

British Architecture

Date of issue: 22 SEPTEMBER 1971



In June 1968 the Postmaster General (PMG), John Stonehouse, decided that the 1969 stamp programme should include a set on English Cathedrals. This, he said, would be the first in a series over several years on the theme of British architecture that would later provide opportunities to include examples from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The six cathedrals depicted were considered by the Post Office to be amongst the United Kingdom's finest buildings and therefore a most suitable introduction to the series. The following year rural cottages were featured, chosen for their humbleness in contrast to the grandness of the cathedrals.

The Post Office recognised the importance of maintaining the interest generated among thematic collectors by such an ongoing series. With this in mind, the Director of Operations and Overseas, G R Downes, decided that the 1971 stamp programme should include an architecture set.

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

The stamp programme for 1971 was among the topics discussed at a meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 21 October 1969. The Secretary, J R Baxter, also of the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD), put forward three suggestions for consideration: the bi-centenary of the birth of Sir Walter Scott, an Architecture series and the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament. He suggested that for the architecture series modern buildings be depicted, possibly based on photographs. This was generally favoured by the SAC, and ideas were quickly developed. It was agreed that, although only a small selection of the rich heritage of British architecture had been shown, it was now time to emphasise it is a continuing art form and fine buildings were still being built in modern-day Britain. The Committee thought that among the best of these were university buildings and Sir Paul Reilly suggested that a recent photographic exhibition of

such buildings might be worth consideration. Another possibility was to commission a photographer who could either work alone or with an artist. It was agreed that the Post Office should look into these ideas prior to the next SAC meeting. The Committee also put forward the idea that in the future a set featuring Betjeman's churches be considered.

During this period the Post Office also considered other ideas for modern architecture. One was 'New Town' architecture. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government was asked if it could supply prints showing examples with the emphasis on town centre developments. A selection was subsequently loaned to the Post Office. The Post Office also hired 216 photographic slides from the Architectural Association, London at a cost of £10.80.

The next SAC meeting on 2 December 1969 was joined by Mr Vieler, Managing Director Posts. The photographs and slides of modern university and new town architecture were shown. It was agreed that new town architecture did not lend itself readily to the minuscule medium and it was recommended that the Post Office concentrate on modern university architecture. It was suggested that expert advice be obtained on the best recent university buildings in order that photographers and designers might be commissioned.

ARTISTS INVITED

At the SAC meeting on 13 January 1970 it was agreed that photographs should be commissioned.

During February 1970 a verbal invitation was given to two designers, Nicholas Jenkins and Ronald Maddox, to submit four special stamp designs illustrating modern university buildings.

The finer details were personally explained to the artists by Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Adviser. The briefs received by the two artists differed in that Jenkins was to submit photographic designs and Maddox was to submit non-photographic designs from his own sketches and material sources. The fees were £63 for each submitted design up to a maximum of four designs (£252), an additional £199.50 to be paid for each design selected for use, totalling £262.50 for each successful design.

ARTWORK RECEIVED

The following artwork was received.

N Jenkins (received late March 1970):

Southampton, Liverpool, Leicester, Corpus Christi, Bath, Aberystwyth (two), Essex (two),

plus nine black and white sketches. These were preliminary artwork rather than finished designs.

Three further designs of Essex were received on 16 April 1970, together with twelve colour transparencies.

R Maddox (received 1 May 1970):

Five stamp-size drawings, plus artwork for York, Sussex, Brunel and East Anglia, plus a first day envelope and presentation pack design, and seven preliminary stamp-size designs.

On 6 May 1970 the SAC examined the designs and after discussion agreed that four by Jenkins be essayed, namely:

Leicester University,
Southampton University,
Essex University,
University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

The Committee's view was that 'the Jenkins' designs on the whole did justice to the buildings represented, while the Maddox designs tended, by prettifying, to cheapen the essential qualities of modern architectural designs'.

DOUBTS VOICED

G J Damp, Marketing Manager, questioned whether it was advisable to feature modern architecture. On 6 March he wrote to Downes, Director Operations and Overseas, saying that the third architecture issue was especially important as the second issue, featuring rural cottages, was 'pictorially most uninteresting and very unlikely to sell even reasonably well', and that another poor issue would destroy the theme. He suggested that people from abroad were more interested in Britain's history, traditions and culture and a series of stamps catering for such interests would be more successful. Downes replied that the decision to feature modern architecture was taken following suggestions made successively by John Stonehouse and Viscount Hall, Chairman of the Post Office Board, that modern subjects should be featured on stamps more often. He explained that the design process early had started early in case it proved difficult to produce good minuscule designs and allowed for a different theme to be introduced. The decision remained that the series would feature modern buildings.

It subsequently appeared that much of the public of the public disagreed with Damp's opinion of the Rural Cottage stamps, as they proved popular and sold in quantities slightly better than average.

A BI-LINGUAL LEGEND

The Post Office considered that it would be appropriate to use the Welsh language, as well as English, on the stamp featuring the University College of Wales. The first time Welsh appeared had been in 1968 on a stamp featuring Menai Bridge as part of a series depicting British bridges. This was followed in 1969 with the Prince of Wales Investiture stamps.

F M Ash, Acting Director Postal Headquarters Wales, approached Sir Goronwy Daniel, the university principal, for suitable suggestions to be used on the stamp. Sir Goronwy thought of three practical possibilities:

simply use the word ABERYSTWYTH, or

'COLEG ABERYSTWYTH', which means Aberystwyth College, although 'Coleg' hardly needed to be translated, or

to give the name of the particular building which was to be shown, for example 'Y Nevadd Fawr' and 'The Great Hall, Aberystwyth'.

Sir Goronwy recognised that the third option posed problems of space and on the whole favoured the second option. Ash wrote to OOD with the recommendations of Sir Goronwy adding that the first and third options would be insufficient to identify the building as a university building and that the second might not need translating, but to be bi-lingual would need to read 'Coleg - Aberystwyth - College' and thus recommended that the wording adopted be 'COLEG PRIFYSGOL - ABERYSTWYTH - UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'.

It was thought within OOD that this last suggestion could be successfully incorporated in the form of a three-line title:

Coleg Prifysgol

Aberystwyth

University College.

The artist was instructed to include this wording in the artwork.

On 17 June the four designs by Jenkins were forwarded to Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers. The designs were:

5p Aberystwyth

7½p Leicester

4p Southampton

2½p Essex.

Harrisons was instructed to amend the legend on the first design from:

Coleg Prifysgol

University College

Aberystwyth
to:
Coleg Prifysgol
Aberystwyth
University College.

Harrisons was also informed that one of the colours on the Leicester design, identified only as colour A, had been found unsuitable by the Post Office Chemist, in that the phosphor signal against this colour would be negligible. The chemist had suggested that a 75 per cent density would probably solve the problem and OOD therefore requested essays in the original colours but with a 75 per cent amendment. The files hold no information regarding the outcome of this: however, it does seem that with the designer later revising the artwork to give more detail, the technical problem was overcome.

PAYMENTS TO ARTISTS

On 24 June 1970 payment was made to Ronald Maddox. On this occasion the Post Office considered that the normal payment was insufficient for the amount of work involved so £600 was paid.

Payment was made to Jenkins on 22 September 1970 when he was informed that the fees had been recently increased to £150 for each design submitted plus a further £150 for each successful design. Jenkins was paid £1,200 for his four successful designs.

ESSAYS

On 16 July Harrisons sent essays to OOD. The essays were shown to the SAC members individually as the next meeting was not until September. The members, although agreeing that the choice of buildings had been right and that the stamps would make a good set, were still not fully pleased and comments made included 'Gloomy looking Leicester has appearance of a factory with a silo and chimney', the Essex design had 'Too much black and was a bit sombre' and 'All should be brightened up a bit'.

The essays were also examined by Jenkins who discussed them with Professor Guyatt of the SAC. Jenkins suggested that the Queen's head be changed, type be improved, colour of the building only to change on the Leicester design to give it the necessary 'lift' with revised artwork for this design giving more detail. Jenkins did not wish to make any change to the colour of the Essex design as had been suggested.

OOD decided that the following amendments should be made:

The type on all stamps was to be made as clear as on the Aberystwyth essay.

The heads on all the stamps to be changed to relief, and to be reduced to the size as on the 1970 Commonwealth Games stamps, and printed in the appropriate background colour.

More detail was required on the Leicester building, as per the revised artwork supplied by the designer, but with the colour black keeping some intensity.

The border line was to be removed from lower and right hand edge of the Southampton essay.

Regarding values, the value of the Southampton stamp had not yet been decided, but was to be made known as soon as possible. In the meantime the printer was to go ahead with cylinder etching for the other three values: Essex 3p, Aberystwyth 7½p, and Leicester 9p.

On 13 August 1970 OOD returned four essays to Harrisons with instructions to make the amendments and proceed to the cylinder stage. A copy of the letter was sent to Supplies Department, Hemel Hempstead with four similar essays.

ARCHITECTS INVITED TO VIEW THE ESSAYS

On 18 August OOD wrote to the Royal Institute of British Architecture (RIBA) saying that the Post Office was again issuing stamps featuring British architecture. OOD felt that RIBA might like to see the essays at this stage, but explained that for security reasons it was not possible to send out the essays and that they could be viewed at Postal Headquarters, London. Similar invitations were sent to the architects of the featured buildings.

The different buildings within each university complex had been designed by a number of architects, as was usually the case. The names of the particular buildings featured on the stamps and their architects (in brackets) were as follows:

University of Leicester: Department of Engineering (Sterling and Gowen)

University of Essex: Hexagon Restaurant (The Architects Co-Partnership)

University of Southampton: Engineering Building (Sir Basil Spence, Bonnington and Collins)

University College of Wales, Aberystwyth: Physical Sciences Building (Sir Percy Thomas and Son).

ROYAL APPROVAL

On 14 August Downes wrote to Mr Vieler, Managing Director Posts (MDP), advising that the SAC had made its recommendations and asking him to forward the essays to the Private Secretary to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, for his agreement that they be submitted for the Queen's approval. On 25 August the Minister, Christopher Chataway,

being in agreement, forwarded the essays to the Assistant Private Secretary to the Queen. The letter stated that, subject to the Queen's approval, the Post Office proposed to make the following slight modifications at the production stage:

University of Essex: value to be changed to 3p

University of Southampton: value to be either 4p or 5p depending on the outcome of current discussions on future postal charges

University College of Wales, Aberystwyth: value to be changed to 7½p

University of Leicester: value to be changed to 9p.

On 27 August the Queen gave her approval, subject to the amendments mentioned.

On 9 September Harrisons, having undertaken the amendments, sent OOD further essays. These essays were shown to the SAC on 11 September, when they made recommendations for three further amendments:

the 'P' in all designs to height of 2 in '7½p' to be reduced,

the gap between the 'y' of University and 'o' of 'of' in Essex, Southampton and Leicester to be widened,

the colour of the building on the Essex design was to be brightened.

On 17 September 1970 essays were returned to Harrisons advising of the three further amendments. In addition it had now been agreed that the values should be:

Aberystwyth 3p

Southampton 5p (as on essay)

Leicester 7½p

Essex 9p.

It was not definite that the value of the Southampton stamp was to be 5p (the alternative was 4p), but it was hoped to determine this very soon. Harrisons was advised that they should leave this cylinder preparation until last.

On the same day a copy of the letter explaining the amendments was sent to Supplies Department with appropriate essays.

SPECIMEN SETS SENT TO THE UNIVERSITIES

On 22 April 1971 B T Sproat, OOD, wrote to the Vice Chancellors of Essex, Leicester and Southampton Universities and to the Principal of the University College of Wales, saying that following the suggestion by the Stamp Advisory Committee that 'some of the best current architectural design is to be found in the universities', modern university architecture was to be the theme of the architectural series of stamps to be issued in

September, with parts of the four universities being featured. Sproat enclosed specimens of all four stamps, adding that there was no objection to senior colleagues seeing them but 'this information was to be treated as confidential until such time as the Post Office made an announcement - probably in early August'. The stamps were pronounced as delightful and pleasing by general consensus.

QUANTITIES SOLD

The stamps were issued on 22 September 1971. The colours and quantities sold were:

3p - black, olive green, light green, yellow and gold - 57,975,114

5p - black, lilac, pink and tan - 9,843,757

7½p - black, gold and maroon - 7,640,465

9p - black, brown, lilac and dark blue - 5,628,511.

The four stamps were printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Ltd. All had phosphor bands and were slightly larger than double definitive size. The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 21 September 1972.

THE DESIGNER

NICHOLAS JENKINS was born in 1939 and studied at Byam Shaw School of Art and St Martin's School of Art. Initially he worked as a mural painter and exhibition designer and went on to hold lecture appointments at Yale University and the Rhode Island School of Art and Design, USA. Following this he taught graphic design at the Royal College of Art and also worked freelance. It was during this period that he designed the University stamps, his first attempt at British stamp design.

FIRST DAY COVERS AND POSTMARKS

The first day envelopes were designed by Ronald Maddox. He also designed the presentation packs, containing one of each of the stamps and priced 29½p each. There were 87,159 presentation packs sold.

Pictorial handstamps were used on the day of issue at Aberystwyth, Southampton, Leicester and Colchester, showing modern heraldic shields from the coats of arms of the four universities. Collectors were able to obtain the same handstamp by applying to the Philatelic Bureau. Envelopes bearing just one of the stamps cancelled at the appropriate place cost as follows: 3p at 14p; 5p at 16p; 7½p at 20p; 9p at 20p.

A cover bearing all four stamps, addressed by the Bureau and cancelled 'Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh' was available at 35½p. For collectors wanting to post their own covers special philatelic posting boxes were provided at 180 post offices throughout the UK: items so posted were given the normal first day of issue cancellation.

Total postings for this issue in the philatelic boxes was 541,017 of which 72.76 per cent bore full sets. A further 20,772 items were extracted from the normal post. There were 186,774 FDC envelopes sold at post office counters – these represented 34.52 per cent of postings in the philatelic boxes. The estimated revenue from postings in the philatelic boxes, including 'normal postage', was £103,750. With estimated staff costs at £2,410 the estimated net revenue, excluding 'normal postage' was £83,259.

Andy Pendlebury
November, 1994

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

- MD/CO/2138
- MD/DK/3048
- Post 54 SAC Minutes

Post Office Press and Broadcast Notices:

- KL131 issued 19 May 1970,
- PB262 issued 12 October 1970,
- BR319 issued 22 December 1970
- AR137 issued 10 August 1971
- AR152 issued 26 August 1971

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