

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

## Birth Bicentenary of JMW Turner

Date of issue: 19 FEBRUARY 1975



The first steps towards the 1975 stamp programme was to canvas on 12 September 1973 regional directors for their proposals; the Post Office had already received a large number of suggestions for subjects, at least three proposing the bicentenary of Turner's birth. One came from Sir Norman Reid, Director of the Tate Gallery, making joint plans with the Royal Academy for an exhibition of Turner's work. The stamp printers Harrison & Sons Ltd had already essayed Turner's works on two previous occasions - *The Fighting 'Temeraire'* (1839) early in 1967, and *Portsmouth* (1824), from the artist's 'Ports of England' series, in early 1968. These had not been solicited by the Post Office but produced as demonstrations of what Harrisons could achieve. These essays had been viewed by the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) in connection with projected issues on paintings, but turned down.

When the SAC began discussion of the 1975 programme on 25 October, the artist's bicentenary did not attract general support. E G White, Chairman of the SAC and Director of Marketing (DPM), explained that the Post Office felt it was 'virtually committed' to four issues marking Christmas, the 150th anniversary of Britain's first railway, the opening of the National Theatre and the European Architectural Heritage Year. White also favoured a sports issue centred on the 50th anniversary of Anglo-Swiss ski racing. As it was hoped to limit the number of special issues to six, this left one subject open; Anthony Lousada, Chairman of the Royal College of Art and a former Chairman of Trustees of the Tate Gallery, suggested this might be another 'Great Britons' set to follow the 'mediaeval warriors' stamps agreed for 1974 - he proposed it should combine the bi-centenaries of the birth of both Turner and Jane Austen. However, the meeting only adopted the Jane Austen idea, probably at the urging of SAC member Stuart Rose.

As Design Adviser to the Post Office, Rose did not object to the inclusion of details of paintings, sketches, engravings, and so on, where these would highlight or harmonise with other features of a design. However, he generally opposed on aesthetic grounds the 'paintings on stamps' concept: 'it is difficult to defend the printing in minuscule of original

works which were created at a different scale and in a different medium'. Despite his advice, there had been, starting in July 1967, five such sets issued and it was acknowledged that these were extremely popular; Rose had, however, succeeded, not without difficulty, to establish as design policy that none of the 'design elements' (such as Queen's head, denomination and inscription) should intrude on the reproduction itself. He customarily positioned these 'design elements' personally, feeling it invidious to ask another designer to do something of which he disapproved.

At the SAC's meeting on 6 December the residue of the 1975 programme remained undecided; the 'sports' theme had proved to present difficulties and the Chairman now felt that another issue on flowers as in 1964 and 1967 would be 'an attractive and popular alternative'. Amid this indecision Lousada again put forward Turner, as 'probably the greatest English painter'. Rose argued that there were some subjects whose undeniable greatness could not be properly translated into stamp form, and thought that Turner might prove a case in point. However, the meeting agreed that Lousada should show slides of paintings by Turner in support of his case when the SAC met on 16 January 1974.

Lousada reiterated at the January meeting that Turner was probably the only British painter of international stature and that the opportunity for an issue should not be missed, despite the design problems he was aware would arise. He repeated that Turner might be included in the same issue as Austen. After slides of Turner's works had been shown the Chairman read a letter supporting a Turner issue, from Richard Guyatt, recently appointed Pro-Rector of the Royal College of Art: Professor Guyatt had been a member of the SAC since 1963 and had produced several designs for the Post Office. The meeting agreed that it was unnecessary and undesirable, for design reasons, to combine Turner and Austen and that the artist merited an issue to himself; this was helped by the decision to combine the National Theatre and European Architectural Year proposals.

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## MICHELANGELO vs TURNER

The SAC was forced to consider another suggestion: this was for a set marking the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth, a suggestion that dated back almost a year and was known to be strongly favoured by the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, who had brought informal pressure to bear via the office of Sir William Ryland, Chairman of the Post Office Corporation. If sufficient pressure was applied, it might be necessary to introduce a Michaelangelo set either additional to or combined with Turner, or even replacing it outright. The SAC discussed such ideas and rejected them decisively. The following day, White wrote to A Currall, the Managing Director, Posts (MDP): 'SAC members feel that British stamps should deal with British subjects, as indeed do I. We could not even fit this in with the same set as Turner.' Michaelangelo had no British associations, while Turner was of

comparable international stature – as White commented, he was of greater eminence than some of the artists honoured by the Post Office in the past. The view was expressed that two separate issues on painters would unbalance the 1975 programme, while a combined issue would not work because of the differences in period and style. These views were reiterated in papers prepared for the next Post Office Management Board meeting on 18 February; nevertheless the Board felt that the SAC should reconsider including Michaelangelo, either separately or jointly with Turner.

This immediately provoked a strong reaction; Stuart Rose wrote in a memorandum to David Burn of Postal Marketing on 19 February, ‘to replace Turner, one of the world’s best painters, by Michaelangelo would betray an oddly-distorted sense of patriotism and fine art judgement’. On 21 February Burn in turn warned the MDP:

The Stamp Advisory Committee are firmly of the opinion that there is no case for the inclusion of Michaelangelo ... To replace the Turner issue with Michaelangelo would probably result in resignations from the SAC. To combine the Turner issue with Michaelangelo would meet with the strongest opposition from the SAC (though probably not to the point of resignation) because the styles of the two men are so different as to detract seriously from the design value of such an issue ... We should not make their task more difficult or go against their advice on design unless we have a very sound reason.

The SAC met on 27 February and discussed the Board’s argument that there was a strong case for including Michaelangelo under the criteria for special issues laid down in 1964, which included ‘important anniversaries’ and events of ‘international importance’. While conceding it was possible to commemorate ‘a foreigner with no British associations’ under these terms, there had been ‘a consistent practice of choosing events and anniversaries having a direct relationship to British affairs or people’. It was the ‘strong and unanimous’ view of the meeting to re-affirm the position taken on 16 January.

On 1 March White urged the MDP not to press the Michaelangelo proposal further, as it could not be achieved without detriment to the Turner issue, damage to stamp design standards in general, or both. He wished to avoid any resignations from the SAC over the principles involved, which he thought a possibility, as it was hoped to re-appoint the existing members in May with the minimum of changes. Currall was persuaded by this to recommend to the next Board meeting, on 4 March, that the idea of a Michaelangelo issue should be abandoned; this was reluctantly accepted, although there was a view that the SAC’s strong stand had been ‘excessively insular’, with an ominous hint that its role would be scrutinised.

## DESIGN OF THE TURNER STAMPS

At the close of the SAC's January meeting, the next step regarding the Turner issue had, in Stuart Rose's words, been 'left in the air'. In fact, Rose intended to follow his customary course with 'paintings' sets, first consulting with Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, over the suitability for photogravure reproduction of any material under consideration, and second making himself responsible for positioning and detail of the Queen's head, value and inscription on each stamp. Writing in the 'British Philatelic Bulletin' for September 1975, he explained his concerns with the Turner stamps:

If we are to commemorate a painter with an issue of stamps, we really have no option but to use his own work ... it seemed to me that we had to represent both [Turner's] oil paintings and his watercolours. So many of his oils are far too large to stand up to such reduction, so we looked for those oils which were relatively small in format, typical of a period in his life and reasonably well known. We applied the same yardstick in selecting the watercolours ... [and] were helped by the fact that nearly all his watercolours were small in size.

Rose did not consider that true 'reproduction' of a painting was possible at stamp size, and chose those paintings that would facilitate the printer's most skilful 'interpretation'. He considered this more important than selecting the best examples of an artist's work. Minor factors (at least initially) were an attempt to cover the whole of Turner's career and to divide the selection equally between those predominantly dark in colour (tending to predate 1820) and predominantly lighter-coloured works. In the event, neither of these lesser criteria was followed through with any rigour.

On 22 January 1974 Lousada wrote to Stuart Rose:

I am sorry that my urging the Committee to have Turner stamps should have been against your wishes. I do realise what a beastly task it is reducing pictures to this minute size, but ... I did feel it essential that we should not let this anniversary go by unmarked.

Rose replied on 25 January:

I quite understand your zeal to commemorate Turner's anniversary, which I share, even though I still question the use of the postage stamp as an appropriate medium. Nevertheless there comes a time when it just becomes a bore to continue with one's personal objection, whether it is valid or not.

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## CHOICE OF PAINTINGS

Although Rose was content to make a selection from Turner's works (concentrating on seascapes and landscapes, rather than portraits) he welcomed Lousada's further suggestions, which followed on 29 January. These included Peace - Burial at Sea, Snowstorm - Steamboat off a harbour's mouth and The Shipwreck; Lousada also suggested that if 'a couple of really long stamps' were considered, Bay of Baiae, Chichester Canal, and The Thames, near Walton Bridges were also possibilities. These were all in oils; Rose was also considering Turner's watercolours, and of these Lousada suggested Edinburgh from St Margaret's Loch, Vesuvius in Eruption, and Venice looking east from the Giudecca - early morning. He commented that these might look 'very pretty' but questioned whether they should be mixed with oils; with regard to reproduction in stamp size he thought that Snowstorm 'would only come out as a beautiful abstract pattern' but would be effective if well reproduced. The Shipwreck, on the other hand, might well be very suitable: 'I have once done a tiny copy of this for a dolls house and it came out remarkably well.' It is not recorded whether any of these were included in the slides seen by the SAC; the only identified title of those shown is Crossing the brook, which was well received as 'a handsome picture', but Lousada pointed out, 'Kenneth Clark in his recent book describes it as anodyne and says it has appeared on more calendars perhaps than any other picture. Consequently, I would rather keep off it.' This was presumably a reference to Lord Clark's 'The Romantic Rebellion', published 1973.

Iain Bain of the Tate Gallery Publications Department was able to supply Rose with a large number of slides and transparencies of Turner's oils in the Tate and also of his watercolours which were largely held by the British Museum. During the following month Rose, liaising with Harrisons and Peter Shrives of Postal Marketing, examined 17 works by Turner to determine their suitability for reproduction on stamps; these can fairly be assumed to have comprised seven oils (Crossing the brook; Bridge of Sighs; The Shipwreck; Bay of Baiae; The 'Sun of Venice' going to sea; Peace - burial at sea; Snowstorm) and ten watercolours (Burning of the Houses of Parliament; St Laurent; Petworth: playing billiards; Girls at Petworth [also known as Two ladies sitting by the fire]; The Arsenal, Rio di San Daniele, Venice; Greens and blues [also known as Buildings by a lake]; Santa Maria della Salute: night scene with rockets; Venice from the Giudecca; Venice from Fusina; Shade and darkness: the evening of the deluge). The following titles have also been identified as possibly also considered: Venice - the Piazzetta with the ceremony of the Doge marrying the sea; Ship on fire; Boats at sea; Storm clouds, sunset; Shore and sky; Sunrise at sea; A pink sky about a grey sea; Paris - the Porte of St Denis; On the coast. On 26 February Rose showed 'about eight' transparencies to a meeting of Postal Marketing representatives and the London Materials Section (LMS) for an opinion on whether the reproductions on phosphor stamp paper would cause any technical problems when passed under ultra-violet light in automated sorting or cancelling equipment. LMS gave its approval, albeit with

reservations in two unspecified cases. Rose finally showed the SAC slides of eight short-listed works by Turner at its meeting of 21 March; these were:

Peace - Burial at sea (1841-42 - oil)

Snowstorm (1842 - oil)

The Arsenal (c1840 - watercolour)

Buildings by a lake \* (1845 - watercolour)

Girls at Petworth \*\* (1827 - watercolour)

St Laurent (1826-33 - watercolour)

Venice from the Giudecca (1819 - watercolour)

Venice from Fusina (c1840 - watercolour).

\* This work was first described in the 1909 Finberg inventory as Greens and blues. The title Buildings by a lake is that currently accepted and was used throughout the design process.

\*\* This title was used in the 1909 inventory and throughout the design process, but this work

is now known as Two ladies sitting by the fire.

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## SHORTLIST AGREED

The short-list was predominantly of watercolours, as these lent themselves more readily to reduction, being generally of smaller size initially. The earlier idea of spanning Turner's career had been largely abandoned; however, half on the short-list were chiefly light in colour (St Laurent, Venice from the Giudecca, Venice from Fusina, Buildings by a lake) with the remainder predominantly darker. The meeting approved the short-list for essaying, any further selection being postponed until this was done.

It was decided to obtain fresh transparencies of all eight paintings; John Webb, liaising with Harrison's technical staff and the Tate Gallery, completed this by 9 April, including a second copy of Girls at Petworth (all nine transparencies are in the British Postal Museum & Archive). At the beginning of May the transparencies were passed to Harrisons, plus artwork by Stuart Rose indicating the layout and lettering - this included two rough designs of which one (with a 4½p value) incorporated The Arsenal, and the other (3½p) S Maria della Salute - night scene with rockets; although this last had not been short-listed it was sufficiently representative to provide an indication to problems of reproduction that might arise. The SAC met on 25 April and was advised that the Turner issue was scheduled for late February 1975, to be out in time for both the opening of the Spring Stampex philatelic exhibition (25 February to 1 March) and the final weeks of the Royal Academy's Turner showing (16 November 1974 to 2 March 1975).

On 17 June Miss F Ladbury of Postal Marketing wrote to the Supplies Department as a reminder that provisional targets of 4 September for essays to be approved, and 11

December for the delivery to Supplies of initial stocks, had been agreed; the issue date was now scheduled for 12 February 1975. She n hoped that essays could be ready in time for the SAC meeting on 17 July, rather than 7 August as previously arranged, as there was no further SAC meeting until 12 September. Harrison's first essays were completed on 1 July and despatched on 4 July, as follows:

St Laurent - 4½p

Venice from Fusina - 4½p

The Arsenal - 5½p

Girls at Petworth - 5½p

Peace - burial at sea - 8p

Snowstorm - 8p

Venice from the Giudecca - 10p

Buildings by a lake - 10p.

At the meeting on 17 July, Snowstorm, Peace, The Arsenal, St Laurent and Buildings by a Lake were selected for further development; Rose said that the captions and numerals would be printed in grey, and the Queen's head in the dominant colour of each painting. The legend 'Turner 1775-1851', as opposed to 'J. M. W. Turner' in full that Rose had included in the two rough designs, was questioned but accepted. E G White promised to consider the suggestion of Kenneth Chapman, one of the SAC's philatelic experts, that information about the paintings should be included in the margin of each sheet. However, there is no evidence that this was pursued; similar suggestions had been made before and were opposed within Postal Marketing as they would only be seen by customers buying whole sheets or stamps with the margin attached.

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### SAC'S FINAL SELECTION

Harrisons produced a second set of essays on 12 September seen by the SAC later that day; as well as the five titles previously selected, these included a further version of Venice from the Giudecca. The Queen's head was printed in various colours as agreed, and the colour of the captions and numerals marginally changed to grey-black. The values were changed:

The Arsenal (8p)

Buildings by a Lake (8p)

St Laurent (8p)

Venice from the Giudecca (10p)

Peace - burial at sea (10p)

Snowstorm (10p).

The SAC made its final selection of four and allocated values as follows: Peace, 4½p; Snowstorm, 5½p; The Arsenal, 8p; St Laurent, 10p (correspondence shows that the SAC was in fact only agreeing a choice of paintings that had already been made by 14 August). The selection is interesting because although all four paintings date from the second half of Turner's career, all except St Laurent feature the darker tones characteristic of his earlier work; also, despite Rose's previous thoughts, the originals of two (Peace and Snowstorm) were comparatively large.

No further changes to the essays were required, apart from the values and the suggestion, generally agreed, that the Queen's head on the 4½p should be printed in a different colour, preferably charcoal. White announced that the proposed issue date had been changed and was now put back to 26 February 1975 (the date was later changed to 19 February following union representations over problems that 26 February might cause counter staff when the time came for 'balancing': this was finally confirmed on 15 October).

Two sets of the final essays were completed on 24 September, each with a different version of the Queen's head, reaching Postal Marketing on 4 October.

E G White submitted essays with the Queen's head in relief on 11 October, for approval by the MDP, the Senior Director of Postal Services (SDP), D Wesil, and the Post Office Chairman. These were forwarded the same day to the Secretary of State for Industry, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, who in turn submitted them on 21 October for the Queen's approval; this was received the following day, with Currall duly notified on 24 October. Another set of essays went to LMS for testing; N Potter replied on 11 November that the designs were suitable for use either with two vertical phosphor bars conventionally placed or with phosphor overall (the stamps were in fact printed with overall phosphor). The approved essays were returned to Harrisons on 14 November for production in photogravure to begin.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT OF ISSUE

The stamps were announced at a press preview on 7 January 1975. Notes for the preview described how the Tate Gallery had facilitated repeated visits by Rose and Harrison's representatives 'to compare the essays at every stage of their development with the originals, as well as with the transparencies. Only by constant reference to the source could they be sure of achieving faithful reproduction.'

On 19 February the set was issued. The stamps were 41mm across by 30mm down, and were issued in sheets of 100 in the following colours: (4½p) olive-bistre, red-orange, dull ultramarine, black, grey-black; (5½p) scarlet, greenish-yellow, deep dull blue, orange-



brown, black, grey-black; (8p) yellow-bistre, red-rosine, orange-red, dull ultramarine, black, grey-black; (10p) light stone, deep blue, dull blue, chocolate, grey-black. The issued denominations represented the basic rates, in ascending order, for inland first class, European letters, and airmail zones B and C. The stamps were withdrawn from philatelic counters after one year, total sales being estimated at 47,920,000 of the 4½p, 8,690,000 of the 5½p, 7,200,000 of the 8p, and 7,100,000 of the 10p.

On the day the stamps were issued, a PHQ postcard 150mm across by 105mm down featuring the 5½p stamp went on sale; this was the ninth in the 'PHQ' series, and 46,250 were issued. A presentation pack also went on sale; the pack and official first day envelope were designed by Jeffery Matthews, and the text for the pack and envelope filler card written by Charity Boxall, the pseudonym used by Matthew's wife. The two were first approached informally at the end of August 1974 and formally commissioned a few days later; Matthews was also asked to design a special 'first day of issue' handstamp for the Philatelic Bureau. At the beginning of December he produced by request a similar handstamp design for use in London WC, to mark Turner's birth in Maiden Lane, Covent Garden.

Matthews chose three works by Turner for reproduction in the presentation pack; these were Portrait of the artist aged about twenty-three, Egremont sea-piece and The sun rising through vapour. He also considered Vignette to Rogers' Poems, 1834; Fishing boat in foreground; The Shipwreck; Hero and Leander; Boats on a lee shore; Bridgewater sea-piece. There were 120,000 packs ordered from the printers, Moore and Matthes Ltd; by the end of July 1975 these had sold out and another 30,000 were ordered. The initial order for the envelope and fillers was first estimated in late October 1974 at a round 500,000 each; however, it was noted that the Fire Service, UPU anniversary, and Great Britons envelopes earlier in the year had enjoyed sales of 495,700, 509,200 and 510,400 respectively, and the order for Turner envelopes was thus increased to 520,000 at the beginning of December, including an allowance for wastage of 10,000. Matthews was paid £115 for designing the presentation pack, £75 for the envelope and filler and £25 for each handstamp; Charity Boxall received £60 for writing the text used for the pack and envelope filler card.

As well as the two official first day handstamps, three other special handstamps were available on 19 February: 'The Oldest Post Office in Britain 1763 Sanquhar', available from the post office at Sanquhar, Dumfries for each special stamp issue between October 1974 and June 1975; 'Up Helly-Aa Lerwick Shetland' at Lerwick post office from 28 January to 28 February; 'Worksop & District Chamber of Trade 1875-1975' at the offices of the 'Worksop Guardian' from 24 January to 22 February. The ordinary 'first day of issue' cancellation was used on items posted in special posting boxes at most larger post offices; all 731 covers serviced in Dumfries were dated '19 February 1974', a fact brought to the office's attention by collectors the following day, and reported by 'Stamp Collecting' on 6 March. Ordinary

local datestamps for the day of issue which proved appropriate included: Petworth, Sussex, where Turner had painted many of his works; Turner's Hill, Crawley, Sussex; Harwich, Essex, the 'harbour' referred to in the full title of Snowstorm reproduced on the 5½p stamp and PHQ card. The commercial covers produced for the occasion included one combining a commemorative medal with the full set of stamps from John Pinches Medallists Ltd, described briefly in 'Stamp Monthly' for March 1975.

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## THE PAINTINGS

'Peace - Burial at sea' was painted in 1841-42 in oil on canvas, and was inspired by the death of Sir David Wilkie, Turner's old friend and rival. Wilkie died suddenly off the coast of Gibraltar on 1 June 1841 whilst returning from the Middle East and was buried at sea under quarantine regulations, at 36 degrees 20 minutes North and 6 degrees 42 minutes West. Criticised for the blackness of the sails in the picture, Turner replied: 'If I could find anything blacker than black, I'd use it.' Harrison's opinion of depicting the painting on a stamp had previously been sought in January 1967; the company replied on that occasion that it was 'hopeless' for any such purpose.

'Snowstorm - Steamboat off a harbour's mouth making signals in shallow water, and going by the lead. The author was in this storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich', to give its full title, was painted in oil on canvas in 1842. Turner claimed to the writer Charles Kingsley that he had himself lashed to the mast of 'Ariel' for four hours, the better to observe the storm's fury; he had not expected to survive the experience but felt bound to record it. Recent researchers have been sceptical as to whether the Margate steamer 'Ariel' was ever caught in any storm off Harwich, with or without an artist on deck capturing the event for posterity. Snowstorm provoked particular critical incomprehension, typified by such comments as 'soapsuds and whitewash' and 'here [Turner] uses his whole array of kitchen stuff'.

'The Arsenal, Rio di San Daniele, Venice', watercolour on white paper, was probably painted during Turner's final visit to Venice in August-September 1840. The city inspired many of Turner's finest works from his first Italian journey in 1819 onwards.

'St Laurent' was painted in watercolour and gouache on blue paper during 1826-33 in preparation for the 'Rivers of France' series of engravings Turner produced in collaboration with the travel writer Leitch Ritchie, published in several volumes between 1833 and 1835. As recently as 1974 it was thought to show St Laurent-des-eaux on the Loire between Orleans and Blois, but it is now known that the title by which the work is known is geographically incorrect - the scene depicted is actually St Florent-les-vieil, between Nantes and Angers.

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## PAINTER AND DESIGNER

Joseph Mallord (or Mallad) William Turner was born on 23 April 1775. From an early age he earned a living by colouring prints for engravers and washing in backgrounds for architects, as well as by drawings sold by his father in his barber's shop. In December 1789 he became a student at the Royal Academy, in 1799 an associate and in 1802 a full member. He became famous for his dramatic depictions of sun and sky in landscapes and seascapes, and also for his colourful but inaccurate treatments of historic and classical themes. His travels in search of subjects took him not only throughout the British Isles but also to France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, constantly accompanied by a sketchbook. From about 1820 his use of light and colour became ever more dazzling and he was often employed in an attempt to express abstract concepts. During the last twenty years of his life his work was increasingly regarded as 'too extreme' for the demands of the public or the taste of critics; he became the butt of satirists such as Thackeray and was consistently attacked by the leading critic of the day, Sir George Beaumont. From 1843, however, he was publicly defended with equal vigour by John Ruskin. In the same period he became increasingly lonely and eccentric after the deaths of his beloved father and numerous friends and colleagues, living in conditions of poverty and seclusion by his own choice. Despite this, his illustrations and engravings kept him in considerable fortune to the end of his life and he died on 19 December 1851 leaving £140,000. Around 20,000 oil paintings, watercolours and sketches of all kinds, in every condition and degree of completion, were bequeathed to the nation. After his death Ruskin saw to it that Turner's standing was justly acknowledged; he is now regarded as not only perhaps the greatest British painter, but among the founders of modernism. Ironically, Ruskin, who had once defended Turner against the charge of 'flinging a pot of paint in the public's face', criticised the artist Whistler in identical terms in 1873.

Stuart Rose was born on 2 October 1911. He became a choral scholar at Magdalen College, Oxford in 1921 and later attended the Central School of Arts and Crafts. From 1934 to 1939 he worked on advertisement layout for W S Crawford, considered Europe's leading advertising agency. After the war he set up as a freelance typographer, graphic designer and print consultant; he was art editor of the magazine 'Design' from 1947 to 1953 and later of the Unilever house magazine 'Progress'. In 1953 he became a Fellow of the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers, which he had joined in 1936, and its President during 1964-65. During 1964-68 he was an associate partner of the Design Research Institute; meanwhile from 1962 he was part-time Typographical Adviser to the Postmaster General and full time Design Adviser from 1968. As well as being a guiding influence on postage stamp design, he was responsible for all aspects of design throughout the postal business and was best known to the public for his numerous townscapes on the front covers of

telephone directories. His association dated back to 1953, when he had designed the Coronation air letter. In 1974 he received both the CBE and the Reginald M Phillips Gold Medal for his contribution to stamp design over the previous five years. He retired on 2 October 1976. Stuart Rose wrote and spoke frequently on the topic of stamp design, and in 1980 his book on the subject, 'Royal Mail Stamps', was published. He died on 10 September 1993.

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## COMMENTS ON THE ISSUE

The stamps were generally well received, a typical comment being 'a worthy celebration of one of Britain's most notable painters, and also a welcome addition to the collector's album'. Criticism was usually that the paintings did not reproduce well in stamp size; the September 1975 'British Philatelic Bulletin' printed a letter from a Canadian correspondent, J E M Young, who found the stamps 'rather confused and dull' and declared that the 4½p, for example, reminded him of a Rorschach ink blot test. Two months later Karl Heinz Becker from West Germany found the 10p 'the least fortunate of the whole series' and retailed an anecdote about a fellow philatelist scratching at the 'brown spot' in the middle of the stamp and complaining 'Is that dirt?' In his book Stuart Rose summed up on the issue: In a funny way I quite liked the loss of definable detail. The stamps almost became abstractions of the paintings, rather like the Ulster paintings [of 1971], and they took on a quality of their own. But I cannot honestly be proud of these stamps, for they seem to me to lack the essential quality by which the graphic expression of an intellectual solution succeeds in terms of design and production. The best a printer can do with this type of subject is to interpret it. He cannot physically reproduce it.

Rose concluded that Harrison's interpretation of all the 'paintings' issues had been 'masterly' and referred elsewhere to their 'consummate skill' in reproducing the Turner stamps.

GILES ALLEN  
30 April 1996

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