

STAMP HISTORY

Broadcasting Anniversaries

Date of issue: 13 SEPTEMBER 1972



The first recorded suggestion of a stamp marking the 50th anniversary of broadcasting in Britain came from George Campey, Head of Publicity at the BBC. On 21 January 1969 he wrote to Tom Dawson, Director of Public Relations at GPO Central Headquarters, saying that the BBC - and consequently British broadcasting - would be 50 years old on 14 November 1972. Campey added that the BBC had in mind a number of schemes to mark this historic date and asked if a stamp could be considered. Dawson replied that he would forward the suggestion to the appropriate department.

On 9 April 1970 Arnold James, Principal of Barry College of Further Education, wrote to the Philatelic Bureau with the suggestion of a stamp to mark the 75th anniversary of the Marconi-Kemp wireless tests over the Bristol Channel.

James explained that he was the Honorary President of the Barry College of Further Education Radio Society and that this society commemorated the tests each year. The society considered the historical significance, the first tests ever over water, warranted a stamp in May 1972.

James was informed that the stamp programme for 1972 would probably not be chosen until the summer of 1971, but the suggestion would be added to the list.

DECIDING THE PROGRAMME

When the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) met on 22 October 1970 it discussed the 1972 programme. So far as important anniversaries were concerned it felt that the Post Office should give serious consideration to the 50th anniversary of the BBC, possibly linking it to an issue commemorating the Marconi-Kemp wireless tests, or an issue solely devoted to the BBC with each of the stamps featuring a landmark or achievement in the Corporation's 50-year existence.

The Chairman of the SAC, George Downes, Director Operations and Overseas, told the Committee when it next met, on 11 December, that it was proposed to submit the following programme for 1972 to the Post Office Board:

- a. British Architecture: Old inns
- b. British Explorers
- c. The Queen's Silver Wedding
- d. Christmas.

He added that there was also the possibility of an anniversary series but the theme(s) of this would be considered later. It had been recent practice to include a general anniversaries series, despite misgivings by some members of the SAC and others who felt that such issues suffered in terms of design, 'especially as little known anniversaries have a habit of creeping in'. The Post Office received many suggestions for stamps and the view was that an anniversary series gave a good opportunity to include four or five considered to be of major importance and appeal.

The SAC did not discuss a general anniversaries issue again until 26 May 1971 when the Chairman said that there was to be such an issue to comprise three or four stamps, and either feature different subjects, or concentrate on one theme. Nearly 40 suggestions had been received and a list was circulated to the members of the Committee. The more notable were: 50th anniversary of the BBC, 150th anniversary of HM Coastguard Association, Centenary of the birth of Ralph Vaughan Williams and the Tutankhamun Exhibition 1972. It was agreed that a shortlist be prepared for consideration at the next meeting.

RECOMMENDING A BBC ISSUE

At its meeting on 7 July the Committee recommended that the General Anniversaries issue in 1972 should comprise three stamps featuring 15th anniversary of HM Coastguard, 50th anniversary of the Excavation of the Tomb of Tutankhamun and one other, as yet undecided, subject. The Committee felt that the BBC should not be included and suggested it merited a series of its own because of 'its importance in the life of the nation'. As such it recommended that a separate series of three stamps be issued to mark the 50th anniversary of the BBC.

At the SAC meeting on 20 October 1971 the Committee was told by the Chairman that the Post Office was going ahead with a set of stamps to mark the BBC anniversary and that it had been decided to link the 75th anniversary of the Marconi-Kemp wireless tests to this issue. In fact, the process of design was now underway as Stuart Rose, Post Office Design

Advisor, had been asked to discuss the proposals with the head of BBC TV design and David Gentleman had been commissioned to begin preliminary artwork.

On 5 November Arnold James was told that a stamp commemorating the Marconi-Kemp wireless tests was to be included in a British Broadcasting series in 1972. He was also asked if he could provide information on the history of the tests. It was subsequently arranged for D H Adams of Barry College to advise Gentleman direct.

David Gentleman presented his preliminary drawings to the SAC at its meeting on 25 November. In outlining his approach Gentleman said he considered the scope to be so vast that it could not be covered pictorially, and to treat it symbolically by using modern symbols such as screens, masts, aerials and so on might be seen as rather overused. One theme, in an effort to be evocative, was showing 'period' radio equipment and furniture used in the early days of broadcasting. Another was to show 'ancient and modern' BBC equipment.

The Committee, having examined the designs, agreed that four subjects should be developed as finished artwork ready for essaying. It had already been decided that three stamps would be for the BBC and one for the Marconi-Kemp anniversary and as such the following subjects were selected:

BBC

Horn Speaker (shown in preliminary drawing)

Earphones (shown in preliminary drawing)

Television camera

Marconi-Kemp

Morse Key (shown in preliminary drawing).

On 2 December 1971 Don Beaumont, PHQ, wrote to Gentleman confirming the verbal invitation to submit four stamp designs to mark the 50th anniversary of the BBC (three stamps) and the 75th anniversary of the Marconi-Kemp first wireless transmission (one stamp). With regards to fees there were to be further discussions in more detail but at this stage it was said that the fee for a design subsequently used as a stamp would be £300.

1972 STAMP PROGRAMME ANNOUNCED

A Press and Broadcast Notice was issued on 29 December 1971 giving details of the 1972 programme and stated:

The 50th anniversary of the BBC and the start of daily broadcasting in the UK will be the subject of three stamps at 3p, 5p and 9p - to be issued on September 13 with a 7½p stamp marking the 75th anniversary of the first wireless transmission across water by Marconi and Kemp.

SELECTING DESIGNS FOR ESSAYING

Following a reorganisation at Postal Headquarters the chairmanship of the SAC was transferred from the Director of Operations and Overseas to the Director of Marketing. When the SAC next met, on 13 January 1972, the Chairman was now E G White, Director of Marketing, who had been Chairman-elect since mid 1971. At this meeting the Committee examined the latest artwork from Gentleman, who was also present. The Committee advised that the values should be in chronological order, that is the earliest broadcasting equipment depicted should bear the lowest value and the latest should bear the highest value. After discussion the meeting agreed that the following designs should be chosen for essaying -

BBC:

Microphones (3p stamp)

Horn Speaker (5p stamp)

Television Camera (9p stamp);

Marconi-Kemp:

Oscillator (7½p stamp).

White reported that Postal Headquarters in Wales had seen a marketing opportunity with the Marconi-Kemp design and suggested it was the 7½p value; this was agreed.

Gentleman was asked to carry out a number of amendments to the Horn Speaker and Television Camera designs before they were passed to the printer.

DELIBERATION OVER ESSAYS

Harrison and Sons forwarded essays to Beaumont on 14 February, some have the Queen's head in gold, others having coloured heads.

The essays were shown to the Committee on 15 February when Gentleman was again invited to attend. They were approved by the Committee subject to the following amendments being made during stamp production:

the 7½p and 9p values should be reversed in order to keep the three BBC stamps together as a set;

the Queen's head to be warm charcoal grey on all four stamps;
bolder typefaces for the bottom caption on the Marconi-Kemp stamp;
adjust colour of the horn speaker;
lettering on the television camera to be less bold.

George Campey was shown the essays on 29 February and was delighted with them. He subsequently suggested that the 3p stamp should be the television camera design as it was so attractive and it would perhaps be the one most readily identified by people in this country. Further to this he was hoping to have BBC mail stamped instead of franked and as such the 3p stamp would be the one most commonly used and the television camera, he suggested, would be the most popular. It was thus necessary to make an immediate decision on the designs and values.

Production of the lowest value stamp tended to begin first due simply to the larger quantities required and R F York of Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, telephoned Postal Headquarters on 3 March seeking permission to start the cylinder for the 3p stamp. There was a problem with production in that a miners' strike, which had lasted 47 days starting on 9 January, had resulted in the Government declaring a state of emergency, during which the use of electricity was severely restricted. With the strike only recently ended there was a need to start production immediately. It was decided to leave the values as agreed by the SAC with 3p for the microphone design, and York was told to go ahead with cylinder work.

CONFUSION OVER VALUES

The Committee had advised, late in 1971, that the values should be in chronological order. However, it was subsequently agreed to make the Marconi-Kemp stamp the 9p value as a means of keeping the BBC stamps together. The Post Office felt it was unnecessary to issue a press release detailing this change. The February 'Philatelic Bulletin' announced the Marconi stamp would be the 9p value: not realising this was correct, it corrected the 'error' in March and said the Marconi-Kemp stamp would be the 7½p stamp. The correct values were given in August. However, the September edition featured an article on the Marconi-Kemp experiments and managed to put the value wrong once more by stating 'To mark the anniversary a 7½p stamp will be issued.'

TITLE DECIDED

The proposed title of the issue had been 'BBC and Radio History' but, wrote Philip Paul, Deputy Director Public Relations, to A E F Lane of Marketing and also Secretary of the SAC on

15 March 1972, 'it omitted what had become the most influential communications medium – television'. He said possibly the BBC's concern to have the television camera stamp on the 3p value emphasised this and therefore suggested the series be titled 'BBC and Broadcasting History'. However, on 22 May Lane wrote to Paul saying that, having taken the advice of Mr Ley, Press Officer, in Paul's absence, the series had been re-named 'Broadcasting Anniversaries'. Despite this it is sometimes referred to as 'BBC and Broadcasting History' and it is this wording that appears on the first day cover.

ESSAYS

On 6 April Harrisons sent essays to Beaumont.

On 5 May Beaumont wrote to Supplies Division, Hemel Hempstead enclosing a proof sheet of the 7½p stamp together with an original essay, stating that he had consulted Gentleman for his comments on the proof sheet, which were as follows:

the tone of grey for the camera is preferred as shown on the essay;

the shade of pink for the word 'colour' on the essay is preferred to that of the proof sheet;

there was noticeable registration wander across the middle (horizontal) of the camera where the pale light line is lost at various points on the proof sheet which should be rectified if possible.

Beaumont asked that these points be brought to the notice of the printers and that remedial action should be taken.

On 12 May Harrisons sent further essays to Beaumont.

Beaumont wrote again to Supplies Division on 15 May, this time enclosing an essay of the 5p design and said that Gentleman had only one suggestion to make. He considered the lowest highlight (where the brown horn meets the black area) to be too prominent and asked that it be reduced in strength, namely grey instead of white. Beaumont added that he had informed Harrisons accordingly.

Harrisons sent four proofs, one specimen from each sheet, on 18 May.

THE QUEEN'S APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 22 May Brigadier Holmes, Managing Director Posts (MDP), wrote to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications enclosing the proofs. The Minister, Sir John Eden, in turn

submitted these to the Queen. Two days later Sir John was informed that the Queen approved the designs.

George York of Harrison and Sons wrote to Beaumont on 8 June enclosing two sheets of the 7½p stamps. One sheet, which had a stamp removed, was the agreed colour for production and York expected most of the run to be to the same standard. York had found that as the colour of the camera was taken down in strength the reddish tinge, which had been requested, became more apparent. The printer had, however, also been specifically requested to increase the strength by 30 per cent. York felt that the compromise between the reddish type of grey used on the essay, and the extra strength called for was the nearest the company could get to meeting the requests. This was found acceptable by the Post Office.

PRESS PREVIEW

As press viewings were generally held about six weeks before the date of issue, 1 August had been suggested in the case of these stamps; Gentleman, however, would be on holiday for all of July and the first two weeks of August. This, Beaumont suggested, left the Post Office with the option of changing the date to late June, postponing the event until after Gentleman's return, bringing Gentleman back from holiday at the Post Office's expense, or going ahead without him.

It was thought that there was no alternative but to go for the third option, with the proviso that Gentleman 'doesn't decide to go to say, South America'. When Beaumont was asked if there was any precedents for this he replied bluntly 'No, but it would be very flat without him!' It had since been established that Gentleman was going to Italy and A E F Lane wrote to the E G White, Director of Philatelic Marketing, explaining the situation adding 'It could well be that, without Gentleman, the view will lose much of its impact. As you know the BBC have shown a deal of interest in the designs and [BBC2's] Collectors World will feature him and his work on the stamps in the September edition of the programme.'

Lane suggested offering to pay Gentleman's expenses in returning to London, which cost £86.50 and sought authority accordingly. Gentleman accepted the offer and the press viewing was held as arranged on 1 August at Postal Headquarters, London.

It was suggested by the Managing Director, Posts that the Chairman might entertain the principal guests to lunch in the private dining rooms at Postal Headquarters after the press viewing. This was agreed; the luncheon guests included:

Charles J Curran, Director General, BBC.

Lord Hill of Luton, Chairman of the Governors of the BBC.

Lord Aylestone, Chairman, Independent Broadcasting Authority.

Tom Jackson, a Governor of the BBC since 1968 and General Secretary of the UPW.

John Snagge, BBC (retired), one of the best-known names and voices in the history of British radio and broadcasting.

Alvar Lidell, BBC (retired), among the first radio announcers and news readers of the 'dinner jackets must be worn before the microphone after 5pm' era.

Robert Telford, Managing Director, The Marconi Company Limited.

Mr and Mrs David Gentleman.

Mrs Gabrielle Pike, appointed to the SAC in May 1971 whose public service included Independent Television Authority and Advertising Standards Authority.

For the preview it was suggested that the Chairman introduce the stamps with a short speech as it 'would add to the news worthiness of the occasion' and as it was believed the BBC would be arranging television coverage.

THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

The stamps were issued on 13 September 1972, a date with no significance in broadcasting terms, but had been chosen by the Post Office as convenient in relation to the 1972 programme as a whole.

The date 14 November was the most important from the BBC's point of view - daily broadcasting began from the London station of the company on this day in 1922 - but 'could not be entertained because of its proximity to the immovable date of the Silver Wedding special issue (November 20) and the issue of Christmas stamps in late October in good time for use on overseas mails'.

The 9p stamp marked the 75th anniversary of the historic Marconi-Kemp experiments in which radio signals were sent between Lavernock Point, the island of Flat Holm in the Bristol Channel, and Brean Down, Somerset. To commemorate these first successful radio tests over water the Post Office provided radio equipment for a three-way radio hook-up on 13 September to coincide with the stamp issue. The hook-up enabled speakers at Cardiff, Flat Holm, and a restaurant near Lavernock to take part in a three-way conversation.

A special posting box was provided on Flat Holm for collectors wishing to post first day covers and also at Barry College of Further Education, Barry, Glamorgan.

COLOURS USED

The colours used for the stamps were:

3p - light grey, mid grey, blue grey, black, brown, yellow

5p - light grey, beige, red, brown, black, umber

7½p - light grey, dark grey, blue grey, black, red

9p - light grey, blue grey, black, yellow, blue, brown.

PRINTING FIGURES AND QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities printed and sold were:

3p - 54,000,000; 51,704,000

5p - 11,000,000; 8,201,800

7½p - 9,500,000; 6,632,000

9p - 8,300,000; 5,364,800.

A total of 99,453 presentation packs were sold.

All four stamps were slightly larger than double definitive size and issued in sheets of 100. They were produced in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Ltd and all had phosphor bands.

About a month's supply was supplied to post offices; they were kept on sale for one year at the Philatelic Bureau and Philatelic sales Counters unless previously sold out. With the date of issue of the broadcasting anniversary stamps being 13 September and the 1972 Christmas stamps issued on 18 October, following discussions with A Tuffin, Union of Postal Workers (UPW), it was agreed to withdraw the BBC series from counter positions prior to the Christmas issue being put on sale. They were, however, to remain available from Head Offices if the demand arose.

The stamps were withdrawn on 12 September 1973.

FIRST DAY COVERS

The first day envelope, bearing the motif of a broadcasting aerial transmitter, and the presentation pack were designed by John Hamper of Hamper & Purssell Ltd and printed and produced by Moore and Mathes (Printers) Ltd.

Two pictorial handstamps were provided by the Post Office - each showing a radio mast transmitting waves - at the Philatelic Bureau and London W1, the postal district covering Broadcasting House.

The Bureau provided an addressed cover bearing all four stamps, cancelled 'Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh' or 'London W1' for an inclusive charge of 35½p.

For collectors who wanted to post their own covers, philatelic boxes were provided at 184 post offices. Items posted in these boxes were given the normal first day of issue cancellation.

A special commemorative handstamp, sponsored by the Marconi Philatelic Society, was in use at Chelmsford. Chelmsford, county town of Essex, has an association with Marconi that stretches back to 1898 when in Hall Street the world's first wireless factory was opened. The manufacturing company had been formed the previous year and was called Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company Limited. The name changed in 1900 to Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Company Ltd, and again in 1963 to the much simpler The Marconi Company Limited. On the day of issue a mobile Post Office unit and exhibition was located at the company's original Hall Street Works and all covers posted bore a special cachet.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR BBC

The BBC mounted two exhibitions from 1 November until the end of that year to commemorate 50 years of public broadcasting. A commemorative cover, produced by the Post Office, was available and the Post Office also arranged for special handstamps to be applied to items posted at these exhibitions.

There were 32,600 special presentation packs to hold the three BBC stamps produced with standard stamp carriers and sleeves inscribed '1922-1972'. The pack was given with the good wishes of the Chairman and Board of Governors, the Director-General and Board of Management of the BBC to every member of staff on the morning of 13 September. The charge made by the Post Office for providing this was £6,398.

Special arrangements were made between the Post Office and BBC Publications (Radio Times) for servicing 7,062 covers. The BBC addressed the covers and provided their own filler cards, and delivered them to Postal Headquarters from where they were taken to Hemel Hempstead to have the three BBC stamps only affixed. They were then sent to London WDO for the special First Day of Issue (FDI) handstamp.

The charge to the BBC for servicing 7,500 covers was £1,483, which included:
7,500 covers at £74.73
affixing stamps at £140
postage and handstamping at £211.86

Post Office profit at £1,050.74.

The profit for the Post Office from the three main aspects of the BBC exercise is recorded as follows:

Production of special pack - £845.80

Production of commemorative cover - £99.31

First Day Cover exercise - £1,051.00

Total - £1,996.11.

SUBJECTS ON STAMPS

Microphones

This design was to suggest BBC sound transmission from earliest days up to the present, national and worldwide. Six microphones were shown, from those in use by the BBC from the start at Savoy Hill (top left) - known as the 'meat-safe' - to contemporary models used for studio or outside broadcast alike, indicating the gradual trend to smaller and lighter units.

Loudspeaker

This design suggested 'listening-in', the early impact of wireless in the home and showed an early domestic loudspeaker, the AMPLION swan-neck, dating from the 1920s. 'The Post Office had described this as 'the precursor of the wireless receiver', but as R J Bird, a retired member of BBC staff, pointed out 'Wireless receivers were in use for many years before loudspeakers developed. The need for the latter only became apparent after the advent of broadcasting.' He suggested that the confusion might have arisen from the fact that 'most present day receivers have their loud speakers built-in, whereas in the days of the horn loudspeaker they were external to the receiver'.

Television camera

This was one of the latest EMI colour cameras in use at Lime Grove, the Television Centre, and Regional studios. It was shown as at Lime Grove during rehearsals. Gentleman saw this design as suggesting or symbolising the present-day television service.

Marconi - Kemp experiments

This design showed an oscillator and an early form of spark transmitter, two items from the transmitting equipment used by Marconi in his 1897 Bristol Channel experiments, conducted in conjunction with the Post Office. Similar equipment was held in the Marconi museum at Chelmsford. Photographs of the experiments provided the reference for Gentleman.

On 21 September a letter from E G White appeared in 'The Times' in response to correspondence that appeared on 16 September relating to the 9p Marconi-Kemp stamp. One correspondent said the Post Office had slighted Marconi by coupling his name with Kemp, adding 'Let us not depreciate the value of the credit due to him by asking him to share the pedestal with a loyal but humble assistant.' The other correspondent suggested the Post Office had slighted Kemp by misspelling his name and said: 'Harry Robert Kempe ... was Principal Technical Officer of the Post Office and collaborated with Marconi in the experiment off the coast of Cornwall ... One cannot help feeling that in those days the Post Office would not have misspelled his name. Is this a sign of the times and will the mistake increase the collection value of the stamp?'

White stated that the Post Office 'certainly [did] not wish to underrate Marconi's crucial contribution to the development of wireless telegraphy' and pointed out that the stamp commemorated 'the most successful of a series of experiments made possible by the sponsorship and assistance of the Post Office with money, equipment and skilled personnel led by George Kemp' and 'while it was never the intention to rank Kemp with Marconi it would not be fair to disregard his contribution to this particular experiment entirely'.

Of the confusion over the name Kemp, White wrote: 'There were three men of similar name involved in the experiment; this confused even Marconi. George Kemp, the man named on the stamp, was Marconi's Senior Technical Assistant. His nephew, H J Kemp, was engaged in a junior capacity. H R Kempe was one of the two men sent by the Post Office to evaluate Marconi's experiments.'

THE MARCONI/KEMP EXPERIMENTS

In 1895 Guglielmo Marconi, a young Italian inventor working in Bologna, succeeded in getting 'electrically agitated' waves to travel across space. Further to this he managed to use successions of such waves to convey intelligible messages, and by the end of that year had raised the level of reception to about 1½ miles.

The following year he came to England where he was introduced to W H Preece (later Sir William Preece), Engineer in Chief of the Post Office. It was subsequently agreed to carry out an extended series of experiments in conjunction with the Post Office. Early in May 1897 a series of tests were started between Lavernock Point, Glamorgan and Flatholm Island and on 18 May radio transmissions were successfully sent between Lavernock Point and Brean Down, Somerset, a distance of 9 miles across the Bristol Channel. From this small success was to grow the vast network of radio and television communication.

Marconi was assisted in these experiments by the Post Office engineer George Kemp, of whom Marconi wrote to Sir William 'without his assistance I certainly could not have carried out so many experiments in the same length of time'.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BBC

The BBC came into being in November 1922, as the British Broadcasting Company. A 50p licence was introduced and from 14 November 1922 daily broadcasting began from the London station of the company. On 1 January 1927 the company was turned into a public corporation constituted under Royal Charter describing 'the great value' of the broadcasting services 'as a means of disseminating information, education and entertainment'.

In 1972, after 50 years of broadcasting, the BBC was a far different institution from that at its inception. It was imbued with the same ideals of public service but had grown to two colour television services, four radio networks, 20 local radio stations, a complex of Welsh language and regional broadcasting and an External Broadcasting system in 40 languages.

Andy Pendlebury
February 1995

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