

Universal Postal Union Centenary

Date of issue: 12 JUNE 1974



The foundation of the Universal Postal Union (UPU) can be traced back to the Paris Postal Conference of May 1863, where representatives of 15 nations gathered at the suggestion of Montgomery Blair, Postmaster General of the United States. The groundwork was laid for a second conference held by 22 nations in Berne, Switzerland, beginning on 15 September 1874; with the guidance of the Director General of the German postal administration, Heinrich von Stephan, the Treaty of Berne, agreeing universal transmission of mail and uniform postal rates, was signed on 9 October. This came into effect on 1 July 1875; the organisation it founded was known by its present name from 1879. Over the next century it came to include almost every nation in the world, and from 1948 was a specialised agency of the United Nations. Congresses of all members met every five years, while the Executive Council met annually in the interim. As 1974 approached, it was noted that this was not only the year of the 17th Congress, to be held in Switzerland, but the centenary year of UPU itself; philatelists correctly anticipated a flood of stamps such as had marked the 75th anniversary in 1949. Some two-thirds of the UPU's member nations - 105 out of 146 - had decided on such issues by the end of January 1973.

At the Executive Council session of May-June 1971, 31 member nations of the UPU resolved that various measures should be taken to mark the organisation's 100th anniversary, including the issue of stamps. On 31 August that year the UPU International Bureau circularised the postal administrations of all its members recommending such stamps - attention was drawn to the resolution of the Tokyo Congress of 1969 that members should take advantage of every opportunity 'to make postal users better acquainted with the Union's aims and with the results already achieved', and to the 1957 Ottawa Congress recommendation that stamp designs should seek 'to contribute to mutual understanding between peoples, the spread of their culture and, in a general way, to the strengthening of bonds of international friendship'. Further advice was that any date in 1974 would be suitable; issues should consist of at least two but no more than four values including the first weight steps for internal and international letters; no design was prescribed, but the UPU emblem and name and the dates 1874-1974 should be included; lastly, under a 1962

ruling, only Switzerland, as the host country in 1974, should draw attention to the occasion of the 17th Congress. This approach was passed on by the Overseas Post Division of the Operations Department of the Post Office, and acknowledged by the stamps section of Postal Marketing on 22 September, promising that in due course the UPU centenary would be 'very carefully considered' for inclusion in 1974.

EARLY CONSIDERATIONS BY POST OFFICE

Further deliberations by the UPU executive council in May 1972 added little to the previous recommendations other than that issues should be released after the 17th Congress, to be held at Lausanne from 22 May to 5 July 1974, and preferably on 9 October, the actual centenary date. Meanwhile, research by the British Post Office into significant anniversaries as potential subjects for stamps in 1974 and beyond was already under way in February 1972. A commercial advisory service, the Historical Research Unit, had been commissioned by Postal Marketing to produce a list of suggestions for 1974-75; these were submitted at the end of February and included the centenary of 'the International [sic] Postal Union founded 1875 [sic]'. On 15 June the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) examined Postal Marketing's own preliminary suggestions for 1974: the UPU anniversary was among the ideas subsequently short-listed by the SAC and reviewed at its meeting on 7 September.

In a circular to solicit contributions from regional directors sent out on 12 September, the anniversary was mentioned as one of 'a number of themes which would be difficult to translate into effective stamp issues but which we may be under some pressure to adopt'. In ensuing correspondence between L G Gage, Chairman of the North Western Postal Board, and E G White, the Director of Marketing, the idea arose of 'a series on Post Office achievements, with the two-fold object of gaining publicity as well as sales'; this appealed to White, whose reply indicated that, while 'we have to be fairly careful not to overdo our privileged position in relation to the choice of stamp subjects', the possibility of incorporating 'something related to postal achievement into the design of the UPU centenary' would certainly be looked into. Otherwise the response from the regions concurred with the general feeling within Postal Marketing, that an issue for the centenary was an obligation rather than a particularly rewarding design concept.

At the SAC meeting on 19 October it was accepted that Britain's status as a founder member of the UPU rendered an issue among those 'thought to be essential' in 1974. However, it was acknowledged that the subject was lacking in 'design appeal' and below average in either general or sectional interest. The meeting was presented with two recommendations to enhance the appeal: (i) a set featuring salient points in the history of Great Britain's role as a member of the UPU, such as the first air mails or the first Royal Mail

ship; (ii) a historic set of British postmen's uniforms. The first suggestion was accepted in general terms, and from this point onward Postal Marketing and the SAC agreed on 'significant aspects of postal history' as the best approach to be adopted; it appears that no attention was paid to the second suggestion.

UPU ISSUE PROPOSAL ACCEPTED

In a minute to A Currall, Managing Director Posts (MDP), of 11 January 1973, White presented the provisional 1974 programme; his case for the UPU centenary issue was as follows: It is likely that all major administrations in the UPU will issue stamps to mark its centenary. As a founder member we could hardly be an exception. Rather than treat the subject in an abstract way we are considering giving it public interest by depicting scenes from postal history that are relevant to the development of the UPU, eg, mail coaches and pillar boxes for the inland rate, first Royal Mail steamship and early flights for the foreign and overseas air rates ... There are thematic collector interests - UPU; boats; airmail.

The proposal for a UPU issue was accepted without further comment, and included in the 1974 programme approved by the Minister of Posts & Telecommunications and released to the press in July 1973. In the meantime, enquiries from the UPU International Bureau and elsewhere were met at this stage with the standard reply that neither the size, date or denominations of the issue had yet been decided. An issue date of 9 October to mark the exact anniversary of UPU's foundation in 1874 was briefly contemplated at an early stage; however, a memorandum by C E Sharwood of Postal Marketing noted on 8 February that the issue date should be provisionally scheduled for either 7 or 12 June 1974. This followed a discussion with Max Guggenheim, one of the organisers of the international philatelic exhibition to be held in Basle as part of UPU's centenary celebrations, who urged the advantages of any contemplated issue coinciding with it. Subsequently White recommended to the MDP on 13 April that the issue should include at least the first class value. In July 1973 a provisional 1974 timetable was produced for internal reference; this gives an issue date of 12 June 1974 with an anticipated requirement of 900,000 sheets, implying that a standard set of four stamps was envisaged. As a Wednesday, 12 June was preferable to 7 June as the day of issue, in line with Post Office practice at this time; October was given over to the Churchill centenary set, itself dislodged from the actual birth date in November because of the pressure created by the Christmas stamps. As a result the organisers of INTERNABA, the Basle exhibition, were now able to fix 12 June 1974 as the event's 'Great Britain Day'.

FIRST ARTWORK COMMISSIONED

At the SAC meeting of 9 May it was announced that designs were about to be commissioned; the artists approached were Peter North of the Garden Studio, who had not previously worked on stamps, and Rosalind Dease, who had considerable experience. Both artists were given verbal instructions by Stuart Rose, confirmed in writing to Dease on 6 August and North on 31 August; these instructions seemed to have been confined to the legend 'Universal Postal Union 1874-1974', use of denominations in the range 3½p to 10p, and the recommendation of transport themes as the preferred approach (although Dease did not confine herself to these). The following artwork was received on 25 September in time for the SAC meeting two days later:

North –

3p 19th century paddle steamer – horizontal

3p variant of above design

3p 19th century paddle steamer – vertical

3½p 19th century paddle steamer - horizontal

3½p variant of above

3½p variant of above

3½p 19th century paddle steamer - vertical

3½p variant of above

5p 20th century mailboat – horizontal

5p variant of above

5p variant of above

5p variant of above

5p 20th century mailboat – vertical

5p variant of above

5½p variant of above

7½p Flying boat – vertical

7½p variant of above – horizontal

8p Biplane - horizontal

8p variant of above

8p variant of above

8p Biplane - vertical

8p variant of above

9p Jet airliner - vertical

9p variant of above - horizontal

10p Flying boat - horizontal

10p variant of above

10p variant of above

10p Flying boat - vertical

Dease –

5½p Portrait of Henniker Heaton MP

8p Portrait of Heinrich von Stephan

10p Portrait of Montgomery Blair

3½p UPU initials

3½p Cancellations

3½p Airmail blue van and postbox with cancellation

5½p Short 'Mayo' composite flying boat with Royal Air Mail pennant

- as above with cancellation replacing pennant

1/- 'C' class flying boat - no cancellation

8p Farman biplane with 'aerial post' cancellation

10p P&O packet steamer 'Peninsular' with 'paquebot' cancellation.

Peter North submitted conventional artwork for nine boat and seven aircraft designs, plus six boat and six aircraft designs on board-mounted envelopes, all 28 being stamp size. Basically these were eight boat and six aircraft designs plus variations of colour, lettering, and so on. All Rosalind Dease's designs were full size artwork in the horizontal format.

At the SAC meeting it was agreed that the most promising set was Rosalind Dease's trio of steamer, biplane and airmail van with historic cancellations; finished versions of these designs were seen at the meeting a month later, on 25 October. Also to hand was the artwork depicting the 1938 'C' class flying boat 'Calpurnia', which Dease had submitted in September, but which had been executed previous to the commission (as the pre-decimal denomination indicates) for another, unspecified, purpose; Dease mistakenly described this later as a 'Canopus', believing it to be the type of aircraft rather than the individual name of another aircraft of the same class as was the case. It was agreed that this could be redrawn to conform with the other designs to make up a set of four; Dease's 'Mayo' designs, which were already in the style of the other three, were passed over because the composite had not flown a regular air route. R F York of Harrison & Sons Ltd, the stamp printers, promised that the set would be essayed in time for the next meeting. It was also decided that the steamer design should be in the 3½p value, the airmail van 5½p, and the two aircraft the 8p and 10p values.

ESSAYS SUPPLIED BY PRINTERS

Essays were supplied by Harrisons on 21 November:

3½p (Airmail van)

5½p (Flying boat)

8p (Biplane)

10p (Steamer).

The values had not yet been altered, except on the 5½p where the original '1/-' had been removed but not replaced by the new value. The artist's hand-drawn cancellations had been replaced with more accurate replicas, and more detail added to the original drawings, especially to the biplane spars and struts and the rigging of the steamer. The 5½p now bore the entirely new caption 'Imperial Airways flying boat 1937' and a 'Southampton Airport' cancellation for 29 June that year, marking the inauguration of the Empire Airmail programme between London and Durban; Dease's various flying boat designs had previously been identified in the captions as '1938 flying boat' or 'transatlantic Mercury/Maia 1938'. The wording of the other captions was also revised; in the case of the 3½p the year was changed to '1930', despite the continued use of a 1931 cancellation, an anomaly which does not seem to have attracted any subsequent comment.

A further set of essays followed on 5 December, on which the values had now been revised, but not wholly as agreed on 25 October: the steamer was now on the 3½p and an aircraft on the 10p, but the airmail van had become the 8p and the biplane the 5½p. The 10p now showed 'Maia', the lower partner of the 'Mayo' composite, as before but with 'Mercury', the upper partner, removed from the artwork; the intent was to depict a conventional Imperial Airways flying boat of 1937 as described in the caption. The 'Calpurnia' design had been dropped as it was felt too dissimilar to the other stamps; Dease had been asked if she could supply a head-on view of the aircraft, but the only such picture available in the source material was that of the 'Mayo' which she had already used.

The revised essays were seen by the SAC at its meeting the next day, 6 December, where it was decided to capitalise the first letter of the 5½p and 8p captions; this was to conform with the 3½p and 10p captions, which already began with capitals – 'P&O' and 'Imperial' respectively. In answer to a query by R A G Lee, one of the 'philatelic' members of the Committee, it was confirmed that all the cancellations would be checked for accuracy; it was also decided to move the cancellation on the 10p slightly to the left so that the date was not obliterated by the wing of the aircraft. The third and final set of essays was supplied by Harrisons on 11 January 1974 and included a further amendment, the caption of the 8p being revised to read 'blue van and postbox' rather than 'blue vans and postboxes'. As with practically all the other revisions made but not recorded in the SAC's deliberations, there is no mention of this elsewhere in the files and it was presumably the result of verbal discussion between Dease, Harrisons, and the Design Director, Stuart Rose.

A single set of the essays was submitted to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications on 24 January, and returned on 14 February after approval by the Queen's Counsellors of State in her absence. Two sheets of 100 of each value were supplied by Harrisons in time for the press conference on 30 April announcing the issue.

ISSUE AND SALES OF STAMPS

The set was issued as scheduled on 12 June 1974, printed in the following colours: deep brownish-grey, bright mauve, grey-black, gold (3½p); pale orange, light emerald, grey-black, gold (5½p); cobalt, brown, grey-black, gold (8p); deep brownish-grey, orange, grey-black, gold (10p). It was printed in photogravure on 'all-over' phosphor-coated paper in sheets of 100 stamps in the 41mm by 30mm format then standard. A preliminary estimate on 30 January had suggested that 52,600,000 of the 3½p, 10,000,000 of the 5½p, 8,700,000 of the 8p and 8,400,000 of the 10p in 'good' condition would be supplied; this suggests a normal wastage rate of just over 10 per cent against the 900,000 sheets noted as required the previous July. Actual issue and sales figures were as follows:

Sheets of 100 stamps	3½p	5½p	8p	10p	Totals
Estimate at 30/1/74	526,000	100,000	87,000	84,000	797,000
Actual number issued	522,058	100,030	87,530	93,028	802,646
Sales	388,808	74,143	64,500	65,938	593,389
Percentage sales against issued	74.5	74.1	73.7	70.9	73.9

The stamps were withdrawn from ordinary counters after two months and by the Philatelic Bureau after one year. The production costs of the stamps were recorded in 1975 as £13,527.13 for development (essays, proofs, plates and cylinders) and £24,603.36 for printing. There were 105,500 presentation packs also sold with insert cards in either English or German; these included portraits by Rosalind Dease of Heinrich von Stephan and Montgomery Blair as originally submitted in her stamp artwork the previous September, plus an additional portrait of Rowland Hill (her third 1973 portrait, that of Henniker Heaton MP, the pioneer of Imperial Penny Post in the 1890s, was omitted). Dease designed both the presentation pack and first day envelope for the issue.

Ordinary 'first day issue' cancellations were available on items posted in philatelic boxes at 186 offices, and a special five-sided handstamp from the Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh. Some excitement had been caused in May when the 'British Philatelic Bulletin' printed a picture of the forthcoming first day cover with the special handstamp back to front; a transparency of the handstamp had been inadvertently reversed. More confusion followed the month after, when a selection of Rosalind Dease's unused designs were identified by the 'Bulletin' as by Peter North, and vice versa. The British Post Office stand at the INTERNABA philatelic exhibition in Switzerland marked 'Great Britain Day' on 12 June by

selling handstamped covers with the exhibition cachet, which could be posted with the addition of a local stamp. Other special handstamps available on the day were from: Southampton, depicting an Imperial Airways flying boat to mark the UPU centenary; the National Postal Museum on a reprinted 1890 Penny Post Jubilee cover; 'Visit of Golden Hind II' at Tower Pier, London EC3 from 1 May to 31 August; 'Churchill Centenary Exhibition' at Somerset House, London WC1 from 10 May to 9 October. A special handstamp marking the actual UPU anniversary on 9 October was later available from Clitheroe, Lancs.

Rosalind Dease was paid £600 for her four completed designs on 1 April; she had previously been paid £600 for four submitted designs on 5 November 1973, plus £150 for a fifth on 4 December (after it had been agreed to change the subject of her flying boat design). Peter North was paid £825 on 12 November for 'four commissioned designs and extra work', made up of £750 plus 10 per cent. The cause of the discrepancy in the methods by which the two artists' fees were calculated is not known. The terms offered to both artists the previous August had been £150 for each submitted design, plus £150 for each one completed; it appears that there was some arrangement to place a ceiling of four on the number of submissions accepted, and to decide any additional payments by verbal agreement with the individual artists.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE SET

Stuart Rose later praised Rosalind Dease's set as 'highly successful examples of explanatory graphics', illustrating significant moments of postal history; one minor inaccuracy was committed however, in her final flying boat design as used on the 10p. The Post Office also overlooked this and it was not noticed until the stamps appeared widely in newspapers after the press launch. First a brief description of the historical background to the designs:

P&O packet steamer

The 'Peninsular' was purpose-built in 1888 for the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company's Bombay service, and later held the speed record for several years on the Shanghai run. She was one of a fleet of 50 P&O ships operating mails contracts, most importantly to India and Australia. The 'Southampton Packet Letter' cancellation was in use from 1881 to 1901.

First official airmail

In 1911 a group of private enthusiasts organised this 'aerial post' service between Windsor and London (via Hendon airfield) to celebrate George V's coronation year. As their number included three senior postal officials, they were able to secure the GPO's full co-operation. Most London postings were routed through the Wimpole Street post office and then flown

(at 37mph) from Hendon to Windsor between 9 and 26 September; there was a service from Windsor to Hendon on the 17 and 18 September only. Two Farman biplanes and two Bleriot monoplanes were used. The special cancellation was reserved for commemorative covers and postcards carried on flights between 9 and 15 September, of which many were also autographed by the pilots. Dease's original design bore the numeral '5', one of the rare Hendon cancellations; the '2' that replaced it indicates the much commoner Wimpole Street cancellation.

Airmail blue van and postbox

On 23 June 1930 blue Air Mail pillar boxes were introduced in London; collections were carried out by Morris vans painted in the same colour ('air force' blue). By 1936 there were over 300 boxes in London and other major cities. The initial aim was to promote use of the surcharged airmail service; when cheaper air mails to Europe and the Empire were regularised after 1936, the boxes' usefulness diminished, and plans for their withdrawal were announced in August 1938. The first box to be erected, outside the London Chief Office, was the last to be withdrawn.

Imperial Airways flying boat

At the end of 1934 the Government announced the Empire Air Mail Scheme; this stated that all letter mails from the United Kingdom to Empire destinations on Imperial air routes would from 1937 be carried by air and without surcharge as far as practicable. To carry out the service Imperial Airways ordered a new fleet of flying boats from Short Brothers of Belfast - 31 of these were built between July 1936 and March 1938. Correctly described as the Short S23 and known popularly as the 'Empire' flying boats, these were known by Imperial Airways as its 'C' class, and were given names such as 'Canopus', 'Corsair', 'Cheviot', etc. Although 'Canopus' was the first to go into service in 1936, the Empire scheme was launched by 'Centurion' on 29 June 1937, taking off from Southampton to inaugurate the London-Durban air mail service. The cancellation was from a silver handstamp applied only to a few very items, such as a letter from the King to the Governor-General of South Africa; 'Southampton Airport' referred to the flying boat and seaplane berth in the docks, not to the airport's current location at Eastleigh. The service was extended to India, Australia and Malaya in 1938; the 'C' class flying boats later evolved into the wartime Sunderland. (Selected references for above: 'The Coronation Aerial Post 1911', Francis J Field and N C Baldwin, 1934; 'British Air Mails 1784-1946', N C Baldwin, 1947; 'The Letter Box', Jean Farrugia, 1969.)

10p 'FLYING BOAT' CONTROVERSY

The inaccuracy in the 10p stamp, widely identified after the press release but too late for the design to be corrected, was that while the caption and cancellation referred to 1937 and

the service initiated by the 'C' class aircraft, the flying boat depicted related to neither. As already explained it was the lower part of the 'Mayo' composite; in full this consisted of 'Mercury', a Short S20 four-engined seaplane, mounted on the back of 'Maia', a Short S21 four-engined flying boat. The concept was for 'Mayo' to take off using the power of all eight engines; 'Maia' would carry its smaller partner to within its range of the destination, after which 'Mercury' would separate and complete the journey. The object was to extend Imperial Airway's services to North America; 'Mayo' carried out two experimental flights to Montreal and New York in 1938 before the composite project was abandoned, and the service was later introduced by the conventional 'C' class in 1939. Both the S20 and S21 were one-off models, unlike the S23 'C' class; the S21 was similar to the latter but by no means identical, being slightly heavier and 84 foot 10¾ inches in fuselage length as opposed to 88 foot. It also bore tripod support structures on its wings designed to carry 'Mercury', and these gave away its identity immediately.

Following a reader's letter, 'The Daily Telegraph' pointed out the error in the 10p in an article of 21 May 1974 which included an interview with Rosalind Dease; this in turn sparked off a letter to Postal Marketing by Wing Commander P R Woodward describing the stamp as 'an insult to the past Flying Boat Industry, [and] British Aviation in general'. Further discussion followed after the release; an authoritative article by John C W Field appeared in the magazine 'Aero Field', while enough adverse comment on the inaccuracy of the 10p was heard in the Bath head post office area to fill a page of 'Contact', the local staff newsletter, plus the editorial remark that 'the strongest opposition came from the aircraft enthusiasts and they are a force to be reckoned with'. Nine years later the controversy was renewed afresh when both the periodical 'Stamps' and the 'British Philatelic Bulletin' mentioned the UPU anniversary issue in historical notes and a wave of readers' correspondence about the 10p was triggered off in each case. The advice given to Rosalind Dease, that the start of the Empire Air Mails programme in 1937 was more significant than the 'Mayo' experiments of the following year, was undoubtedly correct; unfortunately most of the ensuing furore seems to have been due to the fact that she was not then given adequate information about the aircraft operating the programme.

Rosalind Dease was born in Jersey in 1928 and studied at the Royal College of Art. She worked as a freelance illustrator of books, newspapers and magazines, and was also a typographer and designer of exhibition stands and fabrics. Between 1962 and 1974 she worked on a large number of stamp issues for the Post Office, several in collaboration with David Gentleman, to whom she was married between 1953 and 1966. The UPU Centenary issue was her last to be issued by the Post Office.

GILES ALLEN
11 July 1995

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MM69, 30 April 1974

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