

Christmas 1972

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When the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) met on 22 October 1970 it discussed the 1972 stamp programme. The issue of Christmas stamps had become a tradition: the Committee recommended two stamps, 2½p and 5p, with a religious theme, to be issued in October.

At the following meeting the Chairman stated that it was proposed to submit the following programme to the Post Office Board:

British Architecture: Old Inns

British Explorers

The Queen's Silver Wedding

Christmas.

Designs prepared for Christmas 1971 by Rauri McLean, although not chosen on that occasion, were thought then by the SAC to show promise and that they might be suitable for Christmas 1972. McLean was asked to develop these designs and on 7 September submitted five pieces of artwork. The original designs, together with the new typographical designs by the artist, were shown to the SAC the following day. After discussion it felt that the original designs already had a dated appearance and that the new designs were not entirely successful. It therefore agreed to invite other artists to submit designs.

When the Committee met on 20 October it was told by the Chairman that designs had been commissioned from three artists, Margaret Bamberger, Peter Gauld and Sally Stiff. Margaret Bamberger subsequently wrote that she wished to withdraw, as she was not

happy about her designs. She did, however, relent somewhat by allowing the Post Office to have her preliminary sketches.

ARTWORK RECEIVED

Various artworks were received. Peter Gauld, on 24 November 1971, submitted four sets of three designs based on sculptures, embroideries, marbles or alabaster, and stained glass respectively.

Sally Stiff, on 24 November 1971, submitted a board bearing stamp size prints, and two groups of transparencies of angels playing musical instruments.

Margaret Bamberger sent in, on 25 November 1971, her book containing preliminary sketches, while on 7 September 1971 Rauri McLean had submitted his designs featuring Christmas carols, developments of designs he had prepared for Christmas 1971.

The Committee examined the artwork on 25 November and recommended that those by Sally Stiff go forward for essaying.

On 22 March 1972 Harrison and Sons Ltd. sent essays, in values 2½p, 3p and 7½p, to Don Beaumont of Marketing Department, Postal Headquarters.

The essays were examined by the SAC on 23 March who felt that the three-dimensional aspect that Sally Stiff had hoped to achieve with her designs was not now so pronounced. George York from the stamp printers, Harrison and Sons, was confident this could be improved when producing the cylinders for stamp printing. The drawing of the heads of the angels was a matter of general dissatisfaction and after discussion it was agreed that further work should be carried out. Some of the detail drawing in the gold should be removed, and an effort made to try for nuances of shade instead.

Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Advisor, wrote to George York on 27 March regarding a further essay of the 7½p stamp. He requested that Harrison's 'print down the gold, the same as on the alternative Tutankhamun essay'. Other amendments to be made were: the line and tone work was to be overprinted in a reddish-brown rather than the grey-brown of the essay;

the Queen's head was to be essayed in a brown tone 50 per cent of the present strength; the shadow cast by the garment on the right was to be continued upwards across the gold wing and around the shoulder.

Rose added that Sally Stiff was going to provide Harrisons with fresh artwork for the head and wings on the 2½p and 3p, and that it would help her if she could see the revised essay before she finished this work.

On 17 April and 3 May Harrisons sent further essays of the 7½p to Beaumont. The SAC was shown these essays on 4 May. It considered the amendments made a great improvement. There were, however, still one or two minor modifications to be made to the right arm and left forearm, which the printer would carry out.

On 12 May Harrisons sent Beaumont further essays of the 2½p, on 1 June essays of all three values, and on 3 July further essays of the 3p and 7½p.

THE QUEEN'S APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 31 July D Wesil (Senior Director Postal Services) wrote to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications asking that specimens of the proposed Christmas stamps be submitted to the Queen. On 3 August the Minister, Sir John Eden, wrote to the Private Secretary to the Queen, and the Queen's approval was received on 5 August.

PAYMENT TO ARTISTS

On 8 December Beaumont wrote to Peter Gauld explaining that his designs had not been chosen and enclosed a cheque for £450 in payment of three designs at £150 each. Beaumont also wrote to Miss Bamberger saying it was good of her to let the Post Office have her drawings and that her forthrightness was appreciated in saying that she did not wish finally to submit the designs. He enclosed a cheque for £100 in recognition of her work, and concluded: 'Might I suggest that you do not feel too disappointed at the outcome of your work. Experience will, I am sure, give you the necessary confidence.'

THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

The stamps were issued on 18 October 1972, chosen so that they could be used on letters, cards and parcels sent by surface mail overseas.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold were:

2½p - 323,277,200

3p - 130,877,400

7½p - 17,086,600.

There were 105,740 presentation packs sold, containing one each of the stamps and costing 18p.

The stamps were withdrawn on 17 October 1973.

The stamps were printed in photogravure, and partly embossed, by Harrison and Sons Ltd and issued in sheets of 100. All three stamps were vertical and more than double definitive size.

A single phosphor band was applied to the 2½p value (for second class mail) and two bands on the other values.

FIRST DAY COVERS

The Post Office made available a first day envelope and two pictorial handstamps featuring a large snowflake. A different snowflake was depicted on each of the handstamps - one for the Philatelic Bureau Edinburgh, the other for Bethlehem, Llandeilo, Carmarthen.

Philatelic posting boxes were available at 184 post offices: items posted in these boxes were given the normal first day of issue cancellation.

THE ARTIST DESCRIBES HER WORK

Sally Stiff, graphic designer and illustrator with the Greater London Council Architect's Department, felt it was necessary to try a new approach as, unlike other commemorative stamps, the Christmas stamps are produced annually. Although acknowledging that the two previous Christmas issues, including the 1970 issue that she designed, had perfectly illustrated the Nativity story, she felt that perhaps they 'lacked the feel of festivity and well being that is so closely associated with Christmas'. She therefore identified the problem as being 'to combine the religious angle with the celebrating holiday mood, and presenting this in an original way'.

The brief from the Post Office had been virtually open, merely stating that there should be a religious theme. She chose her subject matter - angels - as they were traditional symbolic figures of 'Goodness and Joy'. In carrying out her research she visited most of London's large galleries noting the shapes and forms used in paintings, sculptures, tapestries, carvings, and so on, and 'felt that the figures in the early Italian paintings had great grace and beauty'. These paintings helped her formulate the shape and 'feeling' of her designs. It had occurred to her that this set of stamps probably allowed for a far wider choice of materials to be used than any other. In an effort to make them as bright and cheerful as possible she began to experiment. Her method was novel, in that she built up each figure with a variety of rich materials including velvet, silk ribbons, satin and lace to give the required colour and texture, which were then photographed.

She chose for the 2½p stamp a wide selection of shades of pink, doing the same for the blue 3p stamp and the brown 7½p stamp. The instruments and the angels' heads, hands and wings were of gold foil, embossed with a flat design. The Queen's head and value, placed at the top right hand corner, together with a slight background tint, completed the designs. The original figures were about a foot high and the stamps retained their three dimensional quality.

PICTORIAL AIR LETTER

On 24 November 1971 Sally Stiff submitted four pieces of artwork for the Christmas air letter. Pieces numbered 1 and 2 were panel designs, piece number 3 was a stamp design and number 4 was a mock up of the complete air letter. These were examined by the SAC on 13 January 1972, but were found unsatisfactory. It was agreed that further designs should be commissioned from Sally Stiff and possibly one other designer.

In early February Beaumont wrote to Lawrence Scarfe, a Brighton based freelance graphic designer and mural painter, to submit designs for the stamp and pictorial element of the 1972 Christmas air letter. Scarfe was told that payment was to be £300 for the stamp and pictorial element combined, with £300 the maximum payment to any one designer.

When the SAC next met, on 15 February, it was shown amended designs by Sally Stiff and those by Lawrence Scarfe. After discussion it was agreed that Scarfe be given a further brief and asked to produce fresh designs 'working along the same lines as the design already shown, but possibly incorporating a wrapping band idea'.

On 23 March revised designs by Scarfe were seen and approved by the Committee, subject to the substitution of the design of the Queen's head. The following day Beaumont wrote to McCorquodale and Company Limited, the printers, enclosing three pieces of artwork, two

pictorial panels and one stamp, for the air letter. Beaumont added that two amendments were required for the stamp design:

the value will be 5p and this should be substituted for the 9p shown on the artwork: it should be in white-out;

the portrait of the Queen should be substituted by the normal portrait shown on the 1971 air letter: it should be in gold silhouette.

McCorquodale sent proofs of the air letter, produced at its Clarke and Sherwell plant in Northampton, to Beaumont on 17 April and asked that approval be given by 25 April at the latest in order to meet the date by which Supplies Division required initial supplies.

However, the proofs were not seen by the SAC until 4 May when it gave approval subject to 'amendments to the size of the Queen's head and the value figure, and some attention to the colouring'. Having received copies of the proof direct from McCorquodale, Scarfe wrote to Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Advisor, on 19 April, confessing to being 'baffled by this method of printing'. He said he had kept his originals 'deliberately coarse to allow for reduction ... but the stamp in particular has gone woozy' and asked 'Do they print the colours on the white while it is wet?' He suggested it was most likely the white was at fault, possibly too absorbent. He enclosed samples of yellow which he said 'normally turn out sharp and show up any white details'.

Beaumont wrote to McCorquodale on 25 April enclosing dimensions for the Queen's head and value. Scarfe had asked that the length of the Queen's head be no more than 10mm and that the value should be 18 point Universe medium. He also enclosed a colour swatch of the yellow/lemon, labelled 'Summer 1961', for the colour of the pictorial element. McCorquodale supplied further proofs on 5 May with a second running of white and amendments to the Queen's head and value; these were found 'quite acceptable" by Beaumont.

On 22 May Brigadier K S Holmes, Managing Director Posts (MDP), wrote to Sir John Eden, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, enclosing a proof of the air letter, and stating that that the design was recommended by the SAC and that the Post Office had agreed with the choice and asked, if the Minister was in agreement, would he submit the design to the Queen. On 25 May a reply was received that the Queen had approved the design.

On 20 July Supplies Division wrote to Beaumont asking whether the printers could print the balance of the air letters with one print only of white instead of the two prints as they reported that the ink had now improved. This was agreed with the proviso that the density of black colour was maintained to the level of that on the two-print run.

The air letter went on sale on the same date as the stamps, at a selling price of 6p (5p postage). The stamp was of a new design for which the Post Office provided a first day of issue service. The decorative panel and stamp featured traditional Christmas ornaments

and decorations, designed by Lawrence Scarfe, his first commission to design an air letter, although he had previously undertaken other artwork for the Post Office.

Andy Pendlebury
March 1995

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