

## Christmas

1966



The GPO received a many requests for special Christmas stamps in the years up to 1966, all met with a negative response. The earliest record of such a request dates from August 1957. The reason for refusal was that the dominant feature of British postage stamps had, since their introduction, always been the head of the reigning monarch, and it would be extremely difficult to 'do justice to an event of such transcendental importance as the birth of Christ' without breaking with tradition. This even though such issues were proving extremely popular elsewhere in the world.

By early February 1963, the GPO was not only stressing the difficulties of obtaining a suitable design, but that it was a matter of policy to restrict special issues to marking outstanding national or international current events and Royal and postal anniversaries. It was explaining that to keep the number of special issues within reasonable limits it had become policy not to issue special stamps for annual occasions.

Requests for Christmas stamps continued until 1965, by which time Anthony Wedgwood Benn had become Postmaster General (PMG) with a new attitude towards special stamps. In early 1965, he was suggesting that a stamp with a charity surcharge be issued for Christmas.

The GPO decided against a Christmas stamp for 1965 but the PMG had not forgotten about the idea. In a memorandum dated 21 September 1965, he outlined a programme for 1966 envisaging eight issues that placed less emphasis on stamps that were purely commemorative and included four pictorial issues. The final issue is described in this

memorandum as a 'pictorial stamp with Christmas themes', adding that it might 'possibly be an overprinted stamp for sale by charities'.

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## SCHOOLCHILDREN'S COMPETITION

The PMG put forward the possibility of selecting designs for one issue of 1966, the 900th anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, through a competition involving children, in a scheme whereby each school would select the best design from amongst its own pupils, perhaps with an age-limit of fifteen. These designs would proceed to a further, unspecified, selection process.

Informal enquiries as to how such a competition could be organised were made of the Ministry of Education in early November 1965. These were followed up by a formal proposal on 8 November asking for the help of the Ministry in organising the selection process at both the local and regional level: the GPO feared it would be swamped by the response to such a competition if unaided. It was suggested that each county Education Officer could be responsible for the selection of two designs from the schools within his or her own area. These designs would go for further selection.

The GPO, however, decided to commission artists in the usual way to design the Battle of Hastings stamps. On 3 January 1966, the Ministry of Education was told of this decision but that the GPO intended to proceed with the children's competition to obtain designs for a special Christmas issue. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education, in a letter dated 20 January, declined to take part in the organisation, although it recommended educational bodies that it thought might help.

On 31 January the PMG met the acting Chairman of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), James Fitton and the Director of Postal Services (DPS) to discuss the matter. It was agreed that the competition proceed with a deadline for submissions of 1 July. Two stamps were considered, 3d and 1s 3d, with an issue date of 1 November. The idea of the charity overprint was deferred until legal opinion had been obtained. It was suggested that the competition could provide designs for not only postage stamps but also the first day envelope; there was even discussion about an airletter. It was decided that for the winning designs the normal fee for a selected design would be paid, divided equally among the school, the designer and a charity of the designer's choice.

It was also agreed that no further special stamps be issued in the 3d value, with the exception of the Christmas stamps. This was because of reported difficulties in the segregation of printed matter from fully-paid mail when both bore special stamps.

In early February the Postal Services Department (PSD) wrote, asking for views on a design competition to select the Christmas stamps, to the educational bodies recommended by the Ministry:

Association of Education Committees (2 February)

County Councils Association (2 February)

Inner London Education Authority (2 February)

Welsh Joint Education Committee (2 February)

National Union of Teachers (2 February)

National Association of Schoolmasters (2 February)

Association of Municipal Corporations (4 February).

Delegates from all seven bodies met with PSD on 29 March, and agreed that the competition was an 'attractive novelty'. There were, however, three objections:

they did not favour school competitions of this kind, particularly when they offered monetary rewards;

they felt that children would not be able to meet the requirements of stamp design without the assistance of a teacher, and that this would work against the production of 'uninhibited and original designs';

they felt that the initial selection of designs at a local level by teachers would result in placing additional work on teachers, which would not be welcomed by teachers or Local Education Authorities.

They provided the PSD with an alternative method of organising the initial selection process that called for Local Authority Inspectors to select appropriate material during routine school visits. It was felt that designs so selected would 'embody the child's free expression, unhampered by the competitive complex'. However, bearing in mind the time of year, it was pointed out that Christmas designs would not be available until the Autumn term of 1966 and so the delegates agreed that this project be postponed until 1967. They also agreed that the monetary prize be replaced, suggesting book tokens or even an autograph of the PMG.

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## **AN INDEPENDENT COMPETITION**

At a meeting of the SAC on 3 May 1966, the PMG was told the results of the consultations and the recommendation that the design competition take place in 1967, so the SAC was 'accordingly not asked to take any steps to set in motion a Christmas issue for this year'. It was suggested the competition be initiated in February 1967 for stamps to be issued prior to Christmas.

The PMG expressed concern over this proposed postponement and asked that a minute paper be prepared detailing the discussions thus far. This went to the PMG's office on 5 May but he had by then decided to go ahead with plans for a design competition and a Christmas issue for 1966, regardless of the recommendations.

In the face of the objections and the absence of support from the Ministry of Education, the PMG proposed that the GPO hold its own competition open to all children in the country under school leaving age. His idea was that the rules should be very simple, the only specifications being the size of designs and the number of colours. A memorandum to the DPS of 4 May outlined his wishes with the instruction 'prepare a scheme along these lines as soon as possible'.

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## **PRESS RELEASE - COMPETITION RULES**

The DPS considered the best way of launching such a competition was to organise press coverage with designs sent directly to the GPO. A Press and Broadcast Notice was issued on 25 May, which invited all schoolchildren aged 15 and under to submit designs for Christmas stamps.

The rules of the design competition were, in line with the wishes of the PMG, kept simple:

- the designs had to illustrate a festive or religious theme;
- the designs were not to include any lettering;
- the designs could use up to five colours, dark colours were to be avoided;
- space was to be left for the Queen's head and the denomination which would be added later by the GPO;
- the designs were to be 3.3 inches by 6 inches for an horizontal stamp or 5.9 inches by 3.4 inches for a vertical stamp.

All designs were to be accompanied by the child's name, age, address and name of school, and to include a certificate from the Head Teacher to guarantee that the designs were the unaided work of the child. A prize of £20 was offered for successful designs with additional prizes of presentation packs for all designs commended by the SAC. All entries were to be sent to the Public Relations Department by 20 June.

Meanwhile, the DPS had, at a SAC meeting of 11 May, asked Mr Fitton to view a collection of children's paintings at the Royal Drawing Society, selecting any designs he thought might be interesting. Fitton visited the Society on 12 May and chose 20 paintings, which were seen by the PMG on 16 May. The PMG was unimpressed and instructed that the competition proceed as planned.

## DESIGN SELECTION

In June the PMG suggested that the values of the Christmas stamp be 3d and 4d. The minimum estimated requirement was one million sheets of each, dismissed by the stamp printers, Harrison & Sons, as an impossibility. The airmail letter rate to zone B (USA and Canada) was about to be raised to 1s 6d and Harrisons confirmed it would be able to cope with this and a 3d. The PMG approved these values on 30 June.

It is clear is that the PMG's insistence on proceeding with the design competition was not popular with the SAC. About the time the competition was announced the Committee refused to perform its normal role of design selection. Three reasons were cited: its awareness that the 'education people' did not want to become officially involved; it did not approve of the way in which the competition was thrown open to the public; it thought that it was very likely that the competition would get out of hand.

To select the designs the GPO assembled a panel of eight professional stamp designers, Rosalind Dease, Peter Gauld, Michael and Sylvia Goaman, Jeffery Matthews, Clive Abbott, Andrew Restall and David Gentleman. They had approximately 5,000 designs to view. It seems that thirteen were selected and presented to the PMG, and that made the final selection at the end of June. Four designs were chosen.

First choice:

Design A: 'King Wenceslas' by Tasveer Shemza

Design B: 'Snowman' by James Berry

Second choice:

Design C: 'Father Christmas' by Ann Belshaw

Design D: 'Snowman' by Christine Agios.

All four designs went to Harrison & Sons to be produced in essay form at the end of June/early July. The company was told to add the cameo portrait of the Queen that had featured on most of the special stamps of 1966, and asked that this be located in the top right hand corner of the stamps and printed in gold as on the 6d and 1s 3d Battle of Hastings stamps.

There was some discussion regarding amending these designs for horizontal stamps; however, on 1 July Harrisons advised PSD that design B was not suitable for modification and it was decided to keep the designs as vertical.

## ESSAYS

The first essays were forwarded from Harrisons on 15 July, all having the Queen's head in gold.

In June/July Mr York of Harrisons informed PSD that the cameo Queen's head could be produced in an embossed gold form at no extra cost. In early July he provided an example of such a head which was favourably received. On 8 July Harrisons was asked to produce essays of the four Christmas designs with the embossed head and these were forwarded to the GPO on 19 July.

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## ROYAL APPROVAL

Edward Short, the new PMG, wrote to the Queen on 29 July 1966 submitting the four designs for the stamps. He explained that, due to the Queen's 'lively interest in the gold portrait depicted in two of the Battle of Hastings stamps', the GPO had employed the same process on one set of essays, adding that the GPO had 'gone one stage further' and presented her with an additional set of essays with embossed gold heads. Designs A and B, with or without an embossed head, were submitted as the first choice designs.

On 1 August 1966 the Queen sent her approval of designs A and B with embossed head. These were forwarded to Harrisons on 12 August with the recommendation that the Queen's head be reduced slightly in size.

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## PRODUCTION DETAILS

Early in the production process the printers experienced difficulties with the 3d stamp. The problem lay with the imprint of the names of artist and printer on the bottom of the stamp below the design. This was printed in black and on the initial print runs was found to shift to an unacceptable degree. It was decided on 24 August that the colour of this imprint be changed from black to red.

It was expected that the initial requisitions of the stamps would be delivered by Harrisons by 21 October. However, only a small proportion of the 3d stamps were delivered by this date and the continued slow daily rate of delivery meant that Supplies Department began to fear that the initial requisitions would not be met by the issue date. The problem was that the application of the embossed gold heads was proving to be much slower than had been anticipated.

The situation was carefully monitored by the Supplies Department but failed to improve and, on 21 October, decided to reduce the quantities of stamps sent out. The regions affected were the South West, the Home Counties (east and south-east), the North East, Scotland, those offices in the North West supplied from Edinburgh.

By 27 October Harrison's weekly production of the 3d stamps was still below that required to guarantee that initial orders were met in full, but it is not clear if there were shortfalls on the day that the stamps were issued, as there are no recorded instances of shortages.

The stamps were printed in sheets of 120 on paper with the multiple crown watermark; this appeared sideways on the 3d. Both of the stamps were produced with and without phosphor bands: the 3d with one vertical phosphor band, and two bands on the 1s 6d.

A press conference to launch the stamps was held on 29 September at which the winners of the competition were presented with their prizes.

The stamps were issued on 1 December 1966: the 3d phosphor was sold out in January 1967, and the non-phosphor 3d and the 1s 6d phosphor sold out in October. The non-phosphor 1s 6d was withdrawn from sale on 30 November 1967. The sales figures were:

Ordinary

3d – 153,318,160

1s 6d – 20,774,000

Phosphor

3d – 8,756,960

1s 6d – 2,109,280.

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## **SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS**

The GPO produced a first day envelope for this issue. The design was from of the second choice, namely C, 'Father Christmas' by Ann Belshaw. The envelope was available from the Philatelic Bureau and all philatelic counters at 6d.

The Philatelic Bureau operated its usual full first day cover service using these envelopes at 4s 9d. The cost of servicing envelopes sent in by customers was 2s 9d. Presentation packs were also available at 2s 9d.

Philatelic posting boxes were provided at 84 offices around the UK. At these offices rubber handstamps inscribed 'First Day of Issue' were used to cancel the Christmas stamps.

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## **POSTMASTER GENERAL'S GIFT SCHEME**

As usual a gift of a first day cover and presentation pack containing mint stamps were sent to the Queen, Princess Margaret, Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, the Speaker of the House of Commons, Horace King, members of the SAC (8), former PMGs and Assistant PMGs (16), PMG or equivalent Minister of the self-governing countries of the Commonwealth (21), members of the Selection Panel (7), the successful children. Gifts were also sent to the ten other children (including Christine Agios) whose designs were commended by the selection panel. A total of 69 gifts were sent.

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## **THE STAMP ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

At a meeting of the SAC on 22 December it commented on the designs, concerned about the juxtaposition of the sovereign's head and the snowman's hat on the 1s 6d: it was felt that it appeared as if the brim of the snowman's hat were tickling the Queen's nose.

The Director of the Council of Industrial Design (CoID), Paul Reilly, wrote to the DPS on 3 January admitting that the SAC's withdrawal from its responsibilities had been a mistake since it would have spotted design flaws. The letter mentioned that the Committee suggested 'that it should not opt out in the future unless some assurance can be given that a designer's eye should be cast over any future such amateur submissions'. It would appear that the SAC overlooked the fact that the designs had been selected by eight successful stamp designers.

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## **COMPLAINT ABOUT PAYMENT**

When the competition was launched, the rules outlined in the Press and Broadcast Notice of 25 May failed to include a clause about the copyright of the chosen designs. Under normal circumstances the instructions sent to invited artists made it clear that ownership of designs and copyright was invested in the PMG. Ownership of the designs and copyright was also omitted from all subsequent correspondence between the GPO and the parents of those children whose designs were selected.

It would seem that the GPO assumed that, as payment had been made in the form of prizes, the ownership and copyright of the designs would reside with the PMG as normal. So the GPO permitted that the designs be produced as Christmas cards (in the form of 'maximum cards' to which collectors could affix the appropriate stamps).



On 5 December 1966, the father of the designer of the 3d stamp, A J Shemza, wrote to the PMG to suggest that the children were entitled to share in the profits from the sale of these cards. The GPO replied on 20 January 1967 conceding that some payment was not unreasonable. The publisher of the cards, Stamp Publicity (Worthing) Ltd, forwarded a cheque of £10 to Mr Shemza and described this as an 'ex-gratia' payment.

In his reply to the publisher on 1 February, a copy of which was sent to the PMG, Mr Shemza acknowledged receipt of this cheque as part-payment for the reproduction of his daughter's design. He added that he expected full payment for reproduction and mentioned the figure of £250. He explained that as he understood it the GPO had only the right to print stamps from his daughter's design and had no right to reproduce it in any other form.

The PSD initiated urgent consultation with the Solicitor's Department, a report from which dated 13 February confirmed that, due to the startling lack of any copyright clause in the rules of the competition, there was now a very real doubt as to the ownership of the designs. The Solicitor's Department suggested that the best way out of the difficulty was to pay the sum claimed. It also expressed surprise that legal advice had not been taken either when the competition rules had been published or when the GPO had offered the additional payment to Mr Shemza. At a meeting on the same day PSD representatives were told by their legal advisors that the conditions of the competition had been 'so loosely worded' that there was a very real possibility that the GPO held no legal right even to use the designs for stamps. The PSD was told that the GPO was vulnerable to an embarrassing court action by Mr Shemza for the use of his daughter's design as a stamp. The Solicitor's Department pointed out that such legal action would expose the GPO's incompetence in organising a competition and using the designs which resulted from it without any apparent consideration of the legal or moral right of the artists concerned to any additional payment.

The GPO considered two ways of responding to Mr Shemza. The first was to stand firm and rely on the argument that entry for the competition implied acceptance that the successful design be used for a stamp. In this case the rights of ownership and copyright would reside implicitly with the PMG. The alternative was for the GPO to agree to meet Mr Shemza's claims.

On 20 February the DPS agreed that the GPO would offer Mr Shemza payment for his daughter's design equivalent to the usual fee for accepted stamp designs of 250 guineas. Mr Shemza was notified of this decision on 6 March 1967. Although the legal value of such a document was considered negligible by the Solicitor's Department, Mr Shemza was asked to sign a form which acknowledged that the PMG owned his daughter's design. Mr Shemza signed the form and returned it on 8 March; the GPO forwarded final payment of £242 10s 0d on 5 April.

The parents of James Berry (designer of the 1s 6d stamp) received the same amount on 12 May, after signing the form confirming the PMG's ownership of their son's design. It was also decided that Ann Belshaw, whose design appeared on the first day envelope, would receive the full rate for such a design. After signing the acknowledgement form her parents received a cheque for £42 10s 0d on 12 May.

SIMON BATES  
26 MARCH 1993.

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## REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

MKD/BS/667 - Stamp Design Christmas 1966; Complaint about payment - Shemza.

P 3197/62 - Request for Christmas Postage stamps.

P 30/72 - Christmas Stamps 1966.