

Great Britons

Date of issue: 10 JULY 1974



The first suggestion for what finally became the 'Great Britons' issue was probably on 26 August 1971, when A H Woodland, Director of the South West Postal Region, proposed in a letter to Postal Marketing 'a non-anniversary orientated series of British heroes' within the 1973 stamp programme, albeit his idea was not taken up. When the 1974 programme was considered in May 1972, the idea was revived at an early stage, prompted by proposals, principally from the Scottish National Party but also from private individuals and newspaper articles, that the Post Office mark the 700th anniversary of the birth of Robert the Bruce. Attention had also been drawn to the Bruce anniversary in a list of dates for possible commemoration commissioned from the Historical Research Unit, that had come to hand in March.

The Bruce anniversary was included among the subjects considered for the 1974 programme by the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 15 June. The SAC did not commit itself at this stage; it was decided to circularise postal regions with a shortlist of possible subjects and soliciting further comment and suggestions. The 700th anniversary was included in the final version of the shortlist agreed by the SAC on 7 September; the letter was sent on 12 September signed by E G White, chairman of the SAC and Director of Postal Marketing (DPM). It included the following proposal:

British National Leaders. This series would be centred round the 700th anniversary of Robert the Bruce of Scotland and could include Owen Glendower of Wales and Hereward the Wake of England.

MEETINGS WITH REGIONS

Meetings were held with both Scottish Postal Headquarters and Wales and the Marches Postal Board (WMPB) to discuss their particular needs in the 1974 programme. D J McDougall, the WMPB Chairman, submitted a lengthy memorandum on 4 October detailing stamp proposals that had been agreed with the Stamp Sub-Committee of the Post Office Users' Council for Wales and Monmouthshire, as the latter had approached the Board in May with its own suggestions for the 1974 programme. McDougall's proposals included the commemoration of Owain Glyndwr, who proclaimed himself Prince of Wales and led a national rebellion against English rule in the early 15th century; he was best known to the non-Celtic world as 'Owen Glendower' in Shakespeare's 'Henry IV'. He had not featured among the Council's original suggestions, but had emerged in subsequent discussion. On 9 October McDougall met the DPM and D W Barker, head of the Stamp Division of Postal Marketing; he reiterated that 'in the same context' as Glyndwr, '(a) Robert the Bruce (Scotland), (b) Richard the Lionheart (England) could feature in a national/regional series'. White promised to instigate further consideration and research.

On 12 October Barker visited Edinburgh for similar discussions with J R Hall of the Scottish Postal Board, at which R E Bonar, manager of the Philatelic Bureau, was present. As Scotland had not yet formally replied to White's letter, this was possibly the first point at which Postal Marketing was made aware of the depth of Scottish feeling over the announcement that there would be no issue in 1973 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of John Knox's death, despite the great pressure for such an issue. This had exacerbated the hostile feelings still rankling since 1965, when the GPO had issued a Burns commemorative set with seeming reluctance only after years of campaigning. With this in mind Hall recommended that commemorative stamps should be issued in 1974 not only for Robert the Bruce but also William Wallace, another hero of Scotland's War of Independence and born in the same year (actually Wallace's birth date is known only as about 1270-74, while in Bruce's case the full details - 11 July 1274 - are known). Barker welcomed this proposal and invited suggestions for designs.

BRUCE ANNIVERSARY CONSIDERED

A revised shortlist of 1974 subjects prepared for the SAC meeting on 17 October suggested that the Bruce anniversary could be approached in several different ways:

(i) full Bruce series

(ii) mixed series including Bruce, Hereward the Wake, Owain Glyndwr, Boadicea

(iii) could use as a vehicle for heraldry, eg Royal Arms of Scotland at time of Bruce and Wallace, last Royal Arms of Wales, Royal Arms of Edward I of England.

With regard to the last suggestion, Postal Marketing and the Design Director, Stuart Rose, had been researching possible treatments of 'Heraldry'; the theme had been suggested over several years, it was likely to be very popular, and there were numerous ways in which the maximum effect could be derived. A note of 20 September shows that Boutell's 'Heraldry' was found a valuable reference, while 'Debrett' and Burke's 'Peerage' were also cited. Among the arms copied in the course of this research were those of Richard the Lionheart, Bruce, and Llywelyn II ap Gruffydd, also known as 'Llywelyn the Last', whose death in battle in 1282 marked the end of the line of princes who had ruled an independent Welsh nation since 844; others pertained to James I and VI, William of Orange and the present Royal Family, probably in contemplation of combining 'heraldry' with 'kings and queens', another suggestion that tended to recur.

When the SAC met on 19 September, White's opinion that 'Robert Bruce could not easily be ignored' was accepted. It was decided that the next meeting should attempt to finalise the 1974 programme: a paper was prepared by Mr Barker of Postal Marketing dated 6 November, setting out the pros and cons for the treatments of the proposed subjects. This shows that options for the Bruce anniversary (now listed as 'thought to be essential') had been reduced to two: a 'Great Men' series including other figures with anniversaries in 1974, notably Sir Winston Churchill, or a series of 'nationalist' leaders of the British Isles, which might include Bruce, Wallace, Owain Glyndwr, Hereward, Boadicea, and (two new contenders) Alfred the Great or the Black Prince. The paper inclined toward a rejection of the first option as having no unity and being potentially damaging to later series with greater thematic cohesion; the second option however 'would be an unusual theme and would allow considerable scope for the designer, to explore premediaeval [sic] treatments'. The only disadvantages were that there might be some criticism of an issue based on historic regional conflicts within the British isles while the Ulster troubles continued, and that there might be at least one other 1974 set of historical personages - those envisaged included a 'British Prime Ministers & Parliamentarians' issue, as the best solution to the question of marking Churchill's birth, and a possible set of British scientific and engineering pioneers. However, the essential argument for including Bruce in a 'nationalist' set was cogently presented:

'Almost inevitably there would be pressure from Wales to include Owen Glendower [sic] in a series which included Robert Bruce. Even though there is no specific anniversary for him, his history is so similar to Bruce's that it would be hard to avoid especially in a programme that had not any other Welsh subjects.'

At the SAC meeting of 30 November White once more reminded members that Bruce's 700th anniversary could not be ignored; this was agreed, it being resolved that 'Bruce and Wallace go together and that we should look for a Welsh and possibly a national English character who is reasonably compatible in date terms, who could combine to make a set'. The SAC members were less convinced of the indispensability of Owain Glyndwr.

'BRITISH HEROES' SET PROPOSED

On 11 January 1973 White sent a minute to A Currall, the Managing Director (Posts) (MDP), outlining the 1974 programme to seek his views. The proposal was an issue for the 700th anniversary of both Bruce and Wallace, plus Owain Glyndwr 'to meet the need for some Welsh appeal in the year's programme', and 'an appropriate English hero to complete the set'. This met with no objection and it was announced to the next SAC meeting on 18 January of the 'Bruce/Wallace' issue, generally referred to thereafter as 'British Heroes'. The theme of 'Heraldry' was dropped because the MDP wished to limit the number of issues and it had no special relevance to 1974. However, from February onwards the artist Fritz Wegner was researching background material for the issue, and included a strong heraldic element in his drawings from the outset.

On 15 February Barker wrote to the DPM summarising the research to date: Hereward the Wake was an 11th century figure, Richard the Lionheart proper to the 12th century, and Glyndwr to the end of the 14th, but Bruce, Wallace, Llywelyn II and Edward I were all contemporaries (late 13th century) and thus made the most coherent set. All four had been the warrior leaders of their respective nations and all had enjoyed either the rank or status of kings (Llywelyn as Prince of Wales and Wallace as the elected 'Guardian of the Kingdom'). However, as WMPB had advised that Glyndwr was a popular historical figure in Wales and Llywelyn not well known, Barker recommended that the set should comprise Glyndwr, Bruce, Wallace and Edward. White replied on 20 February:

I still have doubts about the appropriateness of including Edward I with three others who were in a sense 'Nationalist rebels' against the English crown. It seems that Hereward is a character much closer to the other three ... In any case this is a subject upon which there may be political/Palace sensitivity and we would be wise to establish whether this is so ... There are two points here: first, that of showing on stamps bearing the Queen's portrait such characters as Bruce, Wallace and Glyndwr; second, inclusion in a series with these characters of a British monarch.

Unease persisted in Postal Marketing throughout March, on the one hand about stamps featuring 'men who led armies against the English Crown', and on the other about Edward I, a large part of whose claim to posterity was his reputation as 'Hammer of the Scots' and destroyer of Welsh independence. The concept of an alternative set featuring 'rebels', in

which England would be represented by fighters against alien rule such as Hereward the Wake or Boadicea, seems to have been kept in reserve throughout this period. On 27 March Barker wrote to D M Elliott at the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications (MPT) asking whether the inclusion in the series of Edward I on one hand, or leaders such as Bruce opposed to the English crown on the other, would have any unfortunate political implications; no reply is recorded but Edward I seems to have fallen (temporarily) from favour after the end of March.

BLACK PRINCE REPLACES WALLACE

On 7 May the MDP presented the 1974 programme as proposed by White in January to the Post Office Management Board. The 'British Heroes' issue was criticised on several grounds, not least for its perceived inappropriateness, and there was disappointment that another set of literary anniversaries, which some members had been led to expect, was not forthcoming. It was felt that including Wallace as well as Bruce was over-weighting the set in favour of the Scots, and doubts were also expressed about Owain Glyndwr. The DPM was asked if the issue could be replaced with a literary anniversaries set or whether he thought it advisable to proceed with the recommended programme. At the SAC meeting two days later White conveyed the feelings of the Board, and the decision was taken that Wallace should be dropped. Owain Glyndwr should be retained because of the WMPB Chairman's firm advice, cited by White, that 'Glyndwr will be the right choice in the eyes of Welsh people ... we would invite criticism should we include any other Welsh character'. As it was desirable to have a full set of four stamps this still left two figures to be chosen: White favoured Boadicea, which the meeting agreed, and the Black Prince. Regarding the latter the meeting was not convinced, and it was agreed that Alfred the Great, Arthur, and Richard the Lionheart, as well as the Black Prince, should all be further researched and discussed. A suggestion was made that 'the possibility of non-controversial Irish heroes' should also be researched but the meeting took White's advice that the topic was best avoided; previous research had in fact produced several candidates - Thomas Butler (the 10th Earl of Ormond) and Con and Shane O'Neill, the 1st and 2nd Earls of Tyrone, all from the 16th century - but also established that there were no 'Irish heroes' who could be described as free from controversy.

The various alternatives to the Black Prince were in fact swiftly discarded, and a memorandum to this effect sent to Currall on 15 May; the 'British Heroes' in the programme submitted to the MPT on 14 June as approved by the SAC comprised Bruce, Boadicea, Glyndwr and the Black Prince. On 27 May P Neale wrote on behalf of the MPT to Barker of Marketing, explaining that following contact with the Scottish Office, which had in turn consulted Lord Lyon King of Arms (Sir James Monteith Grant, KCVO) and the Historiographer Royal, the inclusion of Bruce did not have any dangerous implications. Sir James, as the

official authority on all Scots matters heraldic, wished to be consulted about the designs, and also suggested that Lord Elgin, current holder of the title of Baron Bruce, be notified out of courtesy. The Post Office should confirm the issue with the Scottish and Welsh Offices once the Minister, Sir John Eden, had signified his agreement to the programme. Details were announced to the press on 11 July – no values were given as these had not yet been decided, but the date of the ‘British Heroes’ issue was given as July 1974 (it was already provisionally fixed for either 10 or 17 July, these being the normal Wednesday issue dates falling nearest to Bruce’s birth date: 10 July was subsequently chosen.)

Lord Elgin was notified of the stamp to commemorate his distinguished ancestor, and replied on 28 July with his family’s collective delight at this news. The previous day McDougall, chairman of the WMPB, expressed concern at the ‘grave political mistake’ if the Black Prince was depicted with the Prince of Wales’ traditional feathers in the same issue as Owain Glyndwr; White appreciated the problem, and it was confirmed on 1 August that it would not arise.

ARTIST’S DESIGNS RECEIVED

A total 23 designs by Fritz Wegner were received on 3 July in time for the next day’s SAC meeting. All but two of these are in the British Postal Museum & Archive, although twelve were only retained as colour reproductions in stamp size. A list of the 21 known designs follows:

The following are 2½ times stamp size:

- 3p – Richard I 1157/1199 (vertical)
- 3p – Queen Boadicea 60AD (vertical)
- 3p – Black Prince 1330/1376 (horizontal)
- 4p – Owen Glyndwr 1350/1416 (vertical)
- 5p – Black Prince 1330/1376 (vertical)
- 7½p – Robert Bruce 1274/1329 (vertical)
- 7½p – Robert Bruce 1274/1329 (horizontal)
- 8p – Henry the Fifth 1387/1422 (horizontal)
- 9p – Edward I 1239/1307 (vertical)

The following are stamp size:

- 3p – Robert Bruce 1274-1329 (vertical)
- 3p – Robert Bruce 1274-1329 (vertical)
- 3p – Robert Bruce 1274-1329 (vertical)
- 3p – Robert Bruce 1274-1329 (vertical)
- 3p – Owen Glyndwr 1350/1416 (horizontal)
- 5p – William Wallace 1274-1305 (vertical)

5p – William Wallace 1274-1305 (vertical)
5p – Queen Boadicea 60AD (vertical)
5p – Boadicea (a rough vertical sketch)
5p – Edward Prince of Wales 1330/1375 (horizontal)
7½p – Owen Glyndwr 1350-1416 (vertical)
9p – Edward I 1239-1307 (vertical).

Of the larger designs, the six in vertical format – two at 3p (Richard I, Boadicea), 4p (Glyndwr), 5p (Black Prince), 7½p (Bruce) and 9p (Edward I) – show the character mounted on a warhorse and armed for battle, and include a shield with the relevant coat-of-arms; the exception is the 3p with Boadicea mounted on a chariot, where no attempt at a coat-of-arms is made. The three horizontal designs – 3p (Black Prince), 7½p (Bruce) and 8p (Henry V) – are similar in concept but do not include coats-of-arms. The horizontal stamp size design for the 3p (Owen Glyndwr) is similar in concept to the latter three; in the other horizontal stamp-size design, 5p (Black Prince) the predominant feature, unlike the rest of those submitted, is a shield with the arms of the figure celebrated, who is shown only standing to one side as a secondary element. The horizontal format is also utilised to show the Black Prince's full formal title ('Edward Prince of Wales'). The other stamp-size designs, all vertical, fall into two sets of figures, one mounted and one standing. The six mounted figures – two at 3p (both Bruce), two at 5p (Boadicea, Wallace), 7½p (Glyndwr) and 9p (Edward I) – are each framed within a mediaeval archway under a shield which again depicts their coat-of-arms, including an invented one for Boadicea; the four standing figures – two at 3p (both Bruce), two at 5p (Boadicea, Wallace) – are each shown beside shields with their coat-of-arms, except for the rough sketch of Boadicea.

As explained, two designs supplied on 3 July are not among those listed above as now held by the BPMA – these were probably borrowed and then mislaid by the 'British Philatelic Bulletin', as one of the missing designs is reproduced in the July 1974 edition. This is a pencil sketch in the 3p denomination showing Boadicea in her war chariot, which seems to belong with the set of horizontal designs depicting the Black Prince, Bruce, Henry V and Glyndwr on horseback.

FINISHED ARTWORK REQUESTED

Twelve of the designs were mounted on cards, as three sets of four, and shown to the SAC on 4 July. The set preferred by the meeting, numbered A1, A2, A3 and A4, was that described in the previous paragraph; it was agreed that Boadicea should also be included, although Stuart Rose felt that her association with the other figures created some difficulties. Alternative titles to 'British Heroes' proposed for the issue were 'People in British History' and 'Great Britons'. Fritz Wegner's commission to design the issue was formally confirmed

on 1 August and the artwork for all five characters was returned to the artist on 7 August to be completed. Wegner's drawing of the Black Prince was completed by 21 August and rushed to the stamp printers Harrison & Sons so that preliminary essays could be ready in time for the 'SAC meeting on 27 September. Harrisons was able to supply essays on 25 September.

Wegner's finished artwork for the central figure of Owain Glyndwr was also available at the meeting, plus a new sketch of Boadicea with a 3p value; this was more detailed than Wegner's earlier treatments and showed the queen fully armed and riding beside her charioteer, drawn behind two charging steeds. White explained that it had been decided to drop Boadicea on design grounds, and that Edward I would take the place of Henry V in a set of four. The values were to be: Bruce, 3½p; Owain Glyndwr, 5½p; Black Prince, 8p; Edward I, 10p. The artist would adopt the correct Welsh spelling of Glyndwr's name. R F York of Harrisons explained that the actual stamps would be printed in a combination of intaglio and photogravure, and that gold, if used, would be embossed. Meanwhile the value numeral would be removed from the vicinity of the Queen's head to the top right-hand corner, and the caption to the left-hand border. The meeting agreed to all of the above.

On 3 October White wrote to D M Elliott at the MPT explaining the decision to drop Boadicea in favour of Edward I:

... It became clear that Boadicea was incompatible with the others in the set. To distinguish between these individuals it has been necessary to rely on heraldic devices. Bruce, Glyndwr and the Black Prince span the period 1274 to c1415, during which arms and armour were generally similar. Boadicea lived twelve centuries earlier and cannot, visually, be related to the others ... I would be grateful for any comments you have to make on the choice of Edward I.

The SAC met on 25 October and saw essays that had been supplied the previous day of 5½p (Glyndwr) and 10p (Black Prince).

It will be noted that the Black Prince featured on the 10p and not the 8p value, despite the agreement reached at the previous SAC meeting, and this revision was not subsequently altered. Finished artwork for Robert the Bruce and Edward I was also seen, both essays and artwork being warmly approved by the meeting. It was agreed to call the issue 'Great Britons' and that the Queen's head be embossed. York added further that the final essays 'would be produced with the intaglio (recess) outline of the horses and characters in black or sepia and the Queen's head in outline or tone'. A letter to York the following day confirmed and amplified the instructions:

1. Essay in two ways - black and sepia.
2. Reposition the head - gold embossed.
3. Print down in flat gold and outline.
4. Print down an outline tone version of the head in brown.

5. Pull greater difference in background colours for Owain Glyndwr and the Black Prince.

CONTROVERSY OVER EDWARD I

A letter was sent by Neale of the MPT dated 15 November replying to the proposal in White's letter of 3 October that Edward I should take the place of Boadicea in the issue. The Welsh Office is prepared to accept it albeit with reservations but the Scottish Office ... was adamant that the inclusion of Edward I in the series would be politically unacceptable ... We are not able to advise the Minister to agree to the proposals to include Edward I.

However, the MPT had undertaken research on its own account, from which Neale suggested Henry V, Henry VII, Henry VIII, Alfred the Great or Simon de Montfort as substitutes for Edward I, although 'these figures are not of course contemporary with those already chosen ... if the alternative suggestions are not acceptable you will presumably consider reducing the series to three stamps only'.

It is not certain whether the MPT had consulted the Scottish Office as to the inclusion of Edward I in the issue; there seems to be no record before November of any opinion on the matter, hostile or otherwise, being registered outside the Post Office. However, a general election was now perceived in the offing, and the question had suddenly become sensitive. In a memorandum of 30 November to D Wesil, the Senior Director of Postal Services, accompanying a draft reply to the MPT, White retorted bitterly to the Scottish Office's opposition on several grounds: 'I find it difficult to accept ... that we cannot include a King of England in a stamp issue'; restricting the issue to three stamps would forgo 'a substantial philatelic profit'; originating new designs for a fourth stamp would delay the 1974 stamp production schedule by several weeks with consequent effects on not only the 'Great Britons' but all subsequent issues; the only possible alternatives to Edward I, in the broad period of the late 13th to early 15th centuries, were Simon de Montfort, who had already been commemorated in 1965, and Henry Percy, Shakespeare's 'Hotspur', who as an English rebel against Henry IV was not suitable. His strongest point was that 'Edward's claim for inclusion ... does not rest only on his martial successes. He made a remarkable contribution to the development of Parliament, central and local government and the legal system ... It would appear that the English and Welsh are thought prepared to accept in this issue men who were successful in war against them. I find it hard to believe that the Scottish people are, as a whole, less mature.'

Nevertheless, Wesil's advice to the MDP on 5 December was that:

The Scottish Office having vetoed the stamp on political grounds my view is that we should be wasting our time trying to get the decision reversed. After all a stamp commemorating the Hammer of the Scots is not likely to be regarded as helpful by a Government in what might turn out to be election year.

Wesil's view was that Marketing should enquire urgently about substituting another figure, 'who I think might be Henry V'. Urgent enquiries duly took place, and a minute to White of 14 December reported on, and advised against, the following figures, for the reasons given: Henry II invaded Wales and also murdered Thomas à Becket, a Catholic saint; Richard I disliked England, preferring to reign from Normandy; John, 'one of the most unlucky kings in history', presided over England's descent into anarchy; Henry V carried out religious persecution and defeated Owain Glyndwr; Edward III warred twice against Scotland; Edward IV was unsuccessful in war, personally immoral 'even by the standards of the time', and, not least, little known to the general public at the present day; John of Gaunt waged unsuccessful wars against Scotland, France and Castile.

HENRY V FINAL CHOICE

The historical figure found most appealing was John Plantagenet, Duke of Bedford, who lived from 1389 to 1435; he was 'strikingly unselfish and patriotic' and a 'first rate general, diplomat, administrator and statesman', who had campaigned only briefly against the Scots. In the minute of 14 December D W Barker of Marketing recommended Bedford; Henry V was a close second, despite his enthusiastic burning of heretics, but his defeat of Glyndwr was now perceived as a serious obstacle to his inclusion. Despite this, White's recommendation to the MDP on 21 December was that Edward I be replaced by Henry V. He explained that the timespan during which warriors appeared on horseback caparisoned as shown in the set was fairly short, and in effect excluded Henry VII, Henry VIII, Alfred the Great, and Simon de Montfort. Henry V had already been recommended by the MPT and Wesil, and suitable designs by Fritz Wegner were already to hand; finally the Welsh Office did not find his victory over Glyndwr a matter for objection. On 27 December the MPT was informed that Henry V would now feature in place of Edward I, the remainder of the issue to be as outlined on 3 October; on 9 January 1974 it was confirmed by the MPT that the issue as now proposed was acceptable to the Queen.

New essays were prepared and supplied by Harrisons on 22 November of 3½p (Bruce), 5½p (Glyndwr), 8p (Edward I), and 10p (Black Prince).

One set of the above was loaned to the College of Arms on 29 November for its comments as to heraldic accuracy: these were received on 6 December.

Further essays of the four designs were received on 5 December. Versions of the 3½p and 5½p with paler background colours were also supplied on 5 December.

On 6 December White explained to the SAC the still unresolved situation whereby Edward I was not agreeable to the Scottish Office, which was accepted with great reluctance; it was decided to ask Harrisons to proceed with preparing cylinders for the remaining designs while an alternative to Edward was selected. The new position of the Queen's head slightly closer to the centre of the stamp was accepted, but it was decided to discard the intaglio outline. Again these decisions were confirmed in a letter to Harrisons the next day:

Remove the black outline from the Queen's head.

Make the crest on the helmet of the 5½p red instead of yellow and use sand colour background instead of green.

Move the caption of the 10p in from the left to maintain the same space as on the other three values ... check the position of the value (10p).

Start to prepare cylinders for the 3½p, 5½p and 10p, but hold up the denomination for the 10p at the moment.

Expect a new drawing for the present 8p to replace Edward I.

The colour change of Glyndwr's crest was ordered on the basis of advice received by Stuart Rose from the College of Arms on 5 December; initially it had been thought that the correct colour was gold, but yellow was possibly used in the first instance as gold was already intended for the Queen's head. The Post Office later acknowledged the help it had received from Sir Anthony Wagner, Garter Principal King of Arms, and F S Andrus, Lancaster Herald at the College, and a consultation fee of £100 was paid on 21 December - £30 had previously been paid on 29 August for advice given to Fritz Wegner. On 28 January 1974 Harrisons was supplied with Wegner's finished drawing of Henry V, and on 30 January, somewhat belatedly, informed that the crest on Glyndwr's horse should also change from yellow to red. Harrisons supplied essays of the 8p (Henry V) on 19 February.

FINAL ESSAYS PRODUCED

During a meeting between Marketing, including Stuart Rose, and LMS5 (the Post Office chemists) on 26 February further design changes were discussed; it was agreed that the 5½p and 10p backgrounds should be more differentiated (both were currently in similar shades of green). Backgrounds generally would be slightly lighter and blue added if possible; values, and possibly captions, were to be in white. All was subject to discussion with the designer, Fritz Wegner, who did not agree the change to white for values and

captions, so this point was not pursued. The chemists also stipulated that to ensure an acceptable signal, the stamps should be overprinted rather than underprinted with phosphor, and the designs marginally reduced to double the gutter area. This last point was put to and accepted by the next day's meeting of the SAC, which also saw the 8p Henry V essays in the context of the whole set for the first time. At the meeting on 21 March, White explained that final essays were still in preparation, and that the deadline by which printing would have to begin was now too close to permit further design changes (this had already been revised from 18 February to 1 May).

Two more sets of essays were received from the printers on 9 and 24 April.

Final essays of the Bruce stamp were produced in both the 3½p and 4½p values as the first class inland letter rate was now expected to change on 24 June; this was not finally confirmed until the end of May, thus it was felt prudent to essay as both values. The SAC saw final essays of the whole set at its meeting on 25 April 'and offered congratulations to the designer and printer on the excellent results'.

In a final development, it was reported on 6 May that earlier plans to print the issue in a combination of photogravure and intaglio had been abandoned. Plans had been afoot since 1972 to use Harrison's 'Gemini' machine for such a purpose, but the firm had decided towards the end of 1973 that this would require electrical modifications to the 'step and repeat' camera apparatus – 'unfortunately parts of the equipment did not conform to the high standard we required or to the standard that was guaranteed by the manufacturers'. Despite the best efforts of its staff over several months, Harrisons failed to overcome these technical problems and it was finally deemed necessary to print the issue in photogravure to ensure satisfactory supplies by the required date.

STAMPS ISSUED - SALES AND SHORTAGES

On 2 May the final essays were submitted to the Secretary of State for the Department of Industry, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who was now the minister responsible for the Post Office; he had been Postmaster General under the last Labour administration. Benn forwarded these to the Queen for her approval, which was granted on 16 May. The press launch of the stamps was first scheduled for 29 May, but postponed to 6 June as the announcement of the tariff increase from 3½p to 4½p did not take place until 31 May. The stamps were issued, in sheets of 100 on phosphor-coated paper, on 10 July as scheduled (although examples of all values are known with a 9 July postmark from Dulverton, Somerset). The customary 30mm by 41mm format was used and the values were in the following colours:

4½p – greenish yellow, vermillion, slate-blue, red-brown, reddish brown, lilac-grey, gold.

5½p - lemon, vermilion, slate-blue, red-brown, reddish-brown, olive-drab, gold.

8p - deep grey, vermilion, greenish yellow, new blue, red-brown, deep cinnamon, gold.

10p - vermilion, greenish yellow, new blue, red-brown, reddish brown, light blue, gold.

The values issued were the base letter rates for, respectively, inland first class, Europe, and airmail Zones B and C covering most of the world outside Europe.

The issue was as usual withdrawn from sale by the Philatelic Bureau a year later; final sales were 41,949,300 of the 4½p, 9,207,800 of the 5½p, 7,243,600 of the 8p, and 7,467,500 of the 10p. Production costs were later calculated as £44,598.83 for 'development' (essays, proofs, plates and cylinders) and £38,314.53 for printing. The following figures show the Post Office's requirements as stated on 1 May 1974 and actual receipts as given by a Contracts Division costing exercise in July 1975:

Sheets/100 stamps	4½p	5½p	8p	10p	Total
Ordered	526,000	102,000	88,000	83,000	799,000
Issued	423,546	119,034	80,282	95,528	718,390
Excess/(shortfall)	(102,454)	17,034	(7,718)	12,528	(80,610)
Percentage issued against ordered	(19.5)	16.7	(8.8)	15.1	(10.1)
Percentage sales against issued	99.0	77.4	90.2	78.2	91.7

It was reported as early as 26 June that shortages had forced cuts of head post offices' requisitions by 25 per cent for the 4½p and 10 per cent for the 8p, attributed to 'a high proportion of waste at the Printers'; fortunately it proved possible to concentrate the burden of these cuts on offices which had notoriously over-requisitioned in the past. In a letter to White on 19 July, R F York gave Harrison's principal reason for the particularly severe shortfall in the number of 4½p sheets supplied as the conditions prevailing in early 1974 (the oil crisis, the 'three day week', strikes by the miners and sympathetic power workers, all resulting in a national power shortage) but admitted that the firm had compounded this by postponing its decision to fall back on conventional printing methods until the last moment. It later transpired that only 409,500 of the 4½p sheets were delivered by the day of issue, with the remainder supplied subsequently. The Supplies Division normally required at least another week to complete distribution to local offices. Similar problems arose with the production and distribution of presentation packs and publicity material, mainly because of the prolonged uncertainty as to whether the first class rate would be changed from 3½p to 4½p.

PACKS, PHQ CARDS, AND HANDSTAMPS

Despite these problems the issue was generally greeted as a success, the sales figures comparing markedly with Marketing's normal assumption that 'nationwide, we would expect about 10-20% of a low value special issue to be returned unsold'. There were 130,600 presentation packs sold; these, the first day envelope, and a philatelic wall chart with illustrations by Fritz Wegner, were all designed by Roger Denning. The latter was first produced for schools' use to coincide with the issue but made generally available shortly after because of the interest shown by collectors. There were 31,750 PHQ cards printed, reproducing each stamp in the series - for the first time these were produced for each value rather than for only one as hitherto.

As usual a special handstamp for first day covers was available from the Philatelic Bureau, and an ordinary 'first day of issue' handstamp from special posting boxes at 186 larger post offices. Two other special handstamps were also available on the day to mark Robert the Bruce's 700th anniversary, one at Dunfermline Abbey, and another at the National Trust for Scotland's Bannockburn Information Centre, near Stirling. A handstamp commemorating Glyndwr was available at the Welshman's former Parliament House in Machynlleth, Powys, from 10 to 13 July. Other handstamps in use on the day included those marking the British Open Golf Championship (Lytham St Annes, 8-13 July), the Royal Tournament (British Forces Postal Service, 10-27 July), the visit of 'Golden Hind II' (London EC3, 1 May-31 August), the Churchill Centenary Exhibition (London WC1, 10 May - 9 October) and the 150th anniversary of the Trustee Savings Bank (Sunderland, 10 July). Among the ordinary first day of issue postmarks, Canterbury, Windsor, Dunfermline and 'Gwent Dydd Cyhoeddiad Cyntab' had historical connections with the issue, as did the 'paquebot' cancellation at Calais, recalling the invasions of France via that port by Henry V and the Black Prince.

A rare glimpse of the activity generated within one locality by a special issue can be found in the September 1974 number of 'Contact', the Bath head post office area staff magazine, as described by J A Moon:

We were exceptionally busy at Bath on Wednesday, 10 July selling Great Britons special stamps, covers and packs. The number of special covers sold in the entire Head Office area was 1,752. Post Office and private covers received for hand stamping amounted to 2,315 plus an additional 5,000 special bulk posting at 4½p each, add to this the sets of stamps taken away by collectors, schools, maiden aunts for nephews, husbands for wives, fathers for sons, for friends overseas and nut cases, including requests for traffic lights and cylinder numbers, plus a Wednesday balance ... A special exercise undertaken at Bath HO at the request of Postal HQ involved the make up and sale of individual sets of special stamps contained in small transparent envelopes.

FRITZ WEGNER, DESIGNER OF THE ISSUE

In an article the artist Fritz Wegner described how his initial researches led him via an exhaustive reading list to 'more visual information' in the form of 'whatever contemporary material I could find, for example, illuminations, coins, seals, sculpture, armour, brasses, etc'. Both the Welsh and Scottish postal boards were helpful in arranging visits and interviews with experts for him. Finally Wegner was attracted by the Royal Seals of Glyndwr and Bruce which he had seen, and decided to make his theme 'the triumphant sovereign or prince on horseback with his coat of arms on shield and trapper ... There was no way round it, I had to research in searchingly correct detail the four royal armour clad heroes on their charging horses, splendidly caparisoned and displaying their armorial bearings.' He was at pains to acknowledge the 'generous help' and 'infinite patience' of A R Dufty, Master of the Armouries at the Tower of London, and Russell H Robinson, the Assistant Master. Wegner himself was praised in at least one press comment for his 'superb designs'.

Wegner was paid £600 for his preliminary designs on 1 August 1973 (on the basis of £150 for each value) plus payments for further commissioned designs of £300 on 22 November and £150 on 5 February. His final payment was of £750 for five completed designs (including Edward I) on 31 March. Fritz Wegner was born in Vienna in 1924 and came to England in 1938. He was first a student, and later visiting lecturer and teacher of illustration, at St Martin's School of Art. He worked primarily as a freelance illustrator of magazines, periodicals and books for both children and adults; his first work for the Post Office was on the new greetings telegram form introduced in 1956. Between 1969 and 1984 he produced successful designs for ten stamp issues and a Christmas air letter.

THE GREAT BRITONS

ROBERT THE BRUCE, born on 11 July 1274, was directly descended from a Norman baron who had come to England with William the Conqueror. He succeeded to the title of Earl of Carrick in 1292, shortly before the outbreak of war between England and Scotland. Bruce supported first one side and then the other in these wars, until 1306 when he murdered the only rival claimant to the Scottish throne. He fought the English until 1327 when the adolescent Edward III was forced to sign a treaty abandoning all claims to sovereignty over Scotland. On 7 June 1329 he died of leprosy.

THE BLACK PRINCE, eldest son of Edward III, was sometimes called Edward of Woodstock after his place of birth in Oxfordshire on 15 June 1330. He fought the French at both Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356), the two greatest victories of the Hundred Years' War in his father's lifetime, and became a popular hero; it has been said that 'on the Black Prince's

occasional visits to England young girls would scream and faint with excitement'. After the truce of 1360 his energies were squandered on further fruitless, bloody and expensive military adventures in France and Spain, and for the last six years of his life he suffered continually from dysentery. In 1371 he returned to England, where he supported the claims of the crown against those of the church on one hand and the rights of parliament against the power of the crown on the other. He died on 8 July 1376.

OWAIN GLYNDWR was born in 1350, 1354 or 1359. His family owned land throughout Wales and was descended from the former line of independent Welsh princes on both sides. He was loyal to English rule under Richard II, but quickly turned to leading Wales in national rebellion when the latter's throne was seized by Henry IV. At the height of his success, he was openly styling himself 'Prince of Wales', while the country enjoyed its own government and parliament and a formal alliance with the French. Between 1405 and 1409 Wales succumbed once more to English power, and Glyndwr's wife, daughter and grandchildren were taken into captivity; Glyndwr finally vanished into obscurity, possibly sheltered by English relatives in Herefordshire, and died between 1415 and 1417. He left many children, mostly illegitimate.

HENRY V was born at Monmouth on 9 August 1387. Between 1403 and 1408 he campaigned personally against the revolt of the Percy family of Northumberland and Owain Glyndwr's Welsh rebellion with ultimate success. On 20 March 1413 he succeeded his father Henry IV. He restored the English sense of national unity, and earned the gratitude and support of the church by his ruthless suppression of religious dissent, or as one account has it: 'He tried to live by all the highest ideals of knightly conduct, which included burning heretics at the stake ... a number of Henry's own friends went up in smoke.' After five years of renewed war with France, he was accepted by treaty as regent and heir to the French throne and married the French king's daughter. His health was undermined by further campaigns to enforce the treaty and he died on 3 August 1422.

GILES ALLEN
11 August 1995

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