

## Literary Anniversaries

Date of issue: 28 JULY 1971



During October 1969 the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD) of the Post Office started planning the 1971 stamp programme. It had, as usual, received many suggestions for subjects from the public and interested bodies: the OOD drew up a preliminary shortlist comprising the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland parliament, an Architecture series and the bi-centenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott. The next step was to involve the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) and at its meeting on 21 October 1969, Jerry Baxter, Secretary of the SAC and a member of the OOD, explained that for some time the Post Office had been considering a low value line engraved stamp and that the bi-centenary of Sir Walter Scott offered a good opportunity. He said that there were two possibilities for the design: either reproduction from an original illustration, or original work by a commissioned etcher and engraver. There was an urgent need for an early decision as the printers, Bradbury Wilkinson, needed 12 to 15 months to produce such stamps.

The year 1969 had been one of major changes for the Post Office involving the design and production of special stamps. With the change in status to a public corporation on 1 October 1969 came the end of the role of Postmaster General. It became the responsibility of the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications to submit designs to the Queen for approval, with the annual stamp programme being drawn up by the Corporation, but shown to the Ministry for advice on political aspects. The SAC continued to function with a representative of the Ministry attending meetings to ensure adequate liaison.

The following SAC meeting was on 13 January 1970 when the Chairman, George Downes, Director Operations and Overseas (DOO), explained that it had been decided by the Post Office that the literary anniversaries series would commemorate Scott, Keats and Gray and that the stamps might be based on portraits of the three. An option suggested by Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Advisor, was to invite Graham Sutherland to produce designs for line-engraving. Alternatively gravure stamps might be produced based on contemporary

portraits and the Committee was shown the following portraits, although the final choice of subjects was to be left to the commissioned artists: Scott by Landseer, Keats by both Severn and Hilton after a miniature by Severn, and Gray by Eccardt.

At its meeting on 4 March the SAC was told that the option of approaching Graham Sutherland had been dropped, although why was not recorded. Stuart Rose told the Committee he still felt that this series offered a good opportunity for an engraved issue and as such he had discussed the possibilities with the printers Bradbury Wilkinson. The printer saw no problems in producing a quality engraved set but stressed it would need plenty of time. With this in mind the Post Office had commissioned two artists, Peter Blake and Rosalind Dease, both trained in engraving. It was intended that Blake would produce his own drawings based on paintings of the three poets and that Miss Dease reproduce engravings obtained from the British Museum. Unlike normal procedure when the commissioned artists were given written instructions, Blake and Dease were invited verbally followed by personal detailed briefs from Stuart Rose. They were asked to submit three stamp designs, based on the line engraved printing process, commemorating:  
the 150th anniversary of the death of John Keats,  
the bi-centenary of the death of Thomas Gray,  
the bi-centenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott.

It was agreed that for each submitted design Blake and Dease would be paid £63 up to a maximum of £189 each, and for each design selected for use, an additional fee of £199.50, a total of £262.50 for each successful design. As was usual all designs submitted and the copyright therein was to become the absolute property of the Post Office.

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## **ARTWORK SUBMITTED**

On 30 April the Post Office received from Miss Dease three designs, and on 5 May three designs from Blake. The six designs were examined by the SAC on 6 May when both sets were rejected. The Committee felt that Blake had not attained the standard required and should therefore not be asked to do further work on this issue. The Committee thought Miss Dease's interpretations of original engravings were unsuccessful, but recommended she be asked to produce further work using, if possible, original portraits. The intention at this stage was still to have an engraved set of stamps.

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## **STAMP PROGRAMME FOR 1971 ANNOUNCED**

On 19 May the Post Office announced that there would be four special stamp issues in 1971 including a series to be issued in late July commemorating literary anniversaries.

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## ESSAYS EXAMINED

As suggested by the SAC, Miss Dease was asked to produce further designs. However, both she and the printer, Bradbury Wilkinson, felt it would not be possible to use unadapted original portraits with modern recess methods. Miss Dease had therefore produced some new designs and put it to OOD that it would be unfair to judge these on artwork alone and that essays should be produced. OOD agreed and on 22 May forwarded to the printer two designs by Miss Dease adding that the rest of her work would be available within a few days. The printer informed OOD that it would need an estimated three months to complete the essays.

On 2 September 1970 Bradbury Wilkinson forwarded to OOD essays of the stamps. For each value there were two essays, one on plain coated paper and one on phosphor coated paper.

The essays were examined by the SAC on 11 September. The Committee was advised by the Chairman that, for operational reasons, the essays with portraits in black were not acceptable to the Post Office but the alternative set with portraits in colour presented no such problems. The Committee, far from enthusiastic over the designs, agreed that those of Scott and Gray were generally satisfactory, but the Keats design would need considerable improvement to give it more character. It suggested that all three designs would be improved if a tinted background were introduced; if that was not possible then a gradated background.

Also in attendance were Miss Dease, D M Elliott (Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications) and W de Segundo, representing Bradbury Wilkinson. Miss Dease said that the addition of some background colour would, in her opinion, be quite acceptable. The printer's representative, however, was doubtful that there was sufficient time for this. At this stage it became apparent that a choice had to be made between two options:  
to produce the current designs, incorporating the amendments suggested by the Committee;  
to ask for fresh artwork (using busts, medallions or portraits), prepared for production by the photogravure process.

It was agreed after further discussion that production of the current designs should proceed by the line engraved process. Miss Dease was asked to improve the head of Keats, making it more interesting by creating a more 'true-to-life' interpretation. She was also asked to experiment with gradated background for each of the designs. The printer was asked to investigate the possibility of using a colour background as an alternative. Rosalind

Dease, however, felt unable to improve on the head of Keats and produced an entirely new one based on a profile hanging in Keats' home.

Prior to the next SAC meeting, held on 22 October, the members individually examined the new essays and, although finding the revised head of Keats an improvement, the majority found the essays unacceptable. The Committee was informed at the meeting that the Post Office had decided to abandon the use of the line engraved method of production. It was decided that the series would now be produced by Harrison and Sons using photogravure. The Committee was shown the first attempts at revised artwork by Miss Dease. After discussion it was agreed that Miss Dease should be asked to amend her original designs for multicoloured photogravure and produce three new designs based on busts, medallions, and so on. It was also agreed that another designer should be commissioned to provide alternative designs.

On 16 November Ronald Maddox submitted three designs based on places closely associated with the authors. That same day Rosalind Dease wrote to Harrisons enclosing three sets of designs, including production artwork adapted from those originally intended for line engraving. Miss Dease explained that, following discussions with the Post Office, one stamp from each set was to be essayed in time for the SAC meeting on 11 December. The remainder was to be shown at the meeting as presentation artwork. As such the following essays were requested:

Scott - from vertical set of bust and reproductions - 3p brown

Keats - from vertical set of drawings - 5p blue

Gray - from horizontal set of drawings - 7½p olive.

Essays of Dease's designs produced by Harrisons were sent to the Post Office on 11 December, some of which were distributed to the Post Office Chemist, Supplies Department, Buckingham Palace and Harrisons.

Essays of designs by R Maddox were also sent that day. These featured Abbotsford, Stoke Poges and Keats' house.

When submitting his designs Ronald Maddox explained that they were based upon the surroundings in which the three literary figures lived and which had influenced their writing. The places were, he suggested, 'closely associated with their memory in the minds of the public generally, both in this country and abroad'. The single colour background with a line illustration was intended to convey a simple yet dignified approach to the subject and provide a contrast to the full colour sets of stamps issued immediately before and after this particular series.

For the design commemorating Sir Walter Scott, Maddox had depicted Abbotsford. Although Sir Walter was born and lived in Edinburgh for many years, at the peak of his fame he built Abbotsford in Roxburghshire in the heart of the Tweed Valley. This was an area he came to know and love very much and became so strongly associated with his 'Waverley' novels that it has since been known as Scott Country. Abbotsford is still owned by Scott's descendants with his study, his library and many features preserved exactly as they were in his lifetime.

After his father's death, Gray's mother had moved to West End House (later incorporated into Stoke Court), which was in the village of Stoke Poges in Buckinghamshire. Gray spent many of his holidays here, and his most famous poem 'Elegy written in a Country Churchyard' was inspired by the churchyard at Stoke Poges. Maddox had decided to feature Stoke Poges Church, for in the churchyard Gray is buried in a simple grave beside his mother.

John Keats had strong associations with Hampstead over many years. He would often go there to be away from the busy city centre of London and to visit literary friends. When his youngest brother, Tom, died of tuberculosis, he went to share a house with his friend Charles Brown, at Wentworth Place. This building is now known as Keats House and, established as a memorial to the poet, contains many relics of Keats and his friends.

The essays were examined by the SAC on 11 December. The Committee considered the new set by Dease to be a great improvement on her earlier work and as such they recommended that these be submitted for the Queen's approval.

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## APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 17 December 1970 Geoffrey Vieler, Managing Director Posts (MDP) wrote to the Private Secretary to the Minister Posts and Telecommunications, enclosing essays of the proposed stamps as recommended by the SAC. Vieler asked that, if the Minister agreed, the essays be submitted for the Queen's approval. The Minister, Christopher Chataway, being in agreement, forwarded the essays to the 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:

Keats - 3p value (instead of 5p) and white lettering except for the signature;

Gray - 5p value (instead of 7½p);

Scott - 7½p value (instead of 3p) and white lettering, except for the signature.

On 31 December a reply stated that the Queen was pleased to approve the designs, subject to the small alterations mentioned.

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## PAYMENT TO ARTISTS

On 19 May 1970 Peter Blake wrote to Don Beaumont, OOD, with an invoice of £180 for payment of roughs for special stamps. Blake reminded Beaumont that he had in fact only completed two designs but stressed that one of these was finished in fine detail and as such felt that the amount of time and work spent on it was more than covered by the £60 fee, and therefore requested payment equal to that for three roughs. Blake went on to say that he wouldn't have undertaken the task had he known there was a chance his designs would not be used, particularly as the Post Office kept the artwork. On 24 June Beaumont wrote to Peter Blake explaining that the SAC having seen his designs had found them unacceptable, and therefore in accordance with the agreed terms he enclosed a warrant for £189 in payment for the designs submitted. Beaumont regretted the confusion that had arisen about the terms of the brief and that Stuart Rose and he had taken pains to explain the situation during their discussions, but 'What none of us could foresee, at that time, was that you would not be able to manage the three designs called for within the necessary period.' Blake had received verbal instructions; the lack of written instructions may have resulted in the misunderstanding.

That same day Beaumont wrote to Rosalind Dease enclosing a warrant for £189 as initial payment for three designs and also formally inviting her to submit further designs. On 24 September Beaumont wrote again to Miss Dease saying that authority had recently been granted for a revised scale of fees. There was now to be an overall fee of £300 per design made up of £150 for each submitted design and £150 for each successful design. The revised arrangements would begin with the 1971 stamp programme, and so all artwork already submitted for special stamps in 1971 attracted the new rates. As such a further warrant was enclosed for £261 representing the difference between the old and the new rates.

On 21 December Beaumont wrote to Ronald Maddox explaining that his designs had not been accepted enclosing £450 in payment for the three drawings.

On 18 January 1971 Beaumont wrote again to Miss Dease, this time enclosing a warrant for £1,050, being the final payment in respect of the designs submitted. This was made up of £600 for four additional submitted designs and £450 for three accepted designs. Miss Dease had also received £72 4s 7d on 21 December 1970 as payment for expenses.

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## THE PRESS SHOWING

The press showing was six weeks prior to the date of issue. With release scheduled for 28 July, the press showing, held as normal at Postal Headquarters in London, was arranged for 22 June. The Post Office issued a Press and Broadcast Notice on the same day.

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## THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

The three stamps were issued on Wednesday, 28 July 1971, each featuring a profile portrait and signature. The 3p stamp commemorated the (1795-1821), printed in black and white against a blue ground. The 5p stamp commemorated the bi-centenary of the death of Thomas Gray (1716-1771), printed in black and white on a green ground. The 7½p stamp commemorated the bi-centenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott and was printed in black and white on a brown ground. All three stamps bore the Queen's head embossed in gold. The stamps, slightly larger than double definitive size, were issued in sheets of 100. They were produced using photogravure on coated, unwatermarked paper by Harrison and Sons Ltd. All had phosphor bands. As an aid to designing the stamps the Post Office had borrowed 17 photographs from Radio Times Hilton Picture Library, part of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC). Although none of these were actually reproduced by Rosalind Dease, she based her interpretations on these and other photographs. Miss Dease had previously designed the 1970 Literary Anniversaries set of stamps and the 1968 Christmas stamps.

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## QUANTITIES SOLD

Records in the files indicate that the printing and sales figures of the stamps were as follows:

3p – 70,352,600; 61,635,564

5p – 13,201,400; 9,767,700

7½p – 13,751,700; 7,678,266.

A presentation pack was available containing a complete set of the stamps and liner notes, available from the Philatelic Bureau and all Head Post Offices at a cost of 20p; 104,724 were sold.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 27 July 1972.

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## FIRST DAY COVERS

A first day envelope was designed by Rosalind Dease and featured an 18<sup>th</sup> century wood engraving by Thomas Bewick depicting the romantic image of the poetic Muse. The envelopes were available from the Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh and all Head Post Offices at 3½p each.

The Philatelic Bureau offered three services. The official envelope, addressed by the Bureau and bearing all three stamps, was cancelled 'Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh' and posted at an inclusive charge of 26½p. For 50 or more envelopes to the same address, the charge was 24p each. Addressed envelopes sent to the Bureau by customers were stamped, cancelled and despatched for 20½p each. Special philatelic post boxes were available at 180 post offices for collectors who preferred to post their own covers. The normal rule, that only the full set of stamps qualified for a first day handstamp, was not applied.

Total postings for this issue in the philatelic boxes were 576,349 of which 72.76 per cent bore full sets. A further 28,132 items were extracted from the normal post. There were 199,974 envelopes sold at post office counters – these represented 34.70 per cent of postings in the philatelic boxes. The estimated revenue from postings in the philatelic boxes, including 'normal postage' was £72,245. With estimated staff costs at £2,590, the estimated net revenue, excluding 'normal postage' was £50,223.

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## SPECIAL POSTMARKS

A special pictorial postmark was used at the London Chief Office, King Edward Street, London, the design of which included a circular datestamp and, on the left, the shield of the Worshipful Company of Stationers and Newspaper Makers, involved with the publication of the works of Keats, Gray and Scott.

Special handstamps included 'John Keats Shanklin 1819 Shanklin Isle of Wight' sponsored by Shanklin Library and '1771-1971 Thomas Gray Bi-centenary Stoke Poges Bucks' sponsored by Stoke Court.

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## SIR WALTER SCOTT ENVELOPES

A commemorative cover was produced by the Post Office in association with the 7½p Scott stamp. The envelope, costing 3½p, was available from early July at the Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh and at philatelic sales counters at the London Chief Office, Trafalgar Square Branch Office, Belfast, Birmingham, Blackpool, Bournemouth, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh,



Glasgow, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sheffield, Southampton and York, and from all Head Post Offices in Scotland. Both the envelope and stamp remained on sale at these offices until 30 September 1971.

On Sunday, 15 August, the 200th anniversary of Scott's birth, a mail coach travelled from Abbotsford, his country home in Roxburghshire, Scotland, to the town of Melrose, 3½ miles away, carrying all the special envelopes posted or requested before that date. Each cover was given an 'Abbotsford' handstamp and a special 'Carried by mail coach' cachet. Although the mail coach service was only provided on 15 August, collectors were able to post or order covers bearing the Scott stamp and cancelled with the 'Abbotsford' handstamp until 30 September. Visitors to Abbotsford were able to buy covers and post them in a special box. Alternately collectors could send stamped covers to the Head Postmaster at Galashiels, Selkirkshire. In addition the covers could be ordered from the Philatelic Bureau.

Andy Pendlebury  
September, 1994

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## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

- MD/CO/2141
- MKD/BS/1573
- Post 54 SAC Minutes

Post Office Press and Broadcast Notices:

- KL 131 issued 19 May 1970
- PB 262 issued 12 October 1970
- BR 319 issued 22 December 1970
- JD 101 issued 22 June 1971
- AR 122 issued 15 July 1971

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