - three stamps of a Christmas theme with a religious and traditional basis.

Downes informed the PMG that suggestions for values would be made at a later date. The dates of issue were also to be suggested, with Tuesday or Wednesday operationally the most convenient, while a spread throughout the year would ease production, distribution and sales.

The PMG accepted the general proposals, with some slight alterations. He agreed that there should be a series on the Post Office and was inclined to favour an historical treatment featuring mail coaches, etc. He also agreed that one of the stamps should show Giro: Baxter advised it might be possible to obtain both historical and 'current activity' designs for the series, so giving the PMG a choice. Later it was decided that the Post Office series should be issued in October.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

Normally instructions were sent to artists to aid preparing designs: there are no records of such instructions in this instance.

DELIBERATIONS OF THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

A meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) was held on 9 October, at which Downes, Chairman, reported that artists would be asked to submit alternative sets of designs illustrating both the modern and historical aspects of the Post Office.

At its next meeting on 8 January 1969 the SAC discussed the series and welcomed C Banks, Production Director of De La Rue & Co Ltd whose company would be printing the stamps (Mr Banks was attending as technical adviser). The PMG had not yet decided whether the series would be historical or modern. Although a historical series might lend itself to more popular designs, the stamps were primarily being issued to commemorate the new status of the Post Office, so a modern series, more 'forward-looking' might be more appropriate. In either case it was felt there should be a stamp illustrating Giro.

The following artwork is held at the British Postal Museum & Archive.

Bradbury Wilkinson:

5d - Magneto telephone

9d - Early sorting carriage (1838)

1s 0d - Village Post Office

1s 6d - First British telegraph

5d - Goonhilly Downs (GPO Earth Station for satellite communications)

1s 0d - Sorting machines

1s 6d - National Giro

Philip Sharland:

5d - Automatic Letter Sorter

1s 0d - National Data Processing Service

1s 0d - National Giro Centre

1s 6d - National Giro

5d - Letter Carrier 1810

9d - Mail Coach 1835

1s 6d - Desk Telephone 1896

J Kinneir:

5d - Four overlapping stamps from the past

9d - Silhouettes of postmen through the years

1s 6d - Pillar boxes through the years

5d - Automatic letter facing machine

1s 0d - Telecommunications

1s 0d - Giro

J Griffiths:

5d - Parcel post

9d - Early pillar box

1s 0d - Postman and barrow

1s 6d - Mail coach

1s 6d - Symbolic automatic sorting

5d - Giro

9d - Telephone dial and globe

1s 0d - Giro

1s 0d - Circuit board and computer punch card

Grafton Arts Ltd:

5d - 19th century mail coach

9d - Bell's first telephone, 1875

1s 6d - First Post Office savings bank 1861

1s 6d - Postal work

1s 0d - Giro

5d - Telecommunications

9d - National Data Processing Service

Rosalind Dease:

9d - 1856 Pillar box

9d - 1820 Bellman
5d - 18th century postboy
5d - 1836 Travelling Post Office (TPO)
5d - 1836 Mail coach
5d - 1887 Parcel post
1s 0d - 1842 Mail boat

De La Rue:

9d - Penny letter rate and early sorting carriage
1s 0d - 1861 First Post Office savings
1s 6d - 1912 Telephones unification, early telephone operators
9d - Unloading a line printer, National Data Processing Service, computer communications
1s 0d - National Giro Centre 1968
1s 9d - First Premium Bond, ERNIE, 1956
5d - Early Bird satellite, Goonhilly Downs dish aerial, telecommunications 1969.

The designs were discussed by the SAC on 8 January: the general consensus was that the Vesting Day of the new Corporation was the wrong occasion for a historical series and therefore the first preference was a modern set.

The following designs were recommended:

Sharland's 'Giro' design based on the G motif
Sharland's 'automatic letter sorter'
Sharland's 'STD' design
Kinneir's 'Telecommunications' design.

The SAC recommended a second set if the PMG preferred a historical series:

Miss Dease's '1836 mail coach'
Miss Dease's '1858 pillar box'
Sharland's '1896 desk telephone'
Sharland's 'Giro' design (as recommended for the modern set).

In his capacity as technical advisor, Banks explained that metallic inks did not produce the best results with the Delacryl process that De La Rue would be using to print the stamps. It was therefore preferable that the Queen's head should not be shown in gold or silver. Banks felt that otherwise the designs chosen presented no problems and told the Committee that it would probably take 6 weeks, from receipt of the artwork, to produce essays.

The PMG, while agreeing that a modern series would be appropriate, considered the final recommendations to be of insufficient merit to warrant production. The PMG asked for a new set to be designed and suggested David Gentleman as a possible designer. Five designs

are held at the British Postal Museum & Archive vary slightly from the issued stamps and are as follows:

Stamp size set of four showing automatic sorting, value 1s 6d;

Stamp size set of four showing Giro 'G' symbol;

Strip of four stamp size designs showing voice waves;

Strip of four stamp size designs each showing half a telephone dial, two designs forming one dial;

Stamp size design showing half dial, half globe.

The designs produced by Gentleman were found acceptable by the PMG. These new designs were examined by the SAC on 11 February. It was unanimous that the designs were far more suitable than any of the originals. The Committee was told that the PMG had suggested producing the two telecommunications stamps in alternate columns on the same sheet: this did not find favour with the Committee. Two members, S Rose and Professor R Guyatt, felt that the Queen's head should be more prominent on the Telecommunications design. The Chairman agreed and said that Gentleman would be asked to consider the matter.

ESSAYS EXAMINED

Essays were produced by De La Rue for the next meeting of the SAC, on 26 March 1969. It recommended the following alterations:

5d Giro –

The inner, pale royal blue circle should have a smaller circumference and be darker in colour. The words National Giro should be moved slightly to the left to avoid registration difficulties and the size of the pence sign should be fractionally increased.

9d Telecommunications –

The size of the pence sign should be fractionally increased as on the Giro stamp.

1s 0d Telecommunications –

The head, lettering and value should be in white - subject to the artist's view. If he found this suggestion acceptable, the Committee asked that he consider the following possibilities:

- (i) black head - white lettering and value,
- (ii) black head and value - white lettering,
- (iii) black head, value and lettering.

1s 6d Automatic sorting –

The wording 'Automatic Sorting' should be in pale blue, the pink should be lighter, and a stamp should be printed on the third letter in the right hand column of the automatic sorter.

It was agreed that Rose and Beaumont would discuss these points with Gentleman.

STAMPS ANNOUNCED

On 19 August Press and Broadcast Notice PB210 was released announcing that four stamps were to be issued on 1 October, Vesting Day for the new Post Office corporation, to mark some of the Post Office's technological achievements. The notice gave details of the designs:

The 5d stamp featured the well-known arrow-G symbol of the national Giro, which was the first system of more than 40 throughout the world to be based on one central computer complex. The design, printed in lavender, royal blue, dark blue and black, embodied the conventional sign for a computer transistor, with associated circuitry.

The 9d stamp, printed in green, blue and black, symbolised the progress of International Subscriber Dialling towards an integrated world telecommunication system. In each corner of the stamp there was a segment of a stylised telephone dial. Seen in the sheet, every intersection of four stamps showed a complete dial with the Queen's head and the value.

The 1s 0d stamp, printed in lavender, green and black, had as its subject Pulse Code Modulation (PCM). PCM enabled up to 24 telephone conversations to be made simultaneously over one circuit. For this design David Gentleman used a conceptual diagram of the wave patterns of two voices travelling interleaved on one circuit.

The 1s 6d stamp, printed in rose, light blue, dark blue and black, symbolised the massive programme of automation that was beginning to transform mail handling in Britain. The design incorporated a representation of the phosphor dots that were printed across envelopes with postcodes for high-speed reading by electronic sorting machines, and a diagrammatic version of three destination boxes in one of the machines.

FIRST DAY SERVICE

Press and Broadcast Notice PB225 on 9 September 1969 advised that a full first day of issue service would be provided on 1 October by the Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh. The inclusive charge for servicing the cover with the full range of stamps was 6s 8d. The Bureau also accepted addressed envelopes to stamp and post on the day of issue at a cost of 4s 8d per

cover. 50 or more covers to one address were serviced at a cost of 5s 8d per cover. The envelope, designed by Leslie V Howard, measured 7½ inches by 4½ inches. Presentation packs were available at 4s 8d each.

DELACRYL

Thomas De La Rue and Company Ltd, the inventors of the process, had 'launched' Delacryl in May 1966, and by 1969 had printed stamps for over 60 countries using the process.

Although Andrew Restall, a well respected stamp designer, had urged its use in September 1967 in the final report of his two years' Fellowship in Minuscule Design at the Royal College of Art, the Post Office Technology issue was the first produced for the GPO using this process.

The process produced brighter and more perfectly detailed stamps through sharp line work, subtle colour definition and the ability to print firm black colour in the 'unshaded' areas. Delacryl was basically a lithographic process enhanced in order to offer both the same facility for multicolour work as photogravure, and the fine line detail of recess printing.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold of the four stamps were:

5d – 72,405,720

9d – 8,472,000

1s 0d – 10,296,120

1s 6d – 10,757,040

Presentation pack – 104,230.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 30 September 1970.

Andy Pendlebury
February, 1994

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files: MKD/BS/2144: Post 54

'Philatelic Bulletin': Volume 7, No. 2, October 1969

Press and Broadcast Notices:

PB210 issued 19 August 1969

PB225 issued 9 September 1969

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