

## IXth Commonwealth Games

Date of issue: 15 JULY 1970



The first recorded mention of stamps in connection with the 1970 Commonwealth Games occurred on 31 May 1968, when G R Downes, the Director of Operations & Overseas, wrote to Roy Mason, the Postmaster General (PMG) soon to be replaced by John Stonehouse, that ‘a series on sport would make a lively and popular issue’ if tied in with the Games; a general treatment of sporting themes was envisaged rather than one devoted to the particular occasion. ‘At a meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 11 February 1969, the Secretary, J R Baxter, also part of the Operations & Overseas Department (OOD) of the Post Office, reviewed the 1970 stamp programme. In the category marking contemporary events there were two options worth serious consideration, one being the international philatelic exhibition, Philympia 70, scheduled for September 1970, and the other the 9th Commonwealth Games to take place in Edinburgh in July.

On 3 March the Managing Director (Posts), A Wolstencroft, wrote to John Stonehouse, PMG, with his recommendations for the 1970 programme, which needed to be finalised in advance of the Post Office’s change to Corporation status on 1 October 1969. He favoured a special issue for the Games on several counts: sporting and athletic themes were generally popular with collectors, and there was a particular precedent in that the 6th Commonwealth Games, held in Cardiff in 1958, had been the subject of an issue. Other factors were that there would be a strong demand from the Scots because of the Games’ location, and it was assumed that many of the other nations taking part would also issue special stamps, although in the event the response was to prove somewhat muted, confined to Swaziland, The Gambia and Malawi. The PMG included a Commonwealth Games set for an as yet unspecified date in July 1970 in his announcement of the following year’s stamp programme to the House of Commons on 27 March 1969.

This news had been given to the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) the previous day; at the meeting Baxter recommended that the stamp printers Thomas De La Rue & Co Ltd be asked to produce the Games issue. Significantly the committee had just appraised De La Rue’s first essays for the Post Office Technology series, printed by its

Delacryl process, and generally welcomed Baxter's proposal. Delacryl was basically a lithographic process enhanced to offer the same facility for multicolour work as photogravure, and the fine line detail of recess printing. Between May 1966 and October 1969 De La Rue used the process for over 60 countries, the Post Office Technology set being its first for the GPO, although Andrew Restall had urged its use in September 1967 in the final report on his two years Fellowship in Minuscule Design at the Royal College of Art.

On 15 May B T Sproat of the OOD wrote a minute to his Director, G R Downes, Chairman of the SAC, concerning the days on which the Games and Philympia 70 stamps might be issued. The problem was that while Wednesdays were the most convenient from counter staffs point of view, the Games were to begin on Thursday, 16 July 1970 and Philympia on Friday, 18 September. Although Friday was one of the busiest days on the counter and thus quite unsuitable as a day of issue in normal circumstances, it was extremely desirable to issue the stamps on the first day of the Philympia exhibition, both to maximise publicity and to satisfy the demands of collectors. Therefore it became equally important that the Games stamps should be issued on Wednesday, 15 July, even though the Thursday date would not have been unduly problematic: 'by keeping to a Wednesday date here we can impress the staff with our determination to issue on Wednesdays whenever possible'. Downes put this recommendation to the PMG on 22 May with the added suggestion that the Games set should consist of three stamps, 5d first class, 1s 6d and 1s 9d, the last two representing the airmail letter base rates to Commonwealth countries.

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## FIRST ARTWORK RECEIVED

The full details of the 1970 programme were eventually agreed between Stonehouse and Viscount Hall of Cynon Valley, Chairman-designate of the new Post Office Corporation, towards the end of July. By this time, although details of the invitations, the instructions to artists, or of the artwork received are not available, designs for the Commonwealth Games stamps had been requested from selected artists and the stamp printing firms, and were anticipated by mid-August. (Of the three individual artists approached, Huntly was Scottish, Gibb Scotland-based, and Restall educated in Edinburgh.) The following is a list of received designs based on those retained in the British Postal Museum & Archive or recorded elsewhere and is not necessarily complete.

Bradbury Wilkinson – 5d swimmers, 1s 6d runners (a similar concept to that used by Restall, but not so developed)

De La Rue – 5d running track, 1s 6d swimming pool, 1s 9d boxing ring

Gordon F Huntly – 5d discuss and weights, 5d hurdle and high jump, 1s 6d relay racers, 1s 9d three runners (opening of the Games, arrival of special baton with Queen's message)

Julian Gibb – 5d runners, 1s 6d divers, 1s 6d divers and St Andrew's Cross, 1s 9d cyclists

J Andrew Restsall – 5d runners, 1s 6d swimmers, 1s 9d cyclists (adaptation of foot-exposure technique used in athletics to study body position and movement)

The artwork was examined by the SAC on 28 August; two sets, one by Andrew Restall, who had become important in stamp design since his work was first accepted in 1964, and one by a new designer from Glasgow, Julian Gibb, were chosen as potentially suitable. It was agreed that a paler colour should be introduced into the background of Gibb's designs, either by a colour wash or printing on tinted paper; in the former the colour should be from the range already used by the artist because of printing constraints. The cycling design should also be redrawn to capture the same sense of vivid motion as in Gibb's running and swimming designs. Meanwhile Andrew Restall should remove the line drawings of Edinburgh from his designs, redraw the swimming design altogether, and replace his semitone head of the Queen by a plain silhouette. Stuart Rose, Director of Design, undertook to pursue these points with the artists. L Chapman and L H Richardson, attending the meeting as representatives of De La Rue, agreed to essay Restall's cycling design, and either the swimming or running design by Gibb, for the next meeting.

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## ESSAYS SEEN BY SAC

In the event full sets of essays of both artists' designs were available at the SAC meeting on 21 October, chaired by Stuart Rose in Downes' absence. De La Rue also produced progressive colour proofs showing the gradual build up to the full colour essays. At this viewing Gibb's designs were judged competently executed but very ordinary in concept compared to the standards required. In contrast Restall's set was unanimously welcomed as a fresh approach to the rather hackneyed theme of athletics as a subject of stamp design. Among the SAC members, Anthony Lousada, who had until recently been Chairman of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery, and Sir Paul Reilly, Director of the Council of Industrial Design, were particularly emphatic in praising the Restall essays as a significant advance in technique and use of colour. In these circumstances, Restall's wish to retain the semitone head of the Queen was accepted despite the earlier preference for a silhouette. It was felt that the swimming design could still be improved so as to show the outlines of the swimmers more clearly: once again this was left for Rose to explore with the artist. L H Richardson stated that De La Rue would proceed with work on Restall's running and cycling designs while awaiting revised artwork for the swimming design.

By 3 November time made it necessary for final approval of the chosen Restall designs, although revised essays of the swimming stamp were not yet to hand. Baxter set the process in motion by submitting the available Gibb and Restall essays to the new MDP, Geoffrey Vieler, with a note indicating the SAC's preference for Restall and explaining that the swimming essay was to be improved (though not substantially altered). Vieler put his

opinion of the essays in a footnote appended to Baxter's covering letter, 'I think they are terrible!!', but forwarded the Restall set and the SAC's recommendations next day, 4 November, to the Minister of Posts & Telecommunications (MPT). This was John Stonehouse, whose old office of PMG had undergone a change of title (and a certain change in responsibility also).

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## CONFRONTATION WITH MINISTER

On 7 November, Miss J M Goose, the Minister's Private Secretary, sent Vieler the following reply:

'The Minister has seen the essays, and he considers the figures look ghostly, and the designs might well be taken as implying that Britain considers the Commonwealth to be an insubstantial pageant faded, leaving not a rack [sic] behind. He feels the designs might be misunderstood in other Commonwealth countries. He is therefore reluctant to recommend them to Her Majesty.

He has asked me to write to find out whether any other designs were prepared, of sufficient artistic merit to submit to The Queen, which, while perhaps not so original, were more robust in their treatment of the theme and which would remind the Commonwealth that it is a living community of peoples.'

On receipt of this, on 11 November, De La Rue was contacted by D H Beaumont of OOD and asked to suspend work on the Games issue until further notice. The firm was somewhat taken aback, having received written confirmation of the SAC's most recent requirements only six days earlier, and warned that this would inevitably cause delays in the production programme and a possible upward revision of the charges. The company had by this time, however, supplied a new and much improved revision of the Restall swimming essay, a clearer effect having been achieved by the removal of a red tint from the design.

Later that same day Vieler met the Minister at a Design Centre exhibition and giving him a brief explanation of the prevailing circumstances. He expanded on this the following day in a reply to Miss Goose, that Restall's designs were the best of those on offer, and that there was no time to seek fresh ones because of De La Rue's tight production schedule. He conceded that he had found Restall's designs 'rather strange, and I have no doubt they will attract some criticism as a departure from the normal ... I feel myself that the occasional moderate deviation is acceptable if we are to achieve progress'. Gibb's designs were, in comparison, 'no better than the average run of athletics and sports stamps churned out by the dozen nowadays, by countries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere'. He concluded that 'short of withdrawing the issue, which would be an unpalatable step ... the choice is between a low quality, if fairly safe, set of designs, and one ... of really high quality, even if it may lead to some controversy'. Restall's revised swimming essay, the only example in the

Post Office's possession, was enclosed with the reply. The MDP's defence of the recommended designs becomes more notable considering the low opinion in which he held them.

A final decision on the designs was postponed until a meeting arranged between the Minister and the Chairman for 20 November. On 18 November Baxter wrote to Mr Tudge of the Chairman's Office, suggesting that Stonehouse's reluctance in forwarding the recommended designs to the Queen was possibly in breach of the agreement on 'Design and Production of Stamps after Vesting Day' that the Minister had himself drawn up with Viscount Hall in July. Under the relevant sections of this agreement it was still the Minister's function to submit designs to the Queen, and he could refuse to do this in the case of anything that might be considered politically objectionable; however, the need for such extreme measures was hopefully obviated by routine prior consultation over any matter that might be politically sensitive. It was for the purpose of such consultation that a representative of the Ministry had attended the SAC meeting on 21 October and would continue to do so in future. Baxter concluded that 'it will seem very strange to the quite distinguished people who serve on the Committee if the main advice given during their first post-Vesting Day meeting is rejected ... The fact is that Mr Stonehouse has sought ... a political excuse for rejecting a design he does not like. This is not a good augury for the working of the agreement.'

The same day the MDP wrote directly to Viscount Hall and laid out the options arising from the position taken by Stonehouse:

- accepting the approved designs;
- substituting a second set of designs which I can best describe as 'cheap and nasty';
- cancelling the issue.

It is not surprising that the Minister was persuaded on 20 November to submit the recommended essays to the Queen, done the same day; the Queen's approval reached the Post Office on 24 November, and was announced to the SAC on 2 December. No production problems were recorded by De La Rue despite the few days while work on the stamps had been at an enforced standstill. Further essays followed from De La Rue on 9 December and on 9 January 1970 until a satisfactory final proof was achieved on the latter date. The colour combinations as finally approved were: 5d pink, emerald, greenish-yellow, yellow-green; 1s 6d green-blue, brown, lilac, Prussian blue; 1s 9d salmon, lilac, yellow-orange, red-brown.

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## SALES AND SPECIAL POSTMARKS

The stamps went on sale on 15 July 1970, measuring 41mm by 24mm, printed in sheets of 120 on chalk surfaced unwatermarked paper with double phosphor bands applied by letterpress. Total sales were 75,255,440 of the 5d, 10,909,760 of the 1s 6d and 6,303,800 of the 1s 9d before the issue was withdrawn on 15 July 1971. The costs of producing the issue, exclusive of artists' fees, were reported in 1975 as £1,720 for development of essays, proofs, plates and cylinders, and £23,309 for printing.

The day after issue the 9th Commonwealth Games opened in Edinburgh and ran from 16 to 25 July; swimming and diving events took place at the Royal Commonwealth Pool and athletics, badminton, cycling, fencing and wrestling at the Meadowbank Stadium. Both the stadium and pool were newly built, while various other venues in the city housed the remaining events - bowls, boxing and weightlifting. The Pollock Halls of Residence at Edinburgh University became the Athletes' Village.

While no arrangements beyond the normal were made for the day of issue in Edinburgh, other than the sale of first day covers at all the main post offices and the use of a 'First Day of Issue' slogan postmark, a special handstamp was available for each day of the Games from 16 to 25 July. Crown offices throughout the city sold a range of philatelic items including presentation packs and commemorative covers, and provided special posting boxes for items to be handstamped; there were also special posting boxes provided for this purpose at Meadowbank and the Commonwealth Pool, while philatelic display and sales units were on site at both main venues and the Athletes' Village. Both Meadowbank and the Village had the provision of temporary post offices, while one of the three existing mobile post offices was used during the Games, with its own cds postmark. Immediately after the end of the Games the special posting boxes at the main venues and post offices remained in place for items requiring the special handstamp of the 3rd Commonwealth Paraplegic Games held on 27 July. A wide variety of special handstamps and slogan postmarks were in use outside Edinburgh on 15 July; these are too numerous to list and none were connected with the Games.

'First day of issue' postings totalled 588,000 items. A total of 2,000 presentation packs were given to the 1,500 athletes and 500 officials participating in the Games; in all 114,209 packs were produced at a cost of £16,358, of which 101,152 were sold. From 14 September the 1970 Collectors' Packs went on sale; 54,678 of these were produced and 46,338 sold. These contained all special stamps issued from the Post Office Technology set to the Commonwealth Games and thus included both issues printed by De La Rue's Delacryl process.

The Games stamps came in for particular attention from those alarmed by this latest departure from tradition - one critic compared them to 'a load of ectoplasm emerging from a sewer', and another accused the printer of 'pouring whisky into the ink troughs to fuddle the machines'.

The successful designer, J Andrew Restall, was born in Headington, Oxfordshire in 1931 and educated at George Watson's College in Edinburgh before studying drawing and painting at Edinburgh College of Art. Subsequently he worked as a graphic designer in the printing industry, as an art director in advertising, and as a lecturer in art and graphic design at Lanchester Polytechnic (Coventry), Brighton Polytechnic, and elsewhere, including a two years' Fellowship at the Royal College of Art during which he investigated the problems and possibilities of stamp design on behalf of the Post Office. Between 1964 and 1983 he produced a great number of stamp designs, his work being particularly valued when technical innovation was sought.

Julian Gibb, whose designs were essayed as a second choice, was subsequently successful with his design for the 1971 Christmas air letter.

GILES ALLEN  
2 February 1994

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## REFERENCES

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