

STAMP HISTORY

Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference

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In early 1970 the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, confirmed that the United Kingdom Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) would be host to the annual Conference in 1973. This prompted Arthur Bottomly, MP, the Deputy Chairman of the CPA, to write to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, John Stonehouse, on 5 February 1970 stating that: 'The last time that this Conference was held in London was in September, 1961, and to mark the occasion, the Post Office issued two special stamps in denominations of 6d and 1/3. Since then, every Commonwealth host Branch to the Conference has followed the same practice.'

The Managing Director, G H Vieler, replied on 17 February that the proposal had been carefully noted but at present the Post Office was busy with design and production of stamps for 1971. Decisions on the 1973 programme were not likely to be made until early in 1972 but Bottomly was advised that full consideration of his suggestion would be given.

On 24 January 1972 Sir Bernard Braine, as Deputy Chairman of the CPA, wrote to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, Christopher Chataway, saying that it now seemed probable the Queen would open the Conference on Thursday, 13 September 1973 and asked that 'sympathetic consideration' be given to 'the issue of two stamps, one for first class British inland mail, and the other for the minimum Commonwealth air mail'.

At the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting held on 15 February the members were told that requests had been put forward to include a stamp to mark the CPA Conference in 1973. The Committee was against including the event in the 1973 programme.

The Minister passed Sir Bernard's letter to Brigadier K S Holmes, the Managing Director Posts (MDP). The MDP wrote to Sir Bernard on 17 February saying that the stamp programme was being considered and that the Conference was included in the list from which a final choice would be made. Although it was to be given 'fullest consideration' Holmes pointed out that the Post Office receives 'a great many requests for special stamps of this nature of which only a very few can be met'. On being told this Sir Bernard wrote again to Chataway complaining that the reply from Holmes was 'most unsatisfactory' and that a stamp marking the Conference should be a priority. Sir Bernard said that the idea of the host nation issuing stamps had been 'initiated by the United Kingdom Branch on the occasion of the last CPA Conference in London in 1961 and in every successive year, a different Commonwealth country, acting as host to this Conference, has issued commemorative stamps which have varied between one and four in number'. While the invitation to hold the Conference in London had been issued by Harold Wilson, there had been a General Election with the Conservatives led by Edward Heath forming the Government in 1970. The obligation to act as host had been accepted by the Government; the Prime Minister was Chairman of the Executive Committee and as such would be the chief host to the Conference. The Lord Chancellor and the Speaker were Joint Vice-Presidents and the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary was to preside over the Conference. Sir Bernard argued that the request 'with respect should not be treated as one of many, some of which will inevitably be rejected. It should be considered in the light of the great importance of the occasion, the precedent laid down when the Conference was last in London, and the firm tradition which has been established over the past decade.'

Sir Bernard suggested that as 1973 was to be the year when Britain entered the European Community it should be wary of accusations of 'snubbing the Commonwealth association'.

The Minister replied on 15 March that he was sorry to hear the way Sir Bernard felt and said he could see no reason why the suggestion should not be 'fully and properly considered'. He said he had already commended it to the Post Office and was willing to pass on the second letter to ensure Brigadier Holmes was aware of the arguments put forward. The Minister pointed out that 'since the passage of the 1969 Post Office Act the selection, design and issue of postage stamps has become the responsibility of the Post Office' and his powers did not extend to 'detailed intervention in the choice of subjects for the annual programme of special stamps'. Sir Bernard's attention was drawn to the fact that in compiling the stamp programme the Post Office is assisted by the Stamp Advisory Committee and the members, drawn from a number of relevant fields, included two Members of Parliament, Brian Batsford and Eric Ogden.

During March 1972 a paper was circulated to the SAC stating that, with regard to the 1973 programme, it was now agreed to include the following subjects:

January - EEC (The accession to the European Economic Community)

April - British Explorers

May - Cricket

July - British Painters

August - British Architecture

October - Christmas.

The Committee had recommended these subjects after considering a list of over 100 suggestions received from the public, interested bodies and within the Post Office. Since the SAC had made its choice there had been an additional 18 subjects proposed and its views were now sought on the choices already made against these new requests. A firm recommendation was now to be put to the Post Office Board.

Included in the list of 18 subjects was the Conference of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

At the SAC meeting held on 23 March B Batsford mentioned a letter he had received from the Deputy Chairman of the CPA urging very strongly for a special stamp. The Committee discussed the matter but eventually re-affirmed its decision not to include the subject in the 1973 programme. E G White described what he saw as the 'fundamental problem' in a letter to the MDP on 13 April: 'political' organisations did not lend themselves to attractive stamp designs and such stamps were considered to have little public or philatelic appeal. The Post Office had already accepted the inevitability of issuing stamps depicting Britain's entry into the EEC in 1973 and did not want another such subject in the same year. If it became unavoidable through political pressure then it should be a single high value stamp issued at the same time as the architectural series commemorating the birth of Inigo Jones proposed for August 1973. He suggested a pictorial treatment of the parliament buildings, considered the 'home' of the CPA, would to some extent fit in with the other designs. The Inigo Jones stamps were to be produced in two pairs in the 3p and 5p values: this allowed for the possibility of simultaneously issuing stamps in either or both of the airmail values, 7½p and 9p, dealing with another subject.

On 20 April Sir Bernard wrote to Sir John Eden who had recently been appointed Minister of Posts and Telecommunications. Having enclosed correspondence with the previous Minister, Sir Bernard explained that he had now felt it necessary to write to Alec Douglas-Home, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pointing out likely repercussions from failing to 'honour the convention'. Although he had not yet approached the Prime Minister, Sir Bernard had taken soundings and predicted 'if the Post Office does not issue a stamp there will be a first class row in Parliament'. Sir John replied on 8 May recognising 'that the claims of this important Commonwealth occasion assume a special significance in the year of Britain's entry into Europe', adding he knew the Post Office was

aware of this and immediately a decision was made about his request he would be informed.

On 4 May the Chairman of the SAC, E G White, Director of Marketing, informed the Committee that considerable pressure was building up to mark the CPA's Conference. The Committee's recommendations were shortly to be put to the Post Office Board to decide on the final programme. The Chairman identified the difficulty in merging the subject with the issues as planned, but suggested one solution would be to issue the stamp featuring an architectural design with the Inigo Jones set planned for August 1973. Possible subjects for such a design were Marlborough House, Lancaster House, or Westminster Hall, the headquarters of the CPA.

CHANGES TO THE STAMP PROGRAMME

When the SAC met on 15 June it was told by the Chairman that a stamp marking the CPA Conference was now to be included in the programme owing to the considerable political support. The stamps would be issued at the time of the Conference and it was proposed to base the design on the architecture of the Palace of Westminster. If this were the design then the sale of the stamps at the Palace would be extended beyond the normal special issue sale period of around two months and would be known as a Houses of Parliament stamp. It was suggested that for this to be possible the stamp could be overprinted to mark the CPA Conference and issued without the overprint after the Conference. The Chairman thought it might be possible to use the stamp in its latter form in a stamp book containing special stamps at the Air Mail rates and aimed for the use of tourists. These stamp books would be sold in a protective wallet that would allow tourist centres and hotels to sell the books at a profit. When asked by the Chairman if the SAC was in agreement with these proposals the Committee gave its approval.

ARTISTS INVITED

On 28 June D H Beaumont of Postal Headquarters (PHQ) wrote to Theo Cockerell confirming the verbal instructions already given by Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Director, to submit designs. Cockerell was advised that the fee for a design eventually produced as a stamp was £300; payment for preliminary designs was to be discussed. A similar letter was addressed to Richard Downer on 4 July.

Sir Bernard Braine was informed on 17 July that the Post Office intended to mark the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference with a special stamp. A Press and Broadcast Notice was issued that day outlining the 1973 stamp programme. Although values were

given for all other issues, for this one it was merely said that the issue would be simultaneous with the Inigo Jones stamps in August.

The SAC was told by the Chairman on 27 July that designs had been commissioned from Theo Cockerell and Richard Downer. It was intended to issue two stamps, 7½p and 9p. It had previously been suggested that the date of issue be that of the Inigo Jones series but the Committee now expressed a preference against this.

ARTWORK RECEIVED

Artwork was received as follows:

From R Downer (on 25 August 1972) –

7½p dark red background

8p dark blue background

9p dark grey (aerial view)

7½p dark blue (aerial view)

7½p and 9p black and white – one board

From T Cockerell (on 25 August 1972) –

Union Jack over Big Ben

Union Jack superimposed on Big Ben

Portcullis above the globe

Portcullis below the globe

Plus colour transparencies

POST OFFICE CHEMIST EXAMINES THE DESIGNS

N Potter of London Materials Section (LMS) sent a report to PHQ on 1 September following a visit to examine the stamp size designs and advise on subsequent essays.

The report described the designs as:

a. four artists' essays, stamp size, comprising two similar horizontal designs each in two colourways; very wide gutters.

Designs: ground-level views of Houses of Parliament in line. No sky detail, sovereign's head and values in upper corners.

Colourways: (i) buildings, head and value in black, pale beige flecked background; (ii) buildings in metallic ink on black background, head and value in clear.

b. two artists' essays, horizontal designs with gutters, comprising two aerial views of Houses of Parliament, buildings containing some white or very weak colouring, set against strong dull background of:

(i) brown and purple

(ii) brown and olive green

a. (i) The background is sufficiently light; satisfactory with phosphor bars or on phosphor-coated paper.

(ii) Satisfactory only if the perforating is closely controlled to give equal side gutters and if the phosphor strength is commensurate with that on the better examples of Harrison's production. Wide phosphor bars or overall phosphor would be necessary. Successful coding of this design depends heavily on the very wide gutters and to a small extent on the head and value being at opposite sides.

b. Could be satisfactorily phosphor-coded, if so preferably over-all; but not recommended.

DESIGNS EXAMINED BY SAC

On 7 September the SAC was shown designs by Downer; Cockerell had explained that he would not have his artwork ready in time for this meeting. Cockerell did submit his designs at a later date but there are no records of these ever being considered for acceptance. The designs by Downer were thought to be particularly suited to line-engraving. It was doubted whether Harrisons would be able to produce a set by intaglio as their Gemini machine was not working sufficiently well for the task. S Ridler, who was attending the meeting representing Bradbury Wilkinson, was asked if the company would be able to produce the stamps, should the designs be approved. He was confident that the designs could be produced, subject to some slight amendments. The Committee discussed the artistic merits of the designs. Sir Paul Reilly thought that the artist was to be admired for showing unusual views of a very familiar building. He added that he liked the dark background but felt that the quality of the architectural drawing was revealed by the lighter background. Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Director, disagreed and said he would rather see the dark background that had not been used before. It was agreed that essays be produced using both alternatives. The Committee agreed it would be preferable to use a shorter title on the designs and that research should be undertaken to find a suitable alternative.

Stuart Rose and Don Beaumont attended a meeting at Westminster Hall of the UK Branch CPA Stamp Sub-Committee on 18 September with the designs. These were shown to Peter Molloy, Secretary of the UK Branch of the CPA, who agreed they 'would fit the bill' and stated that the legend should be 'Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference 1973'. It was agreed that the 9p design should be 'amended to show a transposition Big Ben and St Stephens tower as regards layout' and Rose wished to see the legend on the 9p design

reading 'upwards'. It was agreed that Molloy would be shown the designs at essay stage. The idea was put forward that after the Conference the excess stock of stamps should be withdrawn, but stamps minus the lettering would be available at the House of Commons post office for an indefinite period as a tourist souvenir.

PRELIMINARY ESSAYS PRODUCED

On 29 November W N de Segundo wrote to Beaumont enclosing five cards each showing the same set of four different 9p stamps and five cards each showing the same set of four different 7½p stamps together with one additional card with three 7½p stamps and three 9p stamps. These were preliminary essays as it was felt that it would be necessary to carry out further experiments particularly as far as the gold printing was concerned. The background printings on all of the essays had been printed in a single colour with the exception of the 9p stamp, which was marked 'b', and used two colours to obtain a speckled effect.

SAC AND POST OFFICE CHEMIST EXAMINE MORE ESSAYS

The designer Richard Downer attended the SAC meeting on 30 November when the essays with various colour treatments were shown. The Committee was reminded that it was intended to have a margin around the design, but following the reports from the Post Office Chemist at LMS the width of the margin was to be increased. The Committee discussed which designs should be recommended, with the essay showing Big Ben on the left, combined with the light background (7½p) and the essay with Big Ben on the right, with a black background (9p) eventually being chosen. The designer also preferred these two stamps as a set. It was agreed that the following amendments be made:

7½p stamp - increase the strength of line around Big Ben; reduce the strength of line of the corner buttress making it in the same plain as the rest of the building; some more detail to be introduced into the eastern doorway of Westminster Hall.

9p stamp - to be essayed with the Queen's head and value in the gold of the stamp, as well as in the existing white.

It was also agreed that on both stamps the hands of the clock should be at 2.30. It was discussed whether to compensate to allow the illusion of variation in the size of the Queen's head in the positive and negative outlines, but the decision was not to make any alterations on this.

D C Powell and A D Walker, both of LMS, visited PHQ on 6 December to examine the new essays. At a meeting with Beaumont they discussed the following:

7½p - black line design of the Houses of Parliament on a straw coloured background with the Queen's head probably in gold. Queen's head, value and background to be printed by letterpress, House of Commons and lettering to be printed by recess (intaglio)

9p - gold line design of the Houses of Parliament on black background with the Queen's head probably in gold. Queen's head, value and background to be printed by letterpress. House of Commons and lettering to be printed by recess (intaglio).

The gutter on both stamps is to be not less than 3mm wide, that is not less than 6mm between adjacent printed stamps.

All over phosphor to be printed in letterpress if phosphor coated paper is not available in time.

For the 9p stamp with the black background, the perforating must be closely controlled to give equal side gutters.

The CPA Sub-Committee met on 7 December when it was suggested that there was an error in perspective between Big Ben and the Victoria Tower as seen from the North. Beaumont, on being asked to include CPA shield in the design for the first day cover, said that the Post Office would consider this. Rose said he would try to have the Palace of Westminster portcullis incorporated in the design of the First Day of Issue handstamp.

On 15 December Theo Cockerell was informed that all the designs submitted for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference had now been seen. On this occasion his designs had not been accepted and enclosed was a cheque for £300 in payment of the agreed fee. A letter was also sent to Richard Downer that day; he received £300 for the two commissioned designs and was told he would be written to again when final approval by the Queen had been received. A letter was sent to Downer on 27 March enclosing a cheque for £335, payment for two accepted designs at £150 each and £35 as an agreed fee for requested amendments.

On 15 January 1973 the printers forwarded six cards showing proofs, each with one stamp of the 7½p and two stamps of the 9p. These were examined at the next SAC meeting, on 18 January, when both S Ridler and R Downer attended. These essays featured the amendments agreed to previously together with the amendment relating to the perspective recommended by the CPA executives. As requested the Queen's head and value had been essayed in gold and in white. Downer preferred the effect of the white head and the Committee agreed that this version be adopted. Downer explained that the 'readability is improved by having the lettering running upward on the left hand side and downwards on the right'. D M Elliott, who represented the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications at the meetings, suggested that the size of the lettering might be open to criticism but S Rose advised the Committee that 'the CPA had been kept informed at all stages of production and although they had made comments on several aspects the size of the lettering had not

been in question'. The Committee approved the essays and agreed that work should proceed.

B J Wauters, of Bradbury Wilkinson, wrote to D H Beaumont on 24 January drawing attention to the requirements of the company concerning delivery of the CPA issue. In order that it might submit sheet proofs by mid-April it needed to know the values that were to be shown on the stamps by early March. Assuming that these proof sheets were approved by the end of April it would require paper in early May to start phosphor printing. If the perforation went according to plan, Wauters believed it would have 50 per cent of the order ready by the end of July and the other 50 per cent by the end of August. Beaumont replied on 29 January, noting the requirements and hoping to be able to meet them.

A DECISION IS MADE ON THE VALUES

A Currall, Managing Director Posts (MDP), wrote to the Chairman, Sir William Ryland, on 25 January. It was practice for the Chairman to see each new stamp as it went to the Minister for submission to the Queen for approval. Currall stated that there was a need to start printing by 7 March. Changes in the postage rates were being considered for later that year but any decisions would be made after printing had started. The stamps were to be printed in accord with current postage rates. Currall advised the Chairman that if a price rise occurred it would be unavoidable that the stamps would be on sale with 'obsolete' values, but he did not consider there was much chance of this happening.

On 12 February 1973 Beaumont wrote to the Supplies Department and the printers enclosing essays approved by the Queen, subject to possible amendments to the values. At this stage precise values were still unknown.

It had been hoped that the Queen would open the Conference at Westminster Hall on Thursday, 13 September 1973. P Molloy wrote on 21 February that the Queen had agreed to perform the ceremony on Wednesday, 12 September. This change of date was beneficial to the Post Office as Wednesday was the preferred day of issue at that time.

Beaumont informed Wauters on 2 March that the new postage rates would apply to the CPA series and therefore 'proof sheets should be run off at 8p and 10p'. Beaumont recognised this would 'inevitably delay printing by a few days' but should not jeopardise existing delivery dates. Despite this, discussions on the values to be shown continued and a letter from the Minister to the Chairman, dated 23 March, suggests firm agreement had yet to be reached. The Minister, Sir John Eden, thanked Sir William for his letter dated 15 March regarding the effect of the proposed postal price increases on the stamp programme. Sir John did not think it wise to anticipate uncertain events and print these stamps in the

higher values. He suggested that, assuming it was not practicable to print the stamps, there appeared to be two possible courses of action. One would be to postpone the proposed airmail price increases until after the Conference. Compared with a July introduction date this would presumably involve some loss of revenue, unless increases elsewhere compensated for it. This, Sir John suggested, would only have a small financial effect as airmail increases did not figure among the main revenue sources shown. The other possibility was to issue the stamps at the present rates and invite 'customers to add a definitive stamp of the required value if new airmail rates are implemented before the conference opens'. He accepted that neither of these alternatives was free from snags for the Post Office, but he felt either would be preferable to having to explain 'why stamps had been issued at higher rates than those which might in the event be applicable to Zones B and C'.

The Chairman replied on 29 March that experience in 1971 'when some overseas prices were raised in July following inland changes in February, showed how confusing it is to have different dates for a general increase in postal tariffs'. Delaying the overseas service price changes would result in a loss of revenue of around £400,000 per month and he could 'see no justification in complicating matters for the public at large simply for the sake of one special issue of stamps, the philatelic profit from which would be unlikely to exceed £200,000'. A further point raised was that the attraction for overseas collectors of first day covers would be seriously impaired if they had to mix the special issue with other stamps. The Chairman concluded that the 'only practical course' was to go ahead with the printing in the new higher values 'but with the option of abandoning the issue altogether should the price change for some reason not take place as intended'. The deadline for printing these stamps had been extended until the end of that week but could not be extended any further. The Chairman advised the Minister that he had 'accordingly given instructions for the printing to go ahead on this basis under strictest security conditions to prevent premature leaks of price changes'.

D W G Barker, PHQ, visited Bradbury Wilkinson on 30 March when he discussed in detail the background to this issue with the Chairman and Vice Chairman (Shave and Wauters) and gave the go ahead for printing in values 8p and 10p. He explained the need for secrecy and security to prevent any leak from the factory that would give the impression that the Post Office was about to increase its prices irrespective of POUNC or Ministerial comment. The production manager was to be 'instructed to commence printing with the 8p and 10p essay first and be left with the impression that the Post Office is printing the stamps in both values'.

A list was compiled at PHQ of those who already knew of the decision and where appropriate it was explained the 'necessity to ensure no leak of information'. When it was essential to give people information pertaining to this matter their names were added to the access

list. It was decided to use the essays for 7½p and 9p for show and, when they arrived, the 8p and 10p essays were to be closely guarded.

On 3 April Wauters wrote to Beaumont confidently predicting that full sheet proofs of both values would be ready by mid May, and providing approval was given two to three days after, 50 per cent of the order would be ready by the end of July and the remaining 50 per cent ready by the end of August. He advised Beaumont that in order to start phosphor printing the company would require the paper from the middle of May at the rate of at least 100 reams per week.

The Minister wrote to the Chairman on 10 April thanking him for his letter of 29 March about the implications of the proposed postal price increases. The Minister said that, now the decision to go ahead with printing had been made, he was sure that the Chairman would be ready to defend his position should the need arise. The Minister went on to say that there were further factors to consider in deciding whether this issue could in fact be abandoned at any stage. This issue had been included in the published 1973 programme and had been strongly supported by a number of Members of Parliament and the designs had been submitted to and approved by the Queen. He questioned whether the option of abandoning this issue was actually feasible and requested further consultation on this if the airmail price proposals were not introduced before the planned issued date.

The final essays were seen by the CPA Sub-Committee, which included Sir Malcolm Stoddart-Scott, Sir Alfred Broughton MP, and W E Garret MP, on 12 April. The designs were regarded favourably, although one slight criticism was the use of very small lettering although Downer had explained that this had been necessary due to the overall design. The question was raised of the stamps remaining on sale at the House of Commons Branch Office after the customary two months. It was said that the continued sale of the stamps at the House of Commons with the typography removed was being considered by the Post Office. The opinion at that time was that no alternative legend was required as the design spoke for itself.

A provisional design for the first day cover (FDC) was shown, which included the Mace only as the symbol of Parliament. After discussion it was agreed that it would be more appropriate to show the crossed Mace and Black Rod, which was the symbol of the CPA and related to both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The provisional cover showed also the Royal coat-of-arms but it was explained that this would not appear on the final version. A provisional design of the presentation pack was also shown. It was said that this would also carry the CPA symbol, together with the Royal coat-of-arms. The use of a slogan postmark was discussed, with the argument being the fact that the values of the two stamps were for overseas mail and therefore of no 'advertising' benefit to the CPA in the UK. Against this was the fact that there would be a cost of nearly £100 for the use of a

slogan at the House of Commons and South West District Post Offices. A slogan was decided against on the grounds that philatelic interest was minimal and that the object of the special issue was commemorative rather than promotional: it would be inappropriate and would only add expense and complicate the project.

On 25 May W de Segundo of Bradbury Wilkinson visited PHQ with proof sheets of the 10p value. Approval was confirmed by Beaumont on 30 May, subject to amendments requested by the Supplies Department. Unfortunately the files contain no record of these amendments, but on 20 July Supplies Department wrote asking Beaumont to note the dark impression on the back of the stamp and questioned whether this was acceptable. It was noted 300 sheets had already been printed. Beaumont replied on 24 July that S Rose and R Downer had both seen the sheet and were not prepared to accept this version as it 'bore no relation to the proof sheet'. The gold ink was too thick, filling the typography and inhibiting the sharpness of line in the original proof. There was also concern about the design shadow on the gummed side of the sheet, of which Beaumont said 'We fear adverse publicity and public complaint.'

In mid July the MDP wrote to Sir John Eden, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, saying that further to correspondence earlier in the year, the Post Office was now ready to issue the stamps on 12 September, the values being 8p and 10p. These prices represented the new increased postage rates for ½oz air mail letters to, respectively, Zone B (such countries as Antigua, Botswana, Canada, Hong Kong, Nigeria and Zambia) and to Zone C (countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Tonga and the Solomon Islands). The letter explained that a number of changes in overseas postage rates had recently been proposed by the Post Office and had been accepted by the Post Office Users Council. Overseas postage rates were outside the scope of the counter-inflation legislation imposed by the current government.

THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

The stamps were issued on 12 September 1973 to coincide with the opening of the conference by the Queen. Printed in intaglio and letterpress by Bradbury Wilkinson and Co Ltd, they were issued in sheets of 100. Both were horizontal with all-over phosphor and slightly more than double definitive size. The stamps depicted unusual views of the Houses of Parliament in London. Each stamp gave an 'end-on' view of the Palace of Westminster: the 8p showed the Houses of Parliament as seen from Whitehall and the 10p was the view from Millbank.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold were as follows:

8p - 7,461,100 (black, grey and buff)

10p - 6,481,500 (black and gold).

There were 86,010 presentation packs sold, containing both stamps and designed by Downer. A souvenir 24-page 'lavishly illustrated' booklet was also available which sold for 60p, of which 17,920 were sold.

FIRST DAY COVER

An official first day envelope was available from the Philatelic Bureau and all head post offices. Designed by Downer, the envelope bore the legend Nineteenth Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference London 1973 and depicted the Mace and Black Rod. A pictorial handstamp showing the Houses of Parliament was used to cancel covers at the Bureau. Covers posted in the philatelic posting boxes provided at 186 post offices were given the standard First Day of Issue (FDI) cancellation.

THE DESIGNER

The stamps were the work of Richard Downer, this being his first successful stamp commission. He was born in 1933 and studied at Leeds College of Art and was author of the book 'Drawing Designs', published in 1955. He began his career in London in advertising in 1953 and became a freelance designer, typographer and illustrator in 1965. In 1973 he was designing corporate identity programmes.

STAMPS ON SALE AT HOUSE OF COMMONS

It had been decided that the stamps would remain on sale at the House of Commons Branch Office (BO) after the initial two months. This office sold stamps, FDCs and presentation packs. It is used mainly by the MPs but members of the public being guided round parliament or entering the visitors' gallery may use the office. The office's sales figures for this issue were very low, which was later explained as being a result of the initial instruction to the effect that the stamps should only be sold when specifically requested. An internal memo dated 12 September 1973, which probably originated in the Supplies Division, gives the approximate figures of the stocks as 20 sheets of each value, with 15,000 sheets of each value held at the Stamp Depot.

The memo suggested that: 'Assuming sales rarely exceed the £2 per week level, annual sales must be below 5 sheets per annum of each value. If this level of sales continues, the Stamp Depot holds enough stock to meet demand until 4975 AD (at least!).'

On 4 March 1975 Supplies Division wrote to Postal Marketing saying that the previous October they had been instructed to hold supplies of the 8p and 10p CPA stamp for an indefinite period to meet the requirements of the House of Commons Branch Office. Since the stamps had been withdrawn from the philatelic counters in September 1974 the House of Commons BO had not requested further supplies. When the BO was questioned on this the Postmaster had recommended the withdrawal of the stamps because of the low level of sales, or alternatively publicity to stimulate demand. It appears no decision was made immediately as on 12 December 1975 the Supplies Division again wrote to Postal Marketing, 'With reference to our letter of 4 March 1975, could you please now say if the above issue [CPA] can be destroyed.' There appeared to be no demand for these stamps as last issue had been in October 1974. The remaining stocks were:

Sheets -

18,464 of 8p; 16,429 of 10p

Packs -

216 of the Presentation Pack; 608 of the Souvenir Book.

These figures for sheets are somewhat higher than those previously mentioned above and presumably include returns from other branch offices.

Three days later Postal Marketing replied that they were in agreement that the remaining stocks could now be destroyed.

THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

In 1973 the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association had a membership of over 7,000 parliamentarians in 93 Commonwealth legislatures with branches in 58 countries. The CPA evolved out of the Empire Parliamentary Association which, founded in 1911, had comprised Members of the United Kingdom Parliament and the five Dominion Parliaments at that time. It became the CPA in 1948 when the General Council was created as the governing body with its headquarters at the Palace of Westminster. Prior to 1948 the United Kingdom Branch had been responsible for the Association's affairs; now all branches were represented on the Council and the Commonwealth managed and maintained the CPA as a whole. The Association draws its members from many nations, religions and cultures sharing a common interest in the support of the Parliamentary concept of democratic government in

the countries of the Commonwealth. The aims and objectives of the Association are to strengthen 'understanding and fellowship within the Commonwealth'. By arranging annual conferences, seminars on parliamentary matters, and exchanges of delegations it provides for the pooling of experiences among Members of Parliament. It also actively promotes the study of parliamentary institutions through maintaining a Parliamentary Information and Reference Centre and publishes 'The Parliamentarian', a quarterly journal 'devoted to the practical working of Parliament'.

Prior to 1973 the last conference held in Britain was in 1961 when the tradition was started of the host country issuing stamps to mark the event. The Post Office issued two stamps that year at 6d and 1s 3d. In the years between 1961 and 1973 the response to the conference by the host nations had been as follows:

- 1962 – Nigeria (three stamps)
- 1963 – Malaysia (two stamps)
- 1964 – Jamaica (three stamps)
- 1965 – New Zealand (three stamps)
- 1966 – Canada (one stamp)
- 1967 – Uganda (four stamps)
- 1968 – Bahamas (four stamps)
- 1969 – Trinidad and Tobago (four stamps)
- 1970 – Australia (one stamp)
- 1971 – Malaysia (two stamps)
- 1972 – Zambia (no stamps had been issued).

Andy Pendlebury
August 1995

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