

Christmas 1971

Date of issue: 13 OCTOBER 1971



The Post Office first issued Christmas stamps in 1966, so by 1971 such stamps were expected by the public to use on Christmas mail. It was agreed that a Christmas stamp be issued from the very beginning of discussions on the 1971 stamp programme.

The Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) first discussed the 1971 programme on 21 October 1969 when J R Baxter, a member of the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD) and Secretary of the SAC, proposed stamps marking the bi-centenary of the birth of Walter Scott, the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament and another in the architecture series. It was not until 6 May 1970 that the SAC discussed the Christmas issue deciding on a religious theme and that an air letter would also be issued.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

On 11 September the Committee agreed the 'Instructions to artists', issued to invited stamp designers as a guide to requirements and conditions.

On 17 September invitations were sent to John Sutherland Hawes, Julian Gibb and Rauri McLean to submit designs for three special postage stamps and a commemorative air letter to be issued in November 1971. The instructions stated that the stamps were to have a religious theme but this could be either the artist's own work or depict a religious tapestry or sculpture. Stamps depicting the traditional crib scene, the shepherds, the wise men and the angels had already been issued and so a different approach was required for at least two of the stamps. A suggestion offered by the Post Office was to illustrate well known carols such as 'O come, all ye faithful' and 'O Little Town of Bethlehem', although the artists were free to think of their own ways on how a religious theme could be shown with a fresh

approach. The artists were advised to arrange an interview with Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Director, to discuss the subject at length.

Of the three designs, one should have a pink and one a royal blue background colour. Not more than four colours were to be used for each stamp.

The fee for each completed design was £150 with a maximum of £450 for each artist. An additional fee of £150 was to be paid for each successful design - a total of £300 in all.

ARTWORK RECEIVED

The following designs were received (the number is that allocated by the Post Office to each design).

Rauri McLean (received 23 November 1970):

Designs 1 to 5 – no descriptions available.

J Sutherland Hawes (received 24 November 1970):

Designs 6 to 10 - Flower designs including stamp size designs and photographs;

Designs 11 to 13 - Carol designs together with stamp size designs.

Julian Gibb (received 7 December 1970):

Designs 14 to 16 - Carol designs

Designs 17 to 20 – ‘Kings’ designs.

The designs submitted by McLean were a set of three stamps (1 to 3), and two from a second set (4 and 5) of which the third stamp was delayed by several days. When submitting this last design McLean also attached monochrome prints of each of the six designs reduced to stamp size.

DESIGNS EXAMINED

On 11 December the SAC examined the designs above together with essays of earlier designs of stained glass by Collis Clements. The designs by Clements had been essayed during the selection process for the 1970 Christmas stamps and although not chosen at that time they were thought far too promising to be discarded and were held in reserve for future consideration, possibly to be included in a set celebrating stained glass as a general theme.

The designs submitted by McLean, Sutherland-Hawes and Gibb were not considered suitable for use in the form presented, and only those by McLean were thought promising. It was recommended that McLean be asked to make some improvements to his designs.

Having rejected the essays of Collis Clements' designs in 1970 in favour of a set by Sally Stiff, the Committee now decided that they would be acceptable following a number of slight amendments:

- a grey tone for the guttering;
- the omission of the lip at the top and bottom of the designs;
- the omission of the white hairline between the glass and the panel;
- the Queen's head in the smaller size shown in the 4d vertical essay;
- richer tones for the stained glass.

After further discussion the Committee urged that the 5d essay should become the 2½p stamp (with a pink panel); the 4d essay should become the 3p stamp (with a blue panel); and the 1s 6d essay should be the 7½p stamp. The Committee requested that fresh essays be prepared for the next meeting.

On 21 December Julian Gibb and John Sutherland Hawes were informed that on this occasion their designs had not been accepted. They both received £450 in payment. Rauri McLean also received £450 but was asked to look again at the 'carol' designs, with new artwork to be ready by the end of February.

New essays of the Collis Clements designs, with amendments as suggested by the Committee, were prepared by Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, and sent to the Operations and Overseas Department on 27 January 1971. Various versions of the essays were received as follows:

- Stained Glass Windows;
- Stained Glass Windows with Border (1s 6d)
- Stained Glass Windows with Gold Head.

These were examined by the SAC on 28 January 1971. Although they were considered a great improvement, it felt that further minor amendments could be made to improve the designs still further and show the stained glass to greater effect. For the 2½p and 3p the panels should be in richer, darker colours and the panel for the 7½p should be charcoal. The Queen's head on all three stamps was to be gold embossed. The Committee agreed that these amendments could be effected during production. The suggestion by R F York of Harrison and Sons that the panels could be surrounded by a thin black line to allow for minor shifts in registration and thereby saving wastage, was agreed. It was recommended that the essays be submitted for the Queen's approval.

APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 1 March 1971 G R Downes, Director Operations and Overseas, wrote to Geoffrey Vieler, Managing Director Posts (MDP), stating that the SAC had now made its recommendations for the Christmas stamps. Downes asked that the essays be forwarded to Miss J M Goose, Private Secretary to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, in order that, with the Minister's agreement, they be submitted for the Queen's approval. On 11 March the Minister, Christopher Chataway, being in agreement, forwarded the essays to Sir Michael Adeane, Private Secretary to the Queen. The letter stated that, subject to the Queen's approval, the Post Office proposed to make the following slight modifications:

2½p - A richer, darker colour of red to be used for the panel.

3p - The panel to be green and the value amended to 7½p.

7½p - The panel to be in a rich blue and the value amended to 3p.

On 12 March Chataway was informed that the Queen gave her approval.

Clements was initially paid £189, this being at the old rate of £63 per design. The rates had subsequently been increased to £150 per design and a further £150 for each successful design, so Clements was sent a further £711 on 16 April.

DATE OF ISSUE

On 7 July the Post Office announced that the stamps would go on sale several weeks earlier than usual. This followed complaints from the public that in previous years the stamps had not been issued in time to meet the latest dates of posting Christmas surface mail. As the final posting dates for 1971 were not yet agreed it was decided to base the date of issue on the posting dates of the previous year when the latest date for posting to New Zealand had been 17 October, with all other major Commonwealth countries and the USA slightly later.

It was therefore agreed that the stamps be issued on 13 October. A further consideration that had to be taken into account was the 'Annual Count' which, subject to agreement, was to take place from 17 to 30 October that year. During this period all items posted received an Annual Count 'brand' and it was feared that if this were applied to covers bearing the Christmas stamps it would create trouble with the philatelic trade and stamp collectors alike.

FACILITY PAYMENT

A charge was normally levied by Canterbury Cathedral for professional photography but on this occasion was waived when Canon Waddams acknowledged that the success of the stamps would be in the interest of the Cathedral. Instead a facility payment was agreed to of £25. This was the amount normally paid by the BBC and others who filmed at the Cathedral.

THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

Although it had been Collis Clements who had liaised with the Post Office throughout the design and production process, the designs were in fact the result of a collaborative effort by the design consultants Clarke/Clements/Hughes, comprising Collis Clements, and Edward Hughes in association with Graham Clarke. On 20 March 1971 Clements had written to Postal Headquarters explaining that it was their normal practice to credit all their work Clarke/Clements/Hughes and the Post Office, seeing no problems with this, agreed. Clarke/Clements/Hughes had found this project somewhat unusual in that the work involved using a good deal of photography rather than drawn artwork. The team specialised in graphic design, typography and illustration, and had designed a number of Post Office displays; this was, however, its first postage stamp design commission.

The set of three stamps was issued on 13 October 1971 and featured three of the upper panels of a window in the North Choir Aisle at Canterbury Cathedral, each depicting a nativity scene.

The following list includes the quantities sold.

2½p - Dream of the Magi (Wise Men) - black, dark red, yellow, mauve, light blue, light red, green and gold - 339,218,365

3p - The Adoration of the Magi - black, light blue, yellow, green, red, mauve, dark blue and gold - 217,033,884

7½p - The Ride of the Magi - black, yellow, light mauve, light red, light green, light blue, dark green and gold - 18,777,401.

The stamps, printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Ltd, were issued in sheets of 100. All three stamps had phosphor bands and were horizontal, measuring 1.173 inches by 1.6 inches (31mm by 40mm).

Presentation packs, containing a set of the stamps together with liner notes, were available from the Bureau and all Head Offices. A total of 113,276 packs were sold. The liner notes described the stained glass of Canterbury Cathedral and the Nativity scenes, with most of

the information being extracted from books by Bernard Rackham 'The Ancient Glass of Canterbury' and 'The Stained Glass of Canterbury'. The Dean of Canterbury checked the text.

FIRST DAY COVERS

A special first day envelope was available and depicted an angel from St Gabriel's Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral.

Total postings for this issue in philatelic posting boxes were 537,037 of which 88.06 per cent bore full sets. A further 24,148 items were extracted from the normal post. There were 203,458 envelopes sold at post office counters, with these representing 37.89 per cent of postings in the philatelic boxes. The estimated revenue from first day postings including 'normal postage' was £63,806. With staff costs estimated at £2,543, the estimated net revenue, excluding 'normal' postage, was £43,059.

SPECIAL POSTMARKS

As the stamps depicted scenes from a 12th century stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral the Post Office decided to provide a special pictorial postmark at Canterbury. It was circular, 15/16 inches in diameter, with the Cathedral as a central motif. First day of issue (FDI) postmarks for 'Bethlehem, Llandeilo, Carmarthen' had become popular with collectors since the first special Christmas stamps in 1966 and for the Christmas 1970 stamps the Post Office provided a pictorial FDI postmark at this location. The pictorial postmark had been considered a success by the Post Office and was repeated in 1971 with a different design, this time showing a star-shaped snowflake motif to the left of a circular datestamp, 2¾ inches by 15/16 inches. There was also the usual 'Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh' postmark.

The Head Postmaster at Canterbury estimated that philatelic postings on the day of issue were likely to be 50,000, and was therefore provided with 20 handstamps. The Head Postmaster at Llanelli had been supplied with 29 handstamps for Christmas 1970, but this had been found insufficient to deal with the volume of work. With an increase in traffic anticipated, 50 handstamps were provided.

Items posted in all but the Canterbury and Llanelli offices were given the normal first day of issue cancellation. Official envelopes, bearing all three stamps and cancelled with either the Bureau or Canterbury handstamp were available by order from the Philatelic Bureau.

A breakdown of the number of covers posted is as follows:

Total number of items handstamped:

Bethlehem - 36,904

Canterbury - 56,539

Trafalgar Square - 79,090

Total - 172,533

Number handstamped bearing the complete set of stamps:

Bethlehem - 35,007 (plus 84 with just the 2½p; 1,800 with just the 3p, and 13 with just the 7½p)

Canterbury - 51,210 (plus 1,216 with just the 2½p; 2,226 with just the 3p, 1,109 with just the 7½p, and 778 others)

Trafalgar Square - 72,748 (plus 2,114 with just the 2½p; 2,114 with just the 3p, and 2,114 with just the 7½p)

Total - 158,965 (plus 3,414 with just the 2½p; 6,140 with just the 3p, 3,236 with just the 7½p, and 778 others).

A further 46,225 items were posted at Bethlehem, Llanelli receiving a 'First day of issue' machine slogan postmarks. These items mainly bore 2½p or 3p stamps and are not included in the above totals.

The number of postings was considered disappointing by the Post Office, especially at Bethlehem where the figure were down by half from the previous year. It was thought that some custom was possibly lost by the early issue date, but considering that there was a tariff increase during the year, the fact that total revenue was only 83 per cent of the Christmas 1970 figures was a matter of some concern. The Christmas 1970 stamps comprised the final pre-decimal issue, the values being 4d, 5d and 1s 6d. The Christmas 1971 set comprised 2½p (6d), 3p (7d) and 7½p (1s 6d). The face value of the 1970 set was therefore 87.1 per cent of the 1971 set.

CHRISTMAS AIR LETTERS

From the initial discussions on the Christmas 1971 stamps it had been decided to issue a Christmas air letter as well.

On 6 May 1970 the SAC agreed that the theme of the stamps and the air letter should be religious. On 11 September, however, the Committee decided on a change of theme for the form, now to be light-hearted and secular. Draft 'Instructions to Artists' were agreed. Copies were sent to Ruari McLean, John Sutherland Hawes and Julian Gibb on 17 September 1970, together with the invitation to submit stamp designs.

The artists were informed that a Christmas air letter bearing a 5d stamp was to be issued around October or November 1971. Specimens of the 1968 form, which also had a light-hearted theme, were enclosed. The dimensions were the same as those of the 1971 form and were to be used as a basis for the design.

The designs were to be in two parts, each submitted separately, namely the stamp design and the pictorial element and address panels, with the theme of the designs left to the designer.

The stamp was to be horizontal and include the Queen's head, of which specimens were enclosed. The general layout was to be the same as the specimen with identical wording. The finished artwork was to reach Postal Headquarters by 23 November 1970. The fee for the finished design was to be £150 with a further payment of £150 for the accepted design. Printing was to be by litho by McCorquodale.

On 18 December 1970 Supplies Division, Hemel Hempstead wrote to OOD asking if there was to be a Christmas 1971 air letter as there would be a need to ask the contractor to reserve printing capacity and to order the necessary paper. The following programme was proposed to allow adequate time for production:

designs to printers no later than 1 March 1971;

proofs to the Post Office by 2 April 1971;

approval for printer to go ahead no later than 16 April 1971;

printing to start by 30 April 1971;

initial deliveries to Supplies Division by 28 May 1971;

complete deliveries by 27 August 1971.

DESIGNS EXAMINED

On 11 December the SAC examined designs by the three artists and recommended acceptance of Julian Gibb's design for the pictorial element of the air letter but asked for a new design for the stamp. It was also suggested that some richer colours be incorporated into the design.

On 28 January 1971 the Committee examined two new stamp designs by Julian Gibb. It was felt that recommendations could not be made until the stamp could be seen together with the pictorial element, still with the designer for further amendments. It was agreed to review them again at the following meeting when both designs would be available. In the meantime Gibb was asked to re-draw his designs for the stamp 'relying on the calligraphic form of the bird to define the area of the stamp impression'. The Committee was uncertain

as to whether it preferred the 'rectangular shape of the stamp to the more fluid outline' but felt that there was a 'stylistic conflict between the rigid outline shape and the calligraphic detail contained in the shape'.

At the next SAC meeting, held on 24 February, the Committee examined the re drawn stamp designs in the context of the entire air letter. The unanimous view was that the new designs were unsuccessful and that Gibb should prepare a completely new design 'ignoring altogether the calligraphic presentation, but in harmony with the pictorial element design of the form'.

On 31 March the Committee was told that following its recommendations Gibb had produced two new designs: a) Doves and b) 'Pen Nibs' in the shape of a bird. These designs had been seen by a number of the Committee individually, and the majority had favoured the 'Doves' design with some minor adjustments being suggested, as follows: (i) brighter colours for the right hand dove; (ii) thinner white lines on the globes; (iii) smaller value figure. These amendments were made to the design before it was sent to the printer for proofing.

During the first week of April McCorquodale provided OOD with a new paste-up of the form, which was approved on 7 April subject to the following amendments:

new alignment for centre panel;

substitution of 'WILL' by 'MAY' in text beginning 'An Air Letter should ...'.

It was pointed out to McCorquodale that the reproduction of the 'birds' panels had been taken from the designer's first roughs and should have been taken from the final artwork provided as overlays. This was rectified and the overlay version was used for production.

PAYMENTS TO ARTISTS

On 21 December 1970 D H Beaumont, Operations and Overseas Department, wrote to the three artists. Sutherland Hawes and McLean were both told that on this occasion their designs had not been chosen and were each paid £300. Gibb also received £300 that day; on 1 May he was paid a further £150 for an additional design submitted for the stamp, and on 9 June £300 as final payment for his successful designs for the pictorial element and stamp.

ROYAL APPROVAL

On 17 May G Vieler wrote to Miss Goose, Private Secretary to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, enclosing a proof of the air letter, adding that the designs had been

recommended by the SAC and the Post Office had agreed its choice. He asked that the Minister, Christopher Chataway, submit the proof to the Queen if in agreement.

On 24 May Chataway wrote to Sir Michael Adeane, attaching the proof: the following day Sir Michael replied that the Queen had given her approval.

The air letter, designed by Julian Gibb, a freelance graphic designer from Glasgow, featured doves with seasonal greetings on their wings in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The printed stamp, in blue, green and pink, showed two halves of the world with a dove superimposed on each half. The air letter was on sale from 13 October, the same day as the stamps, until 24 December 1971.

When the Christmas air letter was introduced in 1965 the rate of postage was 6d, with the selling price 10d. In October 1966 the air letter rate was increased to 9d but the selling price remained 10d, and in 1970 the rate was still 9d and the Post Office kept the selling price at 10d. The postage rate for Christmas 1971 was 5p (1s 0d) but the selling price had to be decided. It was estimated that at 5½p there would be a loss and at 6p a break-even point might be reached. It was decided to make the selling price 6p and risk public reaction against the extra cost (a 1d previously and now a new 1p or 2.4 old pence).

There were 3,500,000 printed, at a cost of just over £25,000 and of these 1,750,000 were sold. This compares unfavourably with 1967 and 1968 when 2,500,000 were sold and 1972 when 2,400,000 were sold.

Slightly different figures are given in a letter from Supplies Division to D Beaumont, dated 24 March 1972:

quantity produced - 3,264,850;
quantity actually issued - 3,239,950;
quantity actually returned - 1,252,550;
sales presumed to be 1,987,400.

The letter adds 'The estimated cost per 1,000 of the 1971 Air Letter, including purchase tax (the forerunner of VAT), was £8.07 per 1,000. This compares with a cost of £2.56½, including purchase tax, for the standard Air Letter.'

Andy Pendlebury
November 1994

REFERENCES

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- MD/CO/2383
- MD/CO/2385
- MD/CO/2386
- MD/DK/3048
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- KL 131 issued 19 May 1970
- BR 204 issued 17 August 1970
- BR 319 issued 22 December 1970
- AR115 issued 7 July 1971
- AR146 issued 25 August 1971
- AR 166 issued 16 September 1971

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