

"Ulster '71" Paintings

Date of issue: 16 JUNE 1971



In late September/early October 1968 the Managing Director of Posts agreed that consideration be given to a stamp celebrating the 50th anniversary of Northern Ireland in 1971. It was further agreed that the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD) of the Post Office should look into the possibility of having the stamp designed by local competition in Northern Ireland. The idea appears to have laid dormant until the following year when in March Sir Harold Black, the Secretary of the Northern Ireland Cabinet, appraised G H Coates, Director, Post Office Northern Ireland, of his intention to write to the Home Office with ideas in relation to coinage to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Government of Northern Ireland in June 1971 and asked if he could also suggest a series of stamps. Coates replied that he had already put the suggestion to PHQ in London which had been received favourably. On 13 March Coates wrote to A Wolstencroft, Managing Director Posts, asking whether the Postmaster General (PMG), John Stonehouse, could announce, when meeting the Northern Ireland Prime Minister on 16 April, that he hoped to include a Northern Ireland stamp in the 1971 stamp programme. Before replying Wolstencroft sought advice from J R Baxter (OOD). Baxter reported that the Post Office had announced the Prince of Wales Investiture issue in advance of the main 1969 stamp programme: there seemed no reason against occasional advance announcements although it was considered undesirable as a common practice because:

it was less easy to suggest to other applicants for issues that they would get full consideration along with everyone else when the time came to choose the programme; reducing flexibility by freezing part of the programme could make it progressively more difficult to include later suggestions, which might be more worthy of inclusion.

Baxter felt that in this particular case political considerations were relevant and asked, 'Should there be committal to issuing a UK stamp in two years time when there is a risk, however slight, of a deterioration during this period in the relations between the UK and the Northern Ireland governments?' With this in mind Baxter had an informal word with Mr

North, Home Office Assistant Secretary, who reacted strongly that he would 'deprecate the giving of hostage to fortune by announcing a stamp issue any earlier than in the normal course of events'. Baxter considered this might be excessively cautious but in the circumstances thought the advice should be heeded, and if the PMG was keen to make an announcement then he should at least clear it with the Home Secretary.

Having given the matter further consideration Wolstencroft wrote to Coates to say that it would be wrong for the PMG to make a commitment so far in advance by announcing a proposed stamp issue for which the responsibility would be shared between the new Post Office Corporation and the next Government after the General Election.

PROPOSED THEMES

On 16 September 1969 Baxter wrote to R North, Home Office, stating that, as the situation in Northern Ireland had deteriorated the Post Office was considering avoiding designs which would celebrate the political event under which the Northern Ireland Government was established in 1921 or indeed any historic event or process which either preceded or followed that occasion. This was seen by the Post Office as leaving a choice of:

- a) portrayal of Ulster's ancient culture and history;
- b) country scenes or beautiful buildings in Northern Ireland;
- c) forward-looking developments in Northern Ireland Commerce and Industry.

The suggestion was to show Northern Ireland life as a whole, it being acknowledged that Wales and Scotland had fared better in the recent stamp programmes in this respect, the Prince of Wales Investiture being a notable example. The Post Office proposed, at this stage, to issue the stamps in June 1971. Of the three choices put forward Baxter thought that (a) was too backward looking, (b) was too insignificant, but (c) had possibilities as Northern Ireland would by then be looking to a brighter future. The 1971 stamp programme was to be announced in April 1970. The Home Office supported the idea of a special stamp but North asked if Baxter could have another look at including a scenic design representing the tourist industry as this, he said, played an important role in the Northern Ireland economy.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

With the change of status to a public corporation for the Post Office on 1 October 1969 came an amended procedure for new stamps. The Corporation retained general control of the stamp programme and of stamp design, but, with the position of Postmaster General abolished, the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications was to submit stamps to the

Queen, and was entitled to refuse to submit stamps considered unacceptable on political grounds. The annual stamp programme was to be drawn up by the Corporation, but shown to the Ministry for advice on any postal aspects. The Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), which had been reconstituted early in 1968 continued to exist with a representative of the Ministry attending meetings to ensure adequate liaison.

At the SAC meeting held on 21 October 1969 at Post Office Headquarters J R Baxter, Operations and Overseas Department and Secretary of the SAC, proposed that for the 1971 programme subjects should include: bi-centenary of the birth of Walter Scott, an Architecture series and the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament.

On 4 February 1970 G R Downes, Director Operations and Overseas (DOO), met with Coates and Sir Harold Black. Downes said that it was proposed to issue three stamps, the values to be the equivalent of the then current 5d, 9d and 1s 6d rates. During discussions regarding the date of issue it was noted that the Northern Ireland Parliament first sat on 7 June 1921 (a Monday in 1971) and was officially opened on 22 June 1921 (a Tuesday in 1971). It was agreed that Wednesday, 16 June would be the most suitable date as this would be helpful to counter staff (Wednesdays were preferred by staff as it was the least busy day of the week). It would allow the stamps to be available in good time for the anniversary date, 22 June.

It was suggested that one stamp show the official (Government) Coat of Arms for Northern Ireland. This was agreed after assurances that it would not be controversial to the most people, both Catholic and Protestant, in Northern Ireland. Eric Montgomery, Director of Information Service of the Northern Ireland Cabinet, felt strongly that it should appear on the 5d stamp as this would be used and seen by the largest number of people. A stamp with such an intricate design, however, was more appropriate as a higher value, because the shorter production run enabled the printers to achieve a greater degree of perfection. It was agreed that the other two stamps would be devoted to tourism featuring landscapes thus fitting in well with the official theme for 1971, 'Come to Northern Ireland'. A suggestion that the inscription on the stamps should simply read 'Northern Ireland 1921 - 1971' was to be given further consideration. Montgomery suggested the Red Hand should appear on each stamp. It was not considered practicable to include this as well as the Queen's head and the denomination. Downes stated there was no objection from Postal Headquarters to the stamps remaining on sale at all, or selected, Northern Ireland post offices for up to 12 months from the date of issue, provided it was cleared with the staff concerned. Although all commemorative stamps were available for one year after the date of issue, this generally meant that after an initial period of sale from all post offices they were then only available from the Philatelic Bureau. Coates agreed to put forward the proposals to the Northern Ireland Government for approval and to ask for an acceptable colour design of the Coat of Arms and also to suggest suitable views for the 'tourism' stamps.

Finally Downes reminded everyone that the Post Office was not the final arbiter and that there would be a need to consult the Home Office and Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications.

THE COAT OF ARMS

When the SAC met on 4 March 1970 it examined a colour print of the Coat of Arms sent by Montgomery. After much consideration the Committee felt it was possibly not a suitable subject as it was unlikely to make an impressive or attractive stamp. It was thought the design would be cluttered once the Queen's head had been added and that it would not fit in well with the other two stamps.

Downes advised Sir Harold Black of this in a letter dated 12 March adding that naturally all were disappointed but in the circumstances thought it best to have a tourist theme for all three stamps. Before proceeding he wished to receive any comments Sir Harold might have regarding the views to be shown. The Giant's Causeway was the first suggestion followed by a view of Harland and Wolff Shipyards. Downes acknowledged this was perhaps not 'tourist' in the narrow sense of the word but it seemed to him to represent an important facet of Northern Ireland and that it would make an attractive stamp. For a third stamp it was suggested to show one of Northern Ireland's fine 18th century houses; however, it was unclear whether the political implications of the 18th century aristocratic residence would be acceptable. Sir Harold replied on 1 April and asked if, now that the Coat of Arms had been turned down, whether reconsideration could be given to include the Red Hand on each of the stamps to serve as a connecting link: the Coat of Arms had originally been suggested in order to make the Northern Ireland symbol, basically the Red Hand, better known throughout the United Kingdom. Sir Harold agreed that the Giant's Causeway should be featured and that the suggestion of a view of the shipyard (possibly the large crane set against a background of the Antrim Hills) seemed attractive. Sir Harold said that the idea of illustrating a building was attractive but thought that being Jubilee year it might be more appropriate to use a picture of the Houses of Parliament at Stormont rather than a stately home. He then put forward another possibility, that of the Gray Printing Shop, having strong historical associations with North America in that Gray was the man who printed the American Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia. Sir Harold thought this was appropriate for use on the 1s 6d stamp used for letters to North America.

On 20 April 1970 B T Sproat, Counter Services Division (CSD), wrote to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications enclosing the recent correspondence between Downes and Sir Harold in order to update the Minister on the position of the Northern Ireland stamp. In addition Sproat wrote:

D00 is intending to discuss the matter with the Stamp Advisory Committee at the next meeting on 6 May.

We assume the Ministry sees no political objection to the use of the Red Hand (already shown on the current Northern Ireland Regional stamps).

I personally consider that Stormont is the sort of thing we do not want to show. Its very existence is after all a major factor in the present quarrels and the date (day and year) of the issue seems a sufficient genuflection in its direction!

I am not aware of any political problems with the Gray Printing Shops; the man concerned, the printer of the Declaration, appears to be not Gray but a John Dunlap who began his career in Gray's shop. But we do not really want to commemorate so little known a subject, and I doubt whether the SAC will want to show the Printing Shop anyway since it might look too much like a repetition of our recent cottage stamps.

On 30 April Coates wrote to Sproat that he had held further discussions with Sir Harold Black and Eric Montgomery. They agreed it would be better and safer to proceed with scenery and tourism and it would be essential to include the Giant's Causeway, known all over the world and visited by most tourists to Northern Ireland, making it suitable for the 1s 6d stamp. The Harland and Wolff Shipyard was also favoured strongly. With Sir Harold now accepting that Stormont and Gray's Printing Shop or a stately home as unsuitable, it was suggested that the third stamp feature the Mountains of Mourne. Coates felt that the 6d Antrim stamp issued as part of the Landscapes series on 2 May 1966 presented a very good picture of a typical Ulster scene and it might assist the SAC when it considered the designs. On the subject of designs for a first day cover, Coates asked that he be consulted when the time came and said that he favoured an outline map of Northern Ireland showing the locations of the scenes depicted.

STAMPS FOR 1971 ANNOUNCED

On 19 May 1970 the Post Office advised through a Press and Broadcast Notice that there was to be four special issues in 1971. The first would consist of three stamps in June to mark the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament and have a tourist theme: full details of values and date of issue to be announced later. In most years the stamp programme began in March, sometimes as early as January; in the case of 1971, however, it was decided that the first issue would be in June, because the change to decimal currency on 15 February 1971 necessitated new definitives and 'regional' stamps for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man.

ARTISTS INVITED

It had been decided that artists from Northern Ireland should be invited to design this series. Professor Guyatt, Royal College of Art and member of the SAC, suggested Miss Norah McGuinness be asked to recommend artists. When Sproat wrote to Miss McGuinness she replied that she was not familiar with any artists from Northern Ireland who would be suitable. She did, however, know of three from the south plus herself. They were Gerald Dillow, T P Flanagan and A Armstrong. Although these artists worked and lived in Eire they were 'Ulstermen'.

On 6 July Stuart Rose, Design Director to the Post Office, and Professor Richard Guyatt visited Dublin to view material by Northern Ireland artists. At Hendriks Gallery they viewed work by Terence Flanagan, Arthur Armstrong, Colin Middleton and George Campbell. Middleton and Campbell had been recommended by Kenneth Jameson, Arts Council Northern Ireland. At Dawson Gallery they viewed work by Gerald Dillon. On returning to London Stuart Rose wrote to G R Downes recommending four artists, suggesting that by commissioning one stamp from each of the four it would add a bit more to the set by making the stamps more representative of Irish painting. The four painters were Norah McGuinness, Colin Middleton, Terence Flanagan and Arthur Armstrong. Downes reacted by seeking an early meeting with Baxter saying 'This runs counter to our policy of one artist per set and the idea of working with four complete novices is daunting.'

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

On 10 July 1970 stamp designer David Gentleman was also invited to submit designs. As was normal practice the invited designers were sent written instructions to assist in preparing the designs. Four designs were required in the first instance although only three would form the final choice. The subjects to be featured were:

the Giant's Causeway,

a docklands scene of Harland and Wolff yard and a large crane possibly showing the Antrim Hills,

the Mountains of Mourne,

Stormont Castle: a landscape setting rather than an illustration solely of the building.

Alternative Northern Ireland scenes would be considered although care would need to be taken that they were 'Ulster' not 'Irish'. As such Celtic Crosses and Statues of St Patrick were not likely to be considered appropriate. The inscription to be included in the designs, although not decided, was likely to be 'Northern Ireland 1921 – 1971'.

It was suggested that a few days be taken to formulate ideas that would then be discussed at length with Stuart Rose. The artwork was to be four times linear stamp size, preferably in horizontal format. The stamps would be printed using photogravure: this reproduces graduated tones and therefore the artists were asked to take care to use materials that permit photography of each tone in its true value. The completed artwork was to reach OOD by 10 August 1970.

Specimens of three previously issued stamps featuring Northern Ireland subjects were enclosed: 4d 'Dockyard' 20th International Geographical Congress 1964; 6d 'Antrim' British Landscape series 1966; 1s 6d 'Ulster Thatch' British Architecture 1970. The artists were told not to duplicate in any way the subjects of these stamps.

A fee of £63 was offered for each completed design with a maximum of £252 to any one designer. For each design selected for use, an additional fee of £199 10s was to be paid making a total of £262 10s in all for each successful design.

UNSOLICITED ARTWORK SUBMITTED

Two members of the public submitted unsolicited artwork in 1970. J Drummond submitted four pieces, bearing cameos, at twice stamp size. R G Sellars submitted three mounted designs, 1p, 1½p and 2p, together with an air letter design and a mock-up stamp book design. These were seen by the SAC at the same time as the commissioned artwork but were deemed unsuitable and returned to the respective artists.

INITIAL DELIBERATIONS

On 11 September 1970 the SAC examined four pieces of artwork by David Gentleman, one each of Giant's Causeway and Carrickfergus Castle and two of the Mountains of Mourne, together with designs by Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Director which incorporated reproductions of paintings by Ulster artists. Rose explained that there had been difficulties in finding an Ulster artist capable of producing quality artwork suitable for stamp designs. He had therefore experimented with modern paintings of the Ulster scene by contemporary Ulster painters. He considered that this had avoided any political references.

Of Gentleman's designs the Committee preferred his first efforts to the rather stylised development displayed by his finished designs. Regarding the paintings, Sir Paul Reilly warned against any implication that there was a recognised Ulster school. As the Committee was fairly evenly divided between the Gentleman designs and the paintings, it was decided that essays of both sets of designs should be prepared and examined before

any final choice was made. As such it was agreed that designs by Gentleman showing the Mountains of Mourne, Lough Erne and Dunluce Castle should be essayed and that he be asked to produce fresh artwork showing a dockyard scene. As for the paintings, the three most representational were to be essayed. The choice of which three was to be left to Rose, after further consultation with the Northern Ireland Arts Council.

ARTWORK

The following artwork submitted by David Gentleman is held at the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA):

Dunluce Castle on top of Antrim cliffs,
Dunluce Castle (larger version, slightly different view with more detail),
Carrickfergus Castle from the harbour,
Green Castle with its farm and the Mountains of Mourne in the distance,
Giant's Causeway.

Forty two stamp-size design roughs featuring various Ulster scenes including:

Harland and Wolff,
Stormont Castle,
Giant's Causeway,
Dunluce Castle.

Three stylised stamp-size designs of Giant's Causeway together with a block of four of one other similar design showing an interlinking feature.

The BPMA holds the following pieces of artwork by the three chosen artists:

Tom Carr (two untitled pieces)

T P Flanagan (three untitled pieces)

Colin Middleton (three untitled pieces, plus: Kiln; Lusty Beg, Blue; Winter Sun; Cloud over Sligo; Gay island; Slieve na brock.

ESSAYS

On 21 October 1970 Harrison and Sons Ltd, the stamp printers, sent various essays to OOD.

FURTHER DELIBERATIONS

On 22 October the SAC examined the essays of three paintings and of one of Gentleman's designs, and recommended that the series should feature paintings. Mr York, representing Harrison and Sons, explained that improvements could be made to the essays, particularly the landscape painting of the 'Farmer', which was considered too bright. It was agreed that further essays of the three paintings be produced, together with an essay of another painting of a rural scene with a postman, considered a possible alternative to the 'Farmer'. It was further agreed that the word 'Paintings' should be substituted for 'Painters' in the inscriptions.

On 27 October Mr Beaumont returned the approved essays to York. Stuart Rose had annotated instructions as to the shades of typography on those of the 2p and 4p values. A colour swatch was enclosed for the panel of the 2p value. Additionally a photograph was enclosed of the artwork for the inscription 'Ulster Paintings 1971' (the original appeared to have been mislaid). York was advised that if there was not have enough time to amend all the essays with the new title he could forward one essay with the new heading.

On 16 November 1970 Harrisons sent further essays to OOD. Rose set out the amendments he wished to see as annotations. Beaumont requested further essays accordingly but concluded that the essays of the 'Bridge' and 'Kiln' designs were most satisfactory.

On 11 December essays of four paintings were shown to the SAC incorporating the amendments suggested at the previous meeting. The Committee was informed that the essays had already been seen by the Northern Ireland Government, which had expressed a preference for Flanagan's 'Derry Landscape' and Carr's 'Farmer Buff'. There were strong feelings against Middleton's 'Kiln Carnlough' as it was considered as presenting an 'untypical and unfavourable image of Ulster'. It was also against Carr's 'Cottage with Postman' regarded as backward looking. The SAC's opinion was somewhat different as it regretted 'Kiln Carnlough' had not found favour. It also disagreed over Carr's 'Farmer Buff' which it considered a poor painting and not of a sufficiently high artistic standard to make a stamp. It was, however, recognised that the views of Northern Ireland had to be taken into account and agreement was made to include 'Derry Landscape' and that additional paintings from Middleton and Carr should be obtained as alternatives for the remaining two stamps.

QUESTIONS OF COPYRIGHT

On 12 November 1970 B T Sproat wrote to the Post Office Solicitor's Office as to the copyright of the paintings to be used for the 'Ulster '71' series. The advice given was that

Section 4 (1) of the Copyright Act 1956 operated so as to vest, in the relevant artist, the copyright in his painting or paintings. This assumed that there was no Crown interest in any of the paintings, and that none of the paintings was made by the artist in the course of employment by another person, or a portrait that had been commissioned. The Post Office was advised that, with regards to the painting that had been sold, the copyright in an artistic work does not pass with the physical possession of the work although the courts tended to construe any document given at the time of sale as an assignment of copyright.

A postage stamp featuring a reproduction of a painting has a separate copyright from that of the painting itself. In the process of producing the stamps the Post Office had to commission the making of an engraving and the taking of a photograph; it therefore followed that the copyright in the stamps (but not the copyright in the original paintings) would be vested in the Post Office. The production and issue of postage stamps which reproduce a painting amounts to the reproduction and publication of the painting itself and as such the Post Office was required to obtain permission from the relevant painters.

This applied to reproduction on any postage stamps and not merely those in the Ulster paintings series.

DERRY LANDSCAPE

On 1 January 1971 Beaumont wrote to Downes saying that the timetable for the Ulster Paintings stamps was getting rather tight and that only one essay – the Derry landscape – had been approved. Beaumont suggested that it would help considerably if this became the 3p stamp, required in the largest quantity, to allow the printers to make proofing cylinders. This was agreed by Downes: York was informed, the approved essay for the Derry landscape stamp being returned.

At the SAC meeting held on 28 January, the Committee was informed that the Londonderry landscape was to be the 3p stamp. Essays of four other paintings, two each by Middleton and Carr, were examined, from which the Committee recommended ‘Slieve na brock’ by Middleton and ‘Deer’s Meadow-Mourne’ by Carr for the other two values (5p and 7½p) to complete the series.

On 27 January essays were sent to Beaumont by Harrisons.

On 29 January 1971 the Post Office was advised by the Northern Ireland Arts Council that the titles for the chosen paintings were:

‘Londonderry Landscape’ by T Flanagan;

‘Slieve na brock’ by Colin Middleton;

'Deer's Meadow – Mourne' by Tom Carr.

CHANGE OF EMPHASIS

On 11 January Mr Coates, Director Post Office Northern Ireland, wrote to Downes enclosing a copy of a news release issued by the Northern Ireland Information Service on 4 January. This reported that Sir Cecil Bateman, Chairman of the Ulster '71 Committee, had that day said:

In order to avoid any misunderstanding I feel I must emphasise that Ulster '71 is a non-political festival aimed at restoring Northern Ireland's economic and tourist position ... The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament is a matter for the Government and for Parliament.

Coates thought that the Post Office should therefore expunge all mention of the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament. This met with agreement throughout OOD, it being noted that the Post Office had in May specifically stated that the stamps were to mark the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament. It was hoped that no one would remember this and make 'political', or other, capital out of it.

On 15 February Beaumont sent to Harrisons the provisionally approved essays for the remaining two values. That of the 5p (blue) was to have the value amended to 7½p, the tonal quality of the tree was to be softened and the outline of the mountain was to be made less sharp. The 5p (brown) was to have the value amended to 9p. In each case the name (signature) of the artist was to be included. A copy of this letter was also sent to Supplies Department together with two essays: 5p (blue) and 5p (brown).

APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 16 February 1971 G R Downes wrote to G Vieler, Managing Director Posts, advising that the SAC had made its recommendations, essays of which were enclosed. Vieler, having agreed the recommendations, forwarded the essays to Christopher Chataway, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications. Next the Minister, having also agreed to the recommendations, submitted the essays the Queen's approval via her Private Secretary. The letter stated that some small amendments were to be made as follows:

'Londonderry Landscape' by T Flanagan - The value was to be 3p instead of 2p. The legend was to be as for the 7½p and 9p values namely 'Ulster '71 Paintings' and in the same tonal shade as the right hand panel.

'Slieve na brock' by C Middleton - The value was to be 7½p instead of 5p and the outlines of the tree and the mountain to be softened.

'Deer's Meadow-Mourne' by T Carr - The value was to be 9p instead of 5p.
In all cases the signature of the artist was to be incorporated within the design.

The reply came from Buckingham Palace the following day; the Queen was glad to give her approval to the designs, but in relation to the second design 'in doing so, The Queen commented that it might be a pity if the tree and the mountain were toned down as proposed. The Queen feels this may make the stamp appear a little wishy-washy.' Thus it was decided against any toning down and that on sending final copies to the Queen this was to be made known. Harrison's and the Supplies Department were immediately informed of the decision not to make the amendments.

PAYMENT TO ARTISTS

On 16 December 1970 an estimate was drawn up by OOD of the cost of design work for the Ulster stamps. The estimated total amounted to £2,100 made up as follows:

Original designs - £1,200

Additional designs - £300

Final accepted designs - £450

Designers' expenses - £100

Miscellaneous - £50.

On 12 March 1971 D H Beaumont of Counter Services Division of OOD wrote to Carr, Flanagan and Middleton explaining that the Post Office wished to make use, on postage stamps, of their respective paintings 'Deer's Meadow: Mourne', 'A Mountain Road' and 'Slieve na brock'. The offer of a fee of £200 was made in consideration of the Post Office being granted permission to reproduce the paintings on postage stamps, to issue the stamps to the public (as part of a series featuring Ulster paintings) and to authorise any third parties to make and /or publish copies of the stamps.

The actual total amount paid for the whole design process was somewhat lower than had estimated. It had originally been proposed to pay £150 for each painting used; this was increased to £200. The invitation sent to David Gentleman stated that the initial fee would be £63 for each completed design: this was revised to £150, with a further payment of £150 for each design selected. The total amount paid out amounted to £1,438.16, made up of the following:

Original designs by David Gentleman - £750

Final accepted paintings (three at £200) - £600

David Gentleman's expenses - £88.16.

On 15 April 1971 payment of £200 was made to each painter. Later that year further payments were made to the artists: these were for expenses that had not been claimed at the appropriate time. Carr received £24.60 and Flanagan an unrecorded amount. It is not known if Middleton received any expenses. These expenses arose from visits to Stuart Rose to discuss the designs.

PRESS SHOWING

With the day of issue scheduled for 16 June, the press showing, held as normal at Postal Headquarters in London six weeks prior to the release of the stamps, was arranged for 4 May. Downes felt that it would be appropriate that Ulster should have a small press event simultaneously, with a much bigger event on the first day of issue. It was therefore agreed that the actual paintings be on display at the London press showing, and then sent to Ulster for the first day of issue.

STAMPS ISSUED

The stamps were issued on 16 June 1971 to mark 'Ulster '71', Northern Ireland's biggest-ever festival, which started in May that year and ran until the autumn. The primary aim of the festival was to interest industrialists and tourists in Northern Ireland. By marking the Festival with the stamps the Post Office successfully distanced itself from a rapidly deteriorating political situation. Featuring paintings by Northern Ireland artists, it was the first time the Post Office had devoted an entire issue to contemporary paintings. The resulting stamps were said to have delighted the Northern Ireland Prime Minister.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The files show that the Post Office expected to receive from the printers the following good stamps: 3p - 74 million, 7½p - 15 million and 9p - 12 million.

The quantities sold were as follows:

3p – A Mountain Road by T P Flanagan – 63,214,628

7½p – Deer's Meadow by Tom Carr – 7,868,543

9p – Slieve na brock by Colin Middleton – 5,878,989.

The colours used were:

3 p – buff, yellow, brown, blue, black and straw

7½p – light and dark blue, brown, light and dark grey and green

9p – light and dark grey, brown, yellow, orange, buff and brown/black.

All the stamps were slightly larger than double definitive size and were issued 100 to a sheet. They were printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons; all had phosphor bands. The stamps were withdrawn on 15 June 1972.

A presentation pack was available of which 100,257 were sold.

FIRST DAY COVERS

A full first day cover service on envelopes designed by Ralph Dobson was provided through the Post Office Philatelic Bureau. The inclusive charge for servicing with a full range of stamps was 30p per cover. The Bureau also accepted addressed covers to be stamped and posted on the day of issue at a cost of 24½p per cover. The Bureau offered a choice of postmark, Edinburgh or Belfast.

Philatelic posting boxes were provided at over 170 post offices throughout the United Kingdom. The rule that collectors preparing their own covers should affix the full range of stamps was not applied on this occasion.

A first day of issue handstamp incorporating the Red Hand of Ulster was used to cancel covers posted in the special boxes at Belfast, Londonderry, Coleraine, Newry, Ballymena, Armagh, Portadown, Cookstown, Omagh and Enniskillen. The last-named eight offices offered philatelic posting facilities on this one day only. The Red Hand was featured within a six-point star as a motif on the left of a rectangle.

Total postings in the philatelic boxes were 425,922 of which 87.60 per cent bore full sets. A further 23,668 items were extracted from the normal post. There were 180,533 first day envelopes sold from post office counters with these representing 43.39 per cent of postings in the philatelic boxes. The estimated revenue from philatelic postings, including 'normal postage' was £375,283. With estimated staff costs at £1,600 the estimated net revenue, excluding 'normal postage', was £59,100.

THE RED HAND

The Red Hand had been symbolically associated with Ulster for many centuries. It is the badge of the ancient O'Neill family: Captain Terence O'Neill, was the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland when the stamps were issued. The Government of Northern Ireland chose,

on its establishment in 1922, the Red Hand within a six-pointed star - the star representing the six counties of Northern Ireland - as the centrepiece of its Coat of Arms.

With romantic mysticism having always surrounded the Red Hand, legends abound. One such suggests that two Scottish chieftains, having cast envious eyes on the lands of Ulster, made a pact that 'he who first touched the shore would be given possession of the land'. Such was the heated competition that when one of the invaders - said by legend to be Hugh O'Neill - found himself some way behind as the shores of Ulster were approaching, cut off his left hand and hurled it ashore just ahead of his rival. His claim to be first to touch the soil was recognised and he was proclaimed Prince of Ulster. This legend bears little or no relation with reality as, according to heraldry, the O'Neill house invariably uses the right hand as its emblem. Confusion appears to have arisen when on the institution of the Order of Baronets of Ulster by James I, a 'hand gules' was adopted as the badge of the new Order, but whether left or right was not specified. Either hand was used for some time until gradually the left hand came to be used almost exclusively as the badge of the baronetcy. For the badge of Ulster, however, the right hand is correct and so regarded in the Office of the Ulster King of Arms. There should be no drops of blood.

SIGNATURES

When the original paintings were acquired for essaying none of them bore the artists' signatures: it was later decided to incorporate them within the designs. Having obtained the signatures, it was necessary to decide where to put them on the stamps. York bought the paintings on behalf of Harrisons and took the originals over to Northern Ireland where two of the artists - Flanagan and Middleton - signed the paintings. He was unable, for unrecorded reasons, to arrange for Carr to sign his painting. The Post Office was unaware that two of the originals had been signed until received on 29 April in readiness for the press showing scheduled for 4 May.

On 3 May B T Sproat wrote to Downes and Baxter saying that at the press showing they might be asked as to why the artists' signatures were shown differently on the stamps compared with those on the paintings. The explanation by Sproat, as checked with Stuart Rose, was that the three stamps were 'interpretations' not straight reproductions of the paintings. It was felt that in this context some liberties could justifiably be taken. As to why the Post Office did not buy the originals, the fact was that York pre-empted them.

THE PAINTINGS

The stamps were reproductions of paintings by three well-known Ulster painters, T P Flanagan, Colin Middleton and Tom Carr. The 3p stamp featured an original by T P Flanagan entitled 'A Mountain Road'. The painting was one of a set of Irish bog landscapes that inspired 'Bogland', a poem by the Ulster poet Seamus Heaney. The 7½p stamp featured an original by Colin Middleton entitled 'Slieve na brock' which came from a series of paintings showing scenes of the Tollymore Forest Park on the north slopes of the Mountains of Mourne in County Down, painted in 1965. The 9p stamp featured a painting by Tom Carr entitled 'Deer's Meadow', a beautiful corner of the Mournes.

THE PAINTERS

T P FLANAGAN was born in 1929 in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland. He held a scholarship at Belfast College of Art between 1949 and 1953 and after a number of teaching appointments became principal lecturer in art at St Mary's College of Education, Belfast.

COLIN MIDDLETON was born in Belfast in 1910. By 1971 he had been exhibiting regularly in Belfast and Dublin for over 20 years. He had one-man shows in London and has been represented in group shows in United States, Canada and many parts of Europe. He was awarded the MBE in 1969 and elected to the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1970.

TOM CARR was born in Belfast in 1910. He studied at Slade School of Fine Art. He first exhibited in London in 1933 with a group called 'Objective Abstractionists' and two years later exhibited with this group in the Zwemmer Gallery. He later became attached to the Euston Road group and exhibited with the London Group and at the Royal Academy. His first solo exhibition was held at Wildenstein Gallery in 1940 and after held numerous one-man shows in Belfast, Dublin and London.

SLOGAN OVERPRINTING

In the latter part of 1971 the Irish Republican Philatelic Office in Dublin printed and circulated a leaflet describing overprinted British postage stamps. The stamps were offered for sale in an effort to raise funds for the Republican Movement. Its first overprinted stamp was issued on 19 June 1971 and was the 3p stamp from the Ulster paintings series. The leaflet stated that the stamp had originally been released by the British Post Office to commemorate Ulster '71 (the festival marking the 50th Anniversary of the Partition of Ireland) and that 7,500 of these stamps had been overprinted with the words 'SAOIRSE

EIREANN/FIGHT FOR UNITED IRELAND/1916 – 1971’ to commemorate ‘the 55th year of the Irish Republican Movement’s fight for a free, united, democratic socialist republic’.

The stamps, originally in sheets of 100, were divided into ‘blocks’ of 25 to ease overprinting. The Irish Republican Philatelic Office had posted a number of envelopes on the day of issue and of these about 50 received either a machine cancellation or a circular datestamp, with the remainder, an undisclosed figure, returned uncanceled with a letter from Mr King, Controller of Postal Services, stating that the stamps had no validity.

Not surprisingly the stamps attracted the attention of the Irish press, with headlines such as ‘British PO carries the IRA message’ and ‘IRA stamps on sale in Dublin’.

Mr Roebuck, Downsway Stamp Co Ltd, received a copy of the leaflet through the post. Feeling strongly about the matter he wrote, on 13 December 1971, to his local MP, Sir Peter Rawlinson, asking if an emergency act could be brought in to stop any dealer buying or selling these stamps. Sir Peter immediately wrote to the Minister of Posts and Communications, Christopher Chataway, who replied that the overprinted stamps raised two issues: the defacement of the stamps and their use on postal packets and philatelic dealings in the stamps. Chataway explained that under Section 20 of the Stamp Duties Management Act 1891 it was an offence to deface a stamp before it is used. Further, defaced stamps were not valid for the payment of postage and items bearing them would be liable to surcharging as unpaid. The Post Office was, however, taking the more drastic action of stopping such items and returning them to sender. This had been the same answer as that given to Enoch Powell on 22 December when he had asked a similar question. Chataway ended by saying that while he deplored philatelic dealings in these stamps, as they originated in the Irish Republic his view was that it would be out of proportion to consider legislation to deal with the problem and hoped it could be left to the ‘good judgement of philatelic traders in this country not to deal with these objectionable stamps’.

Andy Pendlebury
August 1994

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