

# 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament

1965



Simon de Montfort was born in Normandy around 1208, and first came to England in 1229 in an attempt to recover his family's English estates. By 1238 he was regarded highly enough by King Henry III to be allowed to marry his sister, Eleanor, and in 1239 was formally invested with the Earldom of Leicester.

Between 1240-1242 he accompanied English knights on crusade in the Holy Land and in June 1241 was proposed for the position of Bailiff and Viceroy of Palestine. His first involvement in English politics came in 1244 when he was appointed as one of twelve commissioners charged with answering the King's demands for funds. From 1248-1252 he served Henry III in France as the Governor of Gascony and between 1254-1257 as envoy to Scotland, France and Italy. In 1258 he helped to draw up the 'Provisions of Oxford' designed to remedy domestic discontent and regulate the monarchy.

By 1260 Simon de Montfort was a powerful force in English politics and regarded as chief among the Barons of the country. Increasingly de Montfort became a focus of the King's displeasure and in 1261 he withdrew to France.

English Kings had, since the 11<sup>th</sup> century, been in the habit of periodically summoning great councils. Such assemblies had been predominantly attended by the clergy and the great Barons; by 1236 some of these councils were known as 'parliaments'. They were not representative of the common man in any way although in 1254 the King's lieutenants ordered that two knights be elected by each county. The parliament which met at Whitsuntide 1263 denounced the King as being false to his oath, and war was proclaimed on all violators of the 'Provisions'. Simon de Montfort was summoned back to England by the other Barons and he arrived in April 1263.

Open hostilities broke out and the forces of Henry III were defeated by an army commanded by Simon de Montfort at Lewes on 14 May 1264; both the King and Prince Edward (de Montfort's own godson, later Edward I) were captured. From then on Simon de Montfort was Governor of England in all but name and it was he who, albeit in the King's name, issued writs on 14 and 24 December 1264 summoning a parliament which first sat in London on 20 January 1265. For the first time not only were churchmen, Barons and two knights from each shire summoned, but also two commoners from the boroughs. This was the first known assembly in this country at which both the town and the country were represented at the same meeting (a format repeated by Henry III in 1268 and later by Edward I in 1275 and the so-called 'Model Parliament' of 1295). This parliament met in various buildings in Westminster during January and February 1265, culminating in a public ceremony held in Westminster Hall.

Resentment at de Montfort's behaviour and influence built up among a number of the other Barons and a dangerous rift opened between de Montfort and the Earl of Gloucester following clashes between the two during the parliament of January. After an attempt at reconciliation failed, Gloucester joined forces with Prince Edward in late May and hostilities broke out once more. Simon de Montfort was intercepted by a superior force commanded by Edward and was defeated and killed after a three hour battle at Evesham early on the morning of 4 August 1265.

The parliament called by de Montfort for January 1265 is regarded as marking the first step towards the foundation of the modern House of Commons and the democratic government of today.

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## REQUESTS FOR SIMON DE MONTFORT STAMPS

On 10 April 1964, the Town Clerk of Evesham, N F Davies, wrote to the Head Postmaster of Evesham on behalf of the Committee responsible for celebrations then being organised in the town to mark the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Simon de Montfort. Mr Davies asked if this anniversary might be commemorated by a special stamp and referred to the Parliament of 1265 as 'an event of outstanding significance in the Parliamentary history of this country and, in fact, the democratic world'. Evesham's Head Postmaster forwarded the letter on to his Regional Director who in turn passed it onto the Postal Services Department in London on 14 April.

While the GPO was considering this request the Prime Minister was asked in the House of Commons, on 21 April, if he would consider celebrating the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 'first

representative English Parliament'. Although he demonstrated no particular enthusiasm, the Prime Minister agreed to consider this matter.

On 8 July 1964, the Postal Services Department (PSD) eventually replied to Mr Davies. This explained that it was GPO policy to restrict special stamps in order to keep the number manageable, and thus limited to current events of national or international interest and Royal and postal anniversaries; it was not, therefore, in a position to issue stamps to mark the anniversary as such. However, it was brought to Mr Davies' notice that stamps could perhaps be issued if the planned celebrations were sufficient to constitute a current event of national or even international importance, and so PSD asked to be informed of details of the planned events.

On 9 July Mr Davies replied that the anniversary would be marked by a festival from August until October. He referred to an interdenominational service attended by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the planned unveiling of a stone memorial by the Speaker of the House of Commons. Mr Davies was advised that the special stamp programme for 1965 was under consideration but that no decisions had been made.

When the programme was discussed it would appear that a stamp commemorating Simon de Montfort or his Parliament was not regarded too favourably. A minute outlining a proposed programme went to the Deputy Director General in early August and included three lists, 'possibles', 'doubtful but not yet turned down', and 'already turned down'. Fourth out of nine on the list of 'doubtful' was what was described in the minute as '700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Battle of Evesham Simon de Montfort and the establishment of Parliamentary Government'.

Pressure for special stamps commemorating the parliament of 1265 continued in the House of Commons during the rest of that year. The anniversary was mentioned in the Queen's speech at the state opening of Parliament that autumn and the House of Commons organised its own celebrations, including an exhibition held in the Robing Room from 20 January to 2 February 1965.

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## POST OFFICE POLICY

With the defeat of the Conservative government Anthony Wedgwood Benn became Postmaster General (PMG) from 19 October 1964. One of his first actions was a review of the policy governing the issue of commemorative stamps. Those who requested special stamps during November were told of this review and that an announcement would be forthcoming.

A meeting of the GPO Board on 25 November decided to broaden the criteria for special stamps. The new criteria was announced in Parliament on 15 December 1964, namely: to celebrate events of national and international importance; to commemorate important anniversaries; to reflect the British contribution to world affairs including the arts and science; to extend public patronage to the arts by encouraging the development of minuscule arts.

Quite obviously the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Parliament of 1265 was now eligible: the decision to issue stamps was made towards the latter part of 1964.

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## **HISTORICAL ACCURACY**

The PMG announced the special stamp programme for 1965 on 1 February that year. Included in a list of eight projected issues was one for June officially described as the '700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sitting of the first Parliament'.

This provoked questions of historical accuracy from those who doubted that the Parliament of 1265 could be described as the first. For example, Mr Carmichael, a Scot then living in Slough, argued that the parliament of 1265 had represented only England and was therefore entirely different from the modern Parliament that represented the people of the United Kingdom.

On 4 February the Deputy Principal Clerk of the House of Commons wrote to the PMG. He was the official specifically involved with the celebrations of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary and wrote to suggest that a more accurate title might be 'the Parliament of Simon de Montfort, 1265'.

The PMG replied on 22 February and explained that the title '700th Anniversary of Parliament' would be used on the stamps as 'a longer title would look cumbersome on a stamp and might defeat our object by making it well nigh impossible to achieve an artistically satisfactory design'. He did, however, undertake to bear the suggested title in mind when making further announcements about these stamps. When further details were announced on 28 April the issue was described as the '700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament'.

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## **INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS**

On 4 December the Council of Industrial Design (CoID) was asked to put forward names of artists, suggesting David Gentleman and Barbara Jones, with William Kempster and Peter

Roberson as reserves. Initial enquiries revealed that both Gentleman and Kempster were unavailable while Roberson could not be contacted, so the CoID then suggested Peter Gauld and Justin Todd.

It had been decided there would be two stamps, 6d and 2s 6d. On 23 December it was agreed that the 6d be produced in photogravure and the 2s 6d line-engraved. The CoID was consulted again and advised that all three artists be invited to submit designs for both stamps.

The artists were formally invited on 24 December (the stamp printing firms were not invited on this occasion). Included with the letter of invitation were two lists of 'Instructions to Artists', one relating to the photogravure stamp and the other to the line-engraved. These were intended to aid the artists:

artists were asked to prepare one design but were told they could submit alternative designs if they wished - the choice of a theme was theirs;

all designs were to include the Queen's head - copies of an approved portrait were provided;

the designs were to include the title '700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Parliament' and to show the denomination in 'clear Arabic numerals' at least once;

artists were to prepare designs on good quality white card and asked to draw them four times the linear stamp size;

the fee was 60 guineas with an additional 190 guineas for an adopted design.

Artists were told that the 6d photogravure stamp would be printed by Harrison & Sons at its High Wycombe works. They were reminded of the qualities of this process and encouraged to ensure that their materials would allow photography of each tone in its true value.

Artists were advised that the stamp would be printed in up to three basic colours although they were under no obligation to use this number. They were told that black was not to be used as a background colour, whereas white was acceptable.

Regarding the 2s 6d stamp, artists were told that this would be line-engraved by Bradbury Wilkinson Ltd. They were asked to use only one colour and were similarly discouraged from using black as a background colour.

The closing date for all submissions was 18 January 1965.

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## SUBMITTED DESIGNS

Nine designs were received. Miss Jones apparently misunderstood the invitation, not realising that she was to prepare designs for both stamps, so submitted only one design for

the 6d value on 19 January. Her mistake was immediately made known to her and she shortly after submitted a design for the 2s 6d.

Justin Todd submitted three designs, received 18 January; Peter Gauld four on 18 January; and Barbara Jones two, the first on 19 January.

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## DESIGN SELECTION

The Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) met on 26 January 1965, but the minutes are unavailable. It seems that the nine designs seen by the Committee were not warmly received. Internal correspondence that survives reveals that the PMG felt the designs failed to capture the real meaning of Parliament. He thought it important that in future designers be made aware of the views of the sponsors of special issues, being included in the 'Instructions to Artists'.

Only one design was recommended to go to colour essay stage, namely Peter Gauld's for the 6d photogravure, showing the Parliamentary Mace.

Apparently it was suggested that a 17<sup>th</sup> century engraving of Westminster by Wenceslaus Hollar might make an acceptable design. Unusually a member of the SAC, Professor Richard Guyatt, was asked to produce an adaptation of this engraving. It was also decided to commission further designs from other artists.

On 27 January invitations were extended to Stewart Black and Reynolds Stone. These were given a slightly amended version of the 'Instructions to Artists', being asked to include either Simon de Montfort's seal or 'a theme indicating the evolution of Parliament, as distinct from the building and its surroundings'. Photographs of the de Montfort's seal were enclosed. Although the artists were still asked to produce only one design for the 2s 6d stamp, they were told to produce at least two alternative designs for the 6d. The deadline for this second batch of submissions was 8 February 1965.

For some unknown reason Justin Todd was asked to submit further designs, the only one of the original group to receive such an invitation.

A total of eight designs were received during the early part of February:  
Stewart Black, three designs received on 8 February;  
Reynolds Stone, two on 4 February;  
Justin Todd, three on 8 February.

On 9 February essays, showing the value 6d, of the Gauld design selected by the SAC were forwarded to the Postal Services Department of the GPO. Professor Guyatt had been working on his adaptation of the Hollar engraving in collaboration with Harrisons and essays of this design were ready for the next meeting of the SAC. The SAC met on 16 February, attended James Fitton (in the chair), Sir John Wilson, Abram Games, Milner Gray, Professor Guyatt, Paul Reilly, Mrs C.G. Tomrley (secretary), plus R F York (of Harrisons) and A A Mead and D H Beaumont of the GPO.

The Committee saw Professor Guyatt's adaptation of the Hollar engraving of 1647, producing a stamp three times the size of a definitive. This design showed the Queen's head framed by a wreath which had been taken from another Hollar engraving. The Committee selected this as its first choice for the 2s 6d, it being agreed that no date would appear on the finished stamp should the design be approved. The second choice for this value was one of Todd's second group of submissions. The minutes, however, record 'a strong recommendation in favour of the Hollar design'.

For the 6d stamp the SAC selected as its first choice a Stewart Black design that showed Simon de Montfort's seal. As its second choice the Committee chose Gauld's design featuring the Parliamentary Mace, though it was thought that Black's design made a better pair with the Hollar design.

Harrisons produced essays of these designs, and it would also seem as if Bradbury Wilkinson prepared some essays, although it is unclear precisely which designs were involved. During late February and early March Harrisons delivered essays to the GPO.

Some of the essays of the proposed 2s 6d show the value as 1s 6d. It seems there was some discussion within PSD about using this denomination rather than 2s 6d; this idea was abandoned.

Sometime during late February, it was decided to print the 2s 6d stamp in photogravure and not line-engraved as had been intended. At this time PSD was thinking of 3 June as the issue date and, in its opinion, left too little time for the printer to be able to produce a line-engraved stamp that was three times the normal size. At any rate, this was the explanation that PSD gave Bradbury Wilkinson. The company had begun preparation of a special perforating head and so sought payment for this and other work already undertaken; they received a total of £35 10s towards the end of March.

The issue date was then tentatively fixed for 15 June.

On 11 March 1965, the PMG suggested to the Director of Postal Services (DPS) that a profile version of the Queen's head be used on Professor Guyatt's 2s 6d design, taken from a

portrait of the Queen by Anthony Buckley. Harrisons adapted the design accordingly and the matter was discussed with Professor Guyatt. He was of the opinion that any adaptation of his design would be unsuccessful and that he would have to start afresh. The DPS pointed out the time factor and recommended to stay with Guyatt's design as it stood.

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## ROYAL APPROVAL

On 31 March 1965, the PMG sought the Queen's formal approval of the designs. He submitted all four designs chosen by the SAC but strongly recommended the Committee's first choice. The PMG was notified of the Queen's approval of these designs on 2 April.

Copies of the approved essays were forwarded to the printer and to Supplies Department on 5 April.

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## PRODUCTION DETAILS

The majority of the artists involved with this issue received their payment towards the end of April, 120 guineas to each of Barbara Jones, Peter Gauld, Reynolds Stone and Justin Todd, and 310 guineas to Stewart Black.

Justin Todd received a further payment of 120 guineas on 18 May. This was for the second batch of designs that he had submitted in early February after his earlier work was rejected; the PSD took the view that Todd was not really entitled to payment for these designs but nevertheless made what it described as an 'ex-gratia' payment. Professor Guyatt was paid 250 guineas on 9 June.

On 28 April the PMG announced in Parliament the issue dates for 1965, with that for the '700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Simon de Montfort's Parliament' on 10 June.

The details of the stamps were made public through a press showing, together with an accompanying Press and Broadcast Notice, on 4 May. On 10 May the DPS received a letter of complaint from the Assistant Secretary of the Union of Post Office Workers. This explained that the Union had first discovered when it was announced to the public that the GPO was to issue a stamp of a size far greater than before. The Assistant Secretary considered that this should have been discussed with his Union before any such public proclamation was made. He added that the Union objected to the introduction of stamps of any size or shape that had not been agreed with the Union first. A letter of apology was duly sent, assuring the Union that this incident would not be repeated.



Unfortunately, on 3 June the PMG was forced to announce the postponement of the stamps due to an unofficial overtime ban at Supplies Department depots. This had already caused the postponement of both the International Telecommunication Union Centenary and Churchill stamps. A new issue date of 19 July was announced to the public on 24 June.

Of the two stamps only the 6d was produced in a phosphor version: this bore three phosphor bands. The stamps were issued on 19 July 1965 and withdrawn from sale on 28 February 1966, by which time the following had been sold:

Ordinary

6d – 12,973,800

2s 6d – 4,055,120

Phosphor

6d – 1,537,920.

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### **SPECIAL PHILATELIC ARRANGEMENTS**

To accompany this issue the GPO produced both a first day envelope and presentation pack. The designer of the 6d stamp, Stewart Black, was invited to submit designs for both on 24 March 1965. The fee was 100 guineas but Black had to modify his original design and so received an additional 50 guineas.

The cover was priced at 6d, available through the Philatelic Bureau and at 57 Post Offices around the country where special philatelic posting boxes were available on 19 July; the Bureau also operated a full first day cover service. All covers posted in the philatelic boxes were cancelled using a ‘first day of issue’ handstamp.

The presentation pack was also available from the Bureau and the same 57 Offices, costing 4s. Stanley Gibbons gives a sales figure of 24,450 packs.

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### **POSTMASTER GENERAL'S GIFTS**

It was the usual practice of the GPO to present gifts of new stamps to ‘distinguished people’. For this issue it was decided that the gift would comprise a first day cover and a presentation pack. The Philatelic Bureau duly provided PSD with 60 of each, although ten of each were later returned as surplus to requirement.

No full list of the recipients can be found, though the following received gifts: the Queen; Princess Margaret; Prime Minister; the Speaker of the House of Commons; previous PMGs

and Assistant PMGs whether still in Parliament or not; the PMG or equivalent Minister of self-governing Commonwealth countries; the designers; members of the SAC.

Gifts were also sent to the Keeper of Records at the House of Commons and to Sir Tufton Beamish.

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## PREMATURE RELEASE

It has already been mentioned that industrial action at Supplies depots caused the postponement of a number of stamp issues until later in 1965. The Parliament stamps were put back from 10 June to 19 July, while the Churchill stamps were released on 8 July and not 24 May. It appears as if in some, if not all, cases, stocks of both of these issues were distributed on the same day. This generated some confusion amongst counter staff, a factor that was later attributed with causing certain staff to issue the Parliament stamps on 8 July. For example the Wimbledon Broadway sub-office reported that it had sold 96 of the 6d and 24 of the 2s 6d on 8 July.

SIMON BATES  
6 MAY 1993.

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## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

P 2264/65 - Special Issues 1965 Programme. Change of Policy.

P 58/72 - 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Parliament.