

British Trees

Date of issue: 27 FEBRUARY 1974



When the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) met on 19 October 1972 it discussed the 1974 stamp programme. The Chairman, E G White, Director of Marketing, outlined subjects circulated at the previous meeting, in September, together with additional suggestions. Several themes were given further consideration:

Centenary of the birth of Sir Winston Churchill - it was thought other countries were likely to issue a stamp for this anniversary and the Post Office could not ignore it.

The Centenary of the founding of the Universal Postal Union - this was considered obligatory with Britain being a founder member.

Robert the Bruce - there had been strong feeling in Scotland following the decision not to issue a John Knox stamp and therefore the 700th anniversary of the birth of Robert Bruce could not be easily ignored.

Literary Anniversaries - there were several from which to choose including: Milton, Goldsmith, Palgrave, Somerset Maugham, G K Chesterton, Maurice Baring and Southey.

200th Anniversary of the founding of the Fire Service.

Christmas - a Christmas issue had become an established annual tradition.

Musicians - there was only one notable anniversary, that of Gustav Holst, unless foreign musicians were to be considered.

The opening of the National Theatre.

Trees - the first stamp in a series of stamps depicting British trees had been issued in 1973 featuring an Oak; the intention was to issue a single stamp each year featuring a tree familiar throughout the UK.

Council of Europe - the 25th anniversary was in 1974. It was suggested by the SAC that to commemorate a 25th anniversary so close to the European Communities (EC) issue of 1973 was not necessary

The Committee discussed which tree to use for the 1974 Trees issue; at this stage the copper-beech was a popular choice. It was agreed that designs showing a tree in winter and summer should be commissioned.

The stamp programme was discussed in detail over the next few months; on 18 January the Chairman told the SAC he would like approval before the next meeting. Between meetings the Chairman had discussed the programme with the Managing Director Posts, A Currall, who felt that as the 1973 programme consisted of eight issues, 1974 should be more modest and not go beyond six. Since the previous meeting the Chairman had heard that the National Theatre was not expected to open until the beginning of 1975 and had therefore been dropped from the 1974 programme. This left:

- The Centenary of the birth of Sir Winston Churchill,
- The Centenary of the founding of the Universal Postal Union (UPU),
- 700th Anniversary of the birth of Robert the Bruce, to be part of a series which might include Sir William Wallace, who was possibly the other major Scottish figure in the war of independence,
- 200th Anniversary of the founding of the Fire Service,
- Tree,
- Christmas,
- Heraldry.

The production files make no mention of heraldry before this point and it was quickly dropped on the grounds that it had no special relevance to 1974: this brought the list down to six. The Managing Director asked if it was too soon to have another Churchill stamp but the Committee felt the subject could not be ignored.

At the meeting held on 14 February, the Chairman told the Committee that the recommendations had gone to the Post Office Board and had included a Tree stamp. After discussion the Committee agreed that David Gentleman, who had designed the previous tree stamp, should once again be commissioned. Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Advisor, said that Gentleman would be asked to submit designs for three or four trees from which a final choice could be made.

At the meeting on 28 March the Chairman explained that it was proposed to continue promotion of postal souvenirs based upon the use of the Tree stamp and stated that tree planting was one of the UK Council's three-year objectives leading up to European Heritage Year in 1975. It had been intended by the Post Office that the 1973 Tree stamp be part of a new marketing venture, known as a 'Tourist' stamp. The idea was that the stamp was to be available at tourist locations for one year and would be used with suitably designed envelopes illustrating popular castles, stately homes, etc. A post box was to be available to

ensure that the stamp received a special pictorial cancellation to indicate it was a personal record of a visit to a place of particular interest. It is unclear when the idea was dropped: both the Tree stamps - 1973 and 1974 - were only available in the same manner as other special issues, that is, on sale for around two months from all post offices and subsequently only available from the Philatelic Bureau for a total of one year.

A BRITISH TREES CHARITY STAMP

At the SAC meeting on 4 July 1973 the Chairman stated 'since the obstacles of the association of the Queen's head with charity had been removed' the Post Office 'was committed to the issue of a charity stamp as an experiment for one year only'. He explained that since it was uneconomic to issue a low value charity stamp on its own, it would be combined with the Tree stamp. He acknowledged that this might be unacceptable to the charity representatives. The Committee, however, was unanimous in its opposition to a charity stamp.

ARTWORK SEEN BY THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

At the meeting on 27 September, the Committee examined a design by Gentleman showing the Horse Chestnut tree in winter and bearing the word 'charity'. It was strongly against this design as there was no relation between the Tree and charity. It was unanimously recommended that the charity issue be postponed until 1975 and should be designed to have some relationship with the purpose for which the charitable contribution was to be made.

The Committee was also shown artwork by Gentleman depicting a Horse Chestnut tree in summer foliage without the word 'Charity'. It was unanimous in its dislike of the flattened top of the tree, which it did not consider to be typical. It was agreed that Gentleman should be informed.

ESSAYS PRODUCED

Early in October 1973 Postal Headquarters forwarded the two Tree designs by Gentleman to Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers. The company was instructed to essay the 10p design that showed the tree in leaf, but was asked to hold back on essaying the 3½p design, which depicted a leafless tree, until further instructions were received. On 24 October Harrisons sent the essays bearing the 10p value and incorporating amendments suggested by the SAC.

The following day the SAC examined the essays. Stuart Rose stated that certain minor revisions in the colour tones would have to be made and the Committee, which was otherwise satisfied with the essays, agreed to these revisions.

On 30 November Harrisons sent further essays which the SAC approved at its meeting held on 6 December.

ROYAL APPROVAL SOUGHT

On 13 December D Wesil, Director of Postal Services, wrote to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications enclosing an essay which he asked be submitted to the Queen. The Minister wrote to Sir Martin Charteris, Private Secretary, and the Queen gave her approval of which the Post Office was notified on 3 January 1974.

PAYMENT TO ARTIST

On 19 October 1973 Gentleman was paid £330 for two designs. A further payment of £165 was made on 24 January 1974 for one accepted design.

THE STAMP IS ISSUED

The stamp was issued on 27 February 1974 and continued the British Trees theme that began with the Oak stamp issued the previous February. The tree featured was a Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus Hippocastanum*), introduced to Western Europe from Istanbul in the 16th century. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the tree as having 'large digitate leaves and upright conical clusters of showy flowers' and Gerard's Herbal (1957) states that the Horse Chestnut got its name because 'the people of the East countries do, with the fruit, cure their horses of the cough'.

Printed in photogravure with all-over phosphor by Harrison and Sons Ltd, the stamp was issued in sheets of 100. It was horizontal and slightly larger than double definitive size. The colours were light green, dark green, brown, black and yellow, with the Queen's head in grey.

An official first day envelope and a pictorial handstamp were provided by the Post Office. The handstamp, available from the Philatelic Bureau Edinburgh, featured the digitate leaf of the Horse Chestnut. Philatelic post boxes were provided at 186 larger post offices for

collectors who wanted to post their own covers, these receiving the ordinary circular First Day of Issue handstamp.

Presentation packs containing a mint stamp were available from the Bureau and many main post offices at 15p.

A picture postcard reproducing the stamp was also available from philatelic counters and most main post offices from 27 February at 5p each. This card, known as a 'PHQ' card, was fifth in a series started in July 1973.

QUANTITIES SOLD

A total of 7,245,200 stamps and 93,680 presentation packs were sold before being withdrawn on 26 February 1975.

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June 1995

REFERENCES

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- MKD/BS/334
- MKD/BS/335
- POST 54 SAC Minutes 1971 - 1972 and 1973 - 1975

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N C Porter 'Collecting British First Day Covers' A G Bradbury

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- MM 7, issued 15 January 1974
- MM 33, issued 26 February 1974