

## Birth Bicentenary of Jane Austen

Date of issue: 22 OCTOBER 1975



Jane Austen was born at Steventon in Hampshire on 16 December 1775, the seventh child of Reverend George Austen, rector of the parish. Her five brothers became clergymen or admirals; her sister Cassandra was to be her lifelong confidante (in later years the pair were described as 'two of the prettiest girls in England'). In 1784 she briefly attended school in Reading but was otherwise mainly educated by her father. By her 16th birthday she was already writing literary parodies and more serious stories to entertain her family; with their encouragement she completed 'Sense & Sensibility' and 'Pride & Prejudice', and had largely finished 'Northanger Abbey' by the end of 1798. In 1801 the family moved to Bath, and after her father's death in 1805, to Southampton; from 1809 Jane's last home was at Chawton in Hampshire, where she wrote 'Emma', 'Persuasion' and 'Mansfield Park'.

Austen characterised her work as 'pictures of domestic life in country villages', and on another occasion remarked: 'Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery'; she regarded her novels as strictly a pastime, from which she made only £700 in her lifetime. She never married, but seems to have had no regrets on this score. Her life was far from sheltered; she regularly visited friends and relations in London, Bath and elsewhere, and her pleasures are listed as including music, dancing, cards, wine, country walks, conversation, children and reading novels. In May 1817 she fell prey to Addison's Disease (to which all three Brontë sisters would later succumb); she died in Winchester on 18 July and is buried in the Cathedral. Four of her novels were published anonymously between 1811 and 1816; it was only with the posthumous publication of 'Persuasion' and 'Northanger Abbey' in 1818 that her identity became known. Since then almost everything she wrote has been published including private letters and abandoned or unfinished stories both early and late.

## ISSUE FIRST PROPOSED

In September 1973 regional directors circularised for their thoughts on the 1975 stamp programme: the bicentenary of Jane Austen's birth was included in a list of possible subjects. At least three suggestions had been received from outside the Post Office, including one from Miss Joan Quennell, Conservative MP for Petersfield, Hants, about seven miles from Chawton. Other 'literary' occasions in 1975 were the 450th anniversary of Tyndale's translation of the Bible into English, the birth bicentenary of Charles Lamb, the 150th anniversaries of the births of R M Ballantyne and R D Blackmore, and the centenaries of John Buchan's birth and Charles Kingsley's death; it was not surprising that several regions advocated another series such as the Literary Anniversaries set of 1971. Trevor Carpenter, Chairman of the Scottish Postal Board, replied on 21 September that Jane Austen was 'obviously peerless' amongst the writers listed, but that the inclusion of Blackmore, Buchan, Kingsley and Ballantyne could make an attractive set. The immediate reaction of E G White, Director of Marketing, was restricted to the comment that Buchan was reportedly anti-Semitic.

On 11 October Desmond Wilkey, Chairman of the North Eastern Postal Board, suggested a set made up of Austen, Buchan and Lamb, while the following day Miss D J Fothergill, Director of the London Postal Region, proposed Austen, Lamb, Kingsley and possibly Blackmore. Finally, on 15 October, Kenneth Gowen, Director of the South West Postal Region, replied supporting an issue of Austen, Tyndale, Kingsley and either Buchan or Blackmore - he added that 'Tyndale, Kingsley and Blackmore all had West Country associations which we would promote', strangely overlooking Austen's own connections with Bath.

Discussion of the 1975 programme took place at the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting of 25 October, under the chairmanship of White. The suggestion was made by Anthony Lousada (Chairman of the Council of the Royal College of Art and a former Chairman of the Trustees of the Tate Gallery) that a 'Great Britons' set could be based around the birth bicentenaries of Jane Austen and the painter J M W Turner, as a sequel to the similar set planned for 1974 incorporating mediaeval warriors. The proposal for a set on Jane Austen was accepted; it was generally felt in the light of past experience that the design problems of sets such as that proposed combining Austen and Turner were best avoided. Nevertheless Lousada pressed the idea at the meetings on 6 December and 16 January 1974; it was finally decided at the January meeting that the programme put to the Post Office Board should include separate issues for each of the two bicentenaries.

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## LINKS WITH IWY CONSIDERED

It was also at the January meeting that D M Elliott, speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications, pointed out that several subjects for which strong outside pressure was being exerted via the Ministry had so far been passed over - these included a 'winter sports' set featuring skiing (pressed by the Foreign Office as a goodwill gesture to Switzerland), the quincentenary of Michelangelo's birth (personally favoured by the Prime Minister, Edward Heath) and the UN-sponsored International Women's Year (IWY) of 1975 which was supported by Baroness Tweedsmuir, Minister of State at the Foreign Office. It was Elliott's recommendation that if one of these subjects could be adopted, pressure for the other two might be more easily resisted; his advice was taken insofar as the SAC agreed that publicity material on the Jane Austen issue could be linked to IWY, while the 'winter sports' proposal was also adopted.

On 17 January White presented the 1975 programme as agreed by the SAC to the Managing Director (Posts) (MDP), Alex Currall. He pointed out that the year as proposed, including commemoration of the Austen bicentenary, would cover literature in addition to architecture, engineering and painting. A set based on illustrations to Jane Austen's novels was favoured, probably depicting contemporary costume and thus bringing in the theme of costume design as well as literature. Currall commented in his reply on 23 January that, 'however worthy the purposes of International Women's Year I think it is unacceptable as a theme for commemorative stamps. Perhaps the sponsors will take consolation from our celebration of the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of Jane Austen.'

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## AGREEMENT BY BOARD AND BENN

In support of the 1975 programme put to the Post Office Management Board on 18 February, the MDP argued Jane Austen's 'pre-eminence' in English literature, especially in comparison to the year's other literary anniversaries - 'among the births at least, none could be ranked with Miss Austen'. The intention was that the issue would feature characters from her novels, showing the costumes of the period. Besides its specialist attraction to thematic collectors as a 'costume' set, Currall considered the issue would have general marketing appeal: 'Jane Austen is highly popular, if not always directly through her books, then through the television and cinema presentations of them.' On the subject of IWY the MDP wrote in his paper for the Board that 'the spirit of such a year would be far better served by concentrating on the achievement of notable women, such as Jane Austen. Should we issue a set for Miss Austen, then it may be taken as our contribution.' This was moderated from a more forthright earlier version, which commented on the topic of IWY: 'Subjects as large and diffuse as this ... are notoriously difficult to portray on stamps ... It is considered more appropriate from all points of view that we mark the birth of a

British woman of genius, whose achievements are recognised and tangible, than an essentially artificial occasion.’

The Board largely accepted the programme as submitted including the set for Jane Austen; writing to Sir Frank Wood, senior civil servant at the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications, on 29 March, Currall suggested that, ‘by a happy coincidence of date’, the set would constitute an adequate gesture towards the celebration of IWY in 1975. Discussion on those issues for which there was external pressure was sustained for some while following the February Board meeting, particularly when Postal Marketing effectively revised the ‘winter sports’ proposal out of existence at the urging of the Design Director Stuart Rose. It was only on 2 August 1974 that Anthony Wedgwood Benn, Secretary of State for Industry under the new Labour government and the minister now responsible for postal affairs, reluctantly agreed to accept the programme as now submitted and abandon the IWY proposal.

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## BARBARA BROWN COMMISSIONED

It had been decided as early as 11 March 1974 to commission the Jane Austen stamps from Barbara G Brown of Saxon Artists Ltd. On 20 March Miss Brown met Stuart Rose to discuss preliminary ideas; it seems that her idea of basing the designs on single or paired characters from the novels was already largely formed at this stage. In the ‘singles’ category Mr Darcy, the sisters Elizabeth and Kitty Bennett [‘Pride & Prejudice’], Emma Woodhouse and Mr Knightley [‘Emma’] were all mentioned, while Darcy and Elizabeth, Mr and Mrs Bennett, Lydia and Kitty Bennett [‘Pride & Prejudice’], Mary and Henry Crawford [‘Mansfield Park’], and Harriet and Emma Woodhouse were all considered as pairs. It was quickly agreed that Mr Darcy should be shown singly and the Crawfords as a pair; the pairing of Lydia and Kitty Bennett was considered but dropped in favour of Emma and her father Mr Woodhouse, and the solo appearance of Emma replaced by that of Catherine Morland [‘Northanger Abbey’]. The artist was formally invited to submit designs for four stamps on 25 March, the invitation containing the following instructions:

- the stamps to measure 1.5 inches by 1.07 inches in printed area (1.6 inches by 1.17 inches or 41mm by 30mm perforation to perforation) and could be in either landscape or portrait format throughout, but not a mixture of the two; artwork should be prepared four times stamp size (6 inches by 4.29 inches);
- there should be a consistent choice of subject matter and design style;
- the overall or dominant colour of each stamp should be different to avoid confusion between values;
- the Queen’s head could be in either half-tone or silhouette;
- if possible, the value figures, caption, and Queen’s head should be on detachable clear acetate overlays.

£150 was payable for each completed design up to a maximum of £600, plus an additional £150 for each design actually used.

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## FIRST ARTWORK SUBMITTED

Despite the size of artwork specified in the instructions, all Miss Brown's designs throughout were stamp size. She later explained: 'I decided to draw all the subjects stamp-size, partly because it seemed to me the most natural size to work at, and partly because for technical reasons I felt that the results would be more within my control than if I had drawn them to a larger scale' (she added that Austen once described her own work as that of a miniaturist). On 22 April she produced six initial pencil sketches; these included three variants of a design featuring Catherine Morland, one of Emma and Mr Woodhouse, and two of Mary and Henry Crawford. She was asked to develop these further and submitted finished roughs on 3 June; these comprised the designs used with minor variations in the final set, plus two variants of Emma and Mr Woodhouse.

Barbara Brown gave a retrospective description of her designs in the 'British Philatelic Bulletin' of October 1975:

From the four novels which seemed to me the most widely read ... I selected six characters whom I thought I could most successfully define and comment on within a limited area. I selected no characters with whom I could not sympathise ... Emma Woodhouse, the reigning queen of her busy humdrum court, typifies a quality of life that the restless stylish Crawfords would probably reject. These designs showing paired, as opposed to single figures, seemed to me particularly important because I wished them to suggest the strongly conversational style of the novels. As for Mr Woodhouse, I selected him in preference to any other character who would equally well have partnered Emma, partly because it seemed to me essential to include one of Jane Austen's brilliant characterisations of those in their middle or later years, and partly because Mr Woodhouse seems to me an unjustly despised gentleman. The dissimilarity between the sedentary parent and the scheming daughter provides another contrast with the intimate, accomplice-like relationship between Henry Crawford and his sister Mary ... Mr Darcy, aloof and distant, had to stand alone epitomising the title of the novel whose hero he is clearly destined to be; while Catherine Morland, very human and silly, is at least for the time content to wander alone through an illusive world of Gothic fantasy.

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## DESIGNS SEEN BY SAC

The designs were seen and approved by the SAC on 5 June; the proviso was made that variations on the amount of information (Austen's name and dates, book titles, names of characters) to be included in the captions should be tried out in time for the next meeting. At this point the value shown was 9p, and the captions were indicated but not included. Following the June meeting Miss Brown prepared a number of alternative captions on large transparencies as follows:

- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Catherine Morland
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Northanger Abbey (also reproduced by printers as large bromide, approximately twice stamp size)
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Northanger Abbey
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Mr D'Arcy [sic]
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Pride and Prejudice
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Pride and Prejudice (also reproduced by printers as large bromide, approximately twice stamp size)
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Emma & Mr Woodhouse (2)
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Emma & Mr Woodhouse (exists only as large bromide)
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Mary & Henry Crawford (also reproduced by printers as large bromide, approximately twice stamp size)
- Jane Austen 1775-1817 Mansfield Park.

It is not known whether three variations were originally produced for each of the four designs or if only those listed were completed as a demonstration of alternatives. In each case the caption was in the left-hand border of the design, although its placing varied from centred to right-aligned on the top left-hand corner or left-aligned on bottom left. All the transparencies bore the 5½p value and the Queen's head in silhouette.

The finished designs were received on 29 July, and finally seen by the SAC on 12 September with varying styles of caption:

- Mr Darcy / Pride & Prejudice (5½p) – caption aligned to left
- Catherine Morland / Northanger Abbey (5½p) – caption centred
- Emma & Mr Woodhouse / Emma (5½p) – caption aligned to right
- Mary & Henry Crawford / Mansfield Park (no value) – no caption.

The meeting decided in favour of right-aligned captions in italics with the names of the depicted characters rather than the novels from which they were taken. The following order of values was agreed: 4½p, Emma and Mr Woodhouse; 5½p, Catherine Morland; 8p, Mr Darcy; 10p, Mary and Henry Crawford. It was felt apt that the paired figures should be at

either end of the value range and the single portraits in the middle. R F York of the stamp printers Harrison and Sons retained the artwork so that essays could be produced; the required values and captions were supplied to Harrisons on 24 September. Part of the delay seems to have been caused by uncertainty within Marketing over the correct spelling of 'Morland'; the misspelling of 'D'Arcy' was altered.

### **First essays received**

Initial essays were supplied by Harrisons on 10 December, of 4½p Mr Darcy, 5½p Catherine Morland, 8p Emma & Mr Woodhouse, 10p Mary and Henry Crawford.

The transposition of values of the 'D'Arcy' and 'Emma' designs from those agreed by the SAC seems to have been a simple error amended in subsequent essays; another curiosity is the use of '&' on the 8p but 'and' on the 10p. In his instructions to Harrisons on 24 September Stuart Rose had specifically told them to use the captions with the ampersands not spelled out as 'and' - no later correspondence is recorded to explain this apparent anomaly. Barbara Brown had also used 'Mary & Henry Crawford' in her captions following the June SAC meeting. The discrepancy brought no comment at the time; neither caption was subsequently amended.

When the SAC saw the essays on 12 December, Rose urged that any changes should be agreed in consultation with Barbara Brown; the meeting felt, however, that little improvement was practicable. R F York recommended, on behalf of Harrisons, that the stamps be printed in photogravure and intaglio, to make full use of the dual process capacities of the printer's new 'Jumelle' press; Harrisons had printed some of the 5½p essays in intaglio and others in photogravure, and Rose received one essay of each from York the same day.

The first essays were finally approved as they stood at the following meeting on 16 January 1975. By this time postage rates were being revised, and the new values were provisionally set at 7p, 8p, 10p and 12p. On 19 February the Post Office chemists reported that examples from the first essays had been tested for response to letter facing and sorting equipment, and were suitable for phosphor coating or printing with two bars or overall.

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### **FURTHER ESSAYS IN INTAGLIO**

On 25 March Rose sent Harrisons Barbara Brown's revised artwork with the new values, plus her line drawings of the designs for printing in intaglio and asked for essays in the dual process. The same day York forwarded further essays of the first 5½p which he described as follows:

I have enclosed two cards containing essays of Jane Austen. The recess outline on the left is a pull from Jumelle, the one next to it is the same dye but pulled on our sheet fed press with reduced inking to make it more acceptable as a background to the gravure colours ... The one on the extreme left was too strong for this particular design ... I believe [these cards] will be invaluable for you over the coming months to show the designers what can be done with intaglio ... Subtle differences, and in some instances considerable contrast, can be achieved by both the gravure and recess processes. The two stamps with the gravure on have been pulled with very slight changes of colour and there is also a subtle difference in the strength of the background iron work.

It appears from this description that these essays were prepared mainly to demonstrate the variety of effects that could be achieved in intaglio and photogravure with different strengths of ink; at this time Harrisons was keen to combine the two methods of printing on all special issues in the second half of 1975, while Stuart Rose was more than ready to see this. He replied to York on 26 March: 'Thank you so much for letting me have the experimental Jane Austen essays. They are most interesting and will be a great help while we are developing the two processes.'

In a telephone conversation on 23 April to Harrisons the company was asked to show the characters in the order first agreed by the SAC and ensure that Mr Darcy's name was spelt correctly when supplying fresh essays in the new values. On 9 May the company supplied a set of revised essays:

- 7p - Emma & Mr Woodhouse
- 8p - Catherine Morland
- 10p - Mr Darcy
- 12p - Mary and Henry Crawford.

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## DUAL PROCESS ABANDONED

As requested, the essays were printed in combined photogravure and intaglio; during the rest of May, however, while producing the Sailing issue, it became apparent that bulk printing of stamps by the dual process on Harrison's Jumelle press was not possible without a significant loss of quality. On 10 June the Director of Marketing wrote to Rose summarising the conclusions reached in recent discussions on stamp production and costs; included was the decision that 'no use will be made of the intaglio facility [on the] commemorative issues in the pipeline at present'. Stuart Rose replied to White on 12 June, agreeing that 'the intaglio facility ... is not performing to the required standard. Until it does, it would be unwise to risk the consequence of running it.' On 16 June D W Barker of Marketing forwarded sets of the 9 May essays to White for submission to the MDP,



Chairman and Secretary of State, explaining: 'The essays were prepared with the intaglio process but the stamps will be printed in photogravure only. In the present circumstances there would be considerable delay if we were to ask for the essays without the intaglio.' However, Harrisons was in fact able to supply a new set of essays on 23 June; these were received on 26 June and on the following day submitted to the Queen, who approved them on 1 July, being returned to the MDP on 4 July.

The approved essays had slightly thinner lettering in the captions and value figures.

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### DATE OF ISSUE CHANGED

Another problem had meanwhile emerged that would affect the date of issue. Inflation was high in 1975: the postage rate increase already mentioned had taken place on 17 March; a second one was now envisaged for 29 September. The rates represented by the Jane Austen set were again affected, and would now be 8½p, 10p, 11p and 13p. It was felt in the interests of security (despite Harrisons reliability in this area) that both production and announcement of any stamps in these values should be curtailed until the Post Office had publicly announced its new increase. The new rates were announced provisionally on 9 July and the first details of the Jane Austen stamps on 21 July; production for the set (essays with new values, preparatory work on cylinders, etc) and hence the final date of issue were put back by two weeks.

It had been clear from the start that Austen's actual birth date in December would clash with the Christmas stamps, and so the set was originally planned for July or August 1975, between the Sailing and Christmas issues. In the first press announcement in December 1974 the stamps were scheduled for 8 October; at the end of June 1975 it was agreed that the new date should be 22 October. Prior to the 21 July press notice discussion reached the view that special stamps were less 'sensitive' than definitives and the announcement would not necessarily be misinterpreted as an attempt to pre-empt the Price Commission or Post Office Users' National Council before their consideration of Post Office proposals. However, it was resolved that any queries about the delayed issue date should be answered that it was due to the unscheduled introduction to the programme of the IPU issue in early September, and also production difficulties at Harrisons in the wake of the print union's national overtime ban. Statements to this effect were in fact published (for example in the 31 July issue of 'Stamp Collecting') whereas these factors had little or no relevance in the decision.

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## STAMPS PRINTED AND ISSUED

Harrisons was sent new artwork for the denominations on 18 July, and began preparing cylinders on 21 July. Due to unspecified difficulties during the previous week Harrisons had still not started printing by 8 August; by 29 August, however, initial requirements had been met on all values except the 8½p, which began printing the previous day and was expected to be completed by 8 September. White explained in a note to the MDP: 'Proofing has been slow but there should be no real problems.' The stamps were shown to the press at a launch on 9 September.

The stamps were issued as scheduled on 22 October, printed in photogravure, on unwatermarked paper with all-over phosphor and PVA dextrin gum, in sheets of 100. The Queen's head was printed in gold on all four stamps, the other colours being: blue, dull green, rose-red, light yellow, slate and grey-black (8½p); bright magenta, grey, light yellow, slate and grey-black (10p); dull blue, pink, olive-sepia, pale greenish yellow, slate and grey-black (11p); bright magenta, light new blue, buff, dull blue-green, slate and grey-black (13p). The issue was recalled from ordinary counters on 24 December, and withdrawn altogether on 21 October 1976; final sales were reported as 44,040,000 of the 8½p, 8,280,000 of the 10p, 7,600,000 of the 11p, and 6,920,000 of the 13p.

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## FIRST DAY COVER AND PACK

The issue was as usual accompanied by a first day envelope and a presentation pack, both designed by Jeffery Matthews; texts for the envelope filler card and for the pack were by Alan Martin Harvey at a fee of £50. Barbara Brown supplied five drawings for the pack for a fee of £100: a cameo portrait of Jane Austen, scenes from 'Mansfield Park', 'Persuasion' and 'Pride & Prejudice', and the writer's house in Chawton. There were 135,000 packs supplied, reportedly sold out by September 1976. There were 561,000 envelopes and filler cards ordered from Robor Ltd to meet requisitions, although rather fewer than 550,000 (plus 3,000 envelopes with the inscription 'Post Office Souvenir Cover' and additional artwork) seem to have been supplied. About 4,00 to 5,000 A4 'workcards' promoting the stamps were produced for schools following the enthusiastic response to a 'Great Britons' package which had recently been issued; both these and the packs were printed by Moore & Matthes Ltd. There were 27,337 sets of four 'PHQ' postcards reproducing the stamps also issued.

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## PAYMENTS TO ARTISTS AND PRINTERS

In addition to the pack and envelopes Jeffery Matthews also designed two pictorial handstamps. For this and his other work he was paid a total of £404.45 in May 1975, plus

£10 in August for amending the date of issue on the handstamps (all fees were subject to VAT at 8 per cent). Barbara Brown was paid £600 for finished artwork in June 1974 and £600 for accepted designs in August 1975; in addition to this she received £100 for her presentation pack drawings in April 1975 and £40 the following month for her outline drawings for essays in intaglio. Harrison's invoice for work on the stamps presented on 24 September comprised £45,812 for 'development' and £3,665 for other costs - the overall total included £7,869 for 'intaglio ink trials', although it was not possible for all intaglio costs to be identified in retrospect.

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## POSTMARKS AND HANDSTAMPS

The usual first day of issue service were supplemented by special handstamps for the Philatelic Bureau and at Steventon, Hants, for which Jeffery Matthews based his designs around Jane Austen's initials. On the day of issue a philatelic exhibition with a Post Office counter and display was organised in Steventon Church Hall by the local Bicentenary Committee; 80,000 covers were reported as processed via Basingstoke. In addition to the official Post Office cover, the Bicentenary Committee also produced its own, of which 8,000 were sold. A 'Despatched by Mailcoach' cachet was also available on items that a mail coach carried from Steventon to Basingstoke via another collection point at nearby Hilsea College - those involved wore period dress. Another handstamp at Steventon was sponsored later in the year to mark Austen's birthday on 16 December, for which a special posting box was provided in the Church Hall. A bicentenary exhibition including a Post Office display was also held in the Pump Room in Bath for three weeks from 6 October, and was marked by a special handstamp and cover for the day of issue, posting boxes being provided in the Pump Room, the Abbey churchyard souvenir shop, and the Assembly Rooms costume museum. Finally, the British Library held a bicentenary exhibition, of original manuscripts, first editions, paintings and other items connected with Jane Austen from 9 December 1975 to 29 February 1976 - this included pencil sketches, finished artwork and essays of the issued stamps. R F S West of the British Library saw the material at the press launch and wrote to Miss F Ladbury of Postal Marketing on 12 September: 'The material you have is so impressive that I would like the Public to have the benefit of seeing it.'

Another handstamp on the day of issue was for the 'Story of a Cathedral' exhibition at Canterbury, Kent - this handstamp was in use from 24 July to 23 October. Slogan postmarks marking the bicentenary were provided at Alton, Basingstoke, Southampton and Winchester from 6 July to 2 August and again from 5 October to 2 November. All four places in Hampshire had Austen connections - ordinary circular datestamp impressions for the day of issue from Alton, Chawton and Steventon were also of interest to collectors.

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## PRAISE AND CRITICISM

The stamps were generally received warmly; K J Ley, Chief Press Officer of the Post Office and in his own words 'a great admirer of Jane', wrote on 26 August to Sir Hugh Smiley, Secretary of the Jane Austen Society, that in his personal opinion 'the designs are among the most attractive we have ever produced'. Mrs Joyce Bown, Secretary of the Steventon Bicentenary Committee, told Stuart Rose after the press launch that the stamps were sure to be 'a tremendous success', while 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' for November 1975 stated that it full marks to the Post Office and to Barbara Brown, the designer, for the four charming 'period pieces'. Barbara Brown was relieved that the product of her labours 'seemed to find favour', but commented privately:

I do wish I could have stood at the printer's elbow when he mixed the colour for Mary Crawford's dress ... I hope very much that people will buy the [PHQ] postcards as well as the stamps, because the colours are more truthful, while, of course, they don't have the clarity and definition of the stamps.

At least one member of the public (M Homer Osburn of Tunbridge Wells) wrote censuring Alan Martin Harvey for his suggestion in the first day envelope text that Henry Crawford in 'Mansfield Park' 'attempts the seduction' of Fanny Price. This complaint found its way to Postal Marketing, where it attracted the informal comment: The subject is a bit 'near the mark' for my innocent ears. Are you sure he's talking about Jane Austen and not Harold Robbins? The outcome of Osburn's complaint is not recorded.

A question arose at the end of November of whether Mr Darcy's overcoat on the 11p stamp was correctly depicted, in that it was shown as buttoning from right to left rather than the reverse, as was now the norm. Mrs Muriel Ross, Chief Librarian at the London College of Fashion, was able to demonstrate from illustrations that there was no strict rule in the period of Austen's novels as to which way fashionable men's coats were buttoned.

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## WRITERS AND THE ARTIST

Jane Austen was the first woman writer to feature on a British stamp.

Barbara Brown, the designer of the stamps, was a graduate of the Royal College of Art; as a freelance illustrator of books and magazines she was later commissioned to design the Famous Authoresses set of 1980 and the 1982 Christmas stamps. She was one of a handful of artists who preferred to produce designs in actual stamp size.

GILES ALLEN  
9 January 1997

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