

SPECIAL STAMP HISTORY

Seventh Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference

Date of issue: 25 SEPTEMBER 1961



The idea of stamps for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference in London in September 1961 came a letter to the Postmaster General (PMG) on 28 November 1960 from the Chairman of the General Council of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Sir Roland Robinson. He argued an issue would 'emphasise to our country and to the world the closeness of the Commonwealth link'. The organisation was formed on the coronation of King George V in 1910 as the Empire Parliamentary Association; the name was changed in 1948.

The Post Office was already committed to stamps to commemorate the Post Office Savings Bank centenary, probably in September. It also was likely the European Postal and Telecommunication Conference, to be held in Torquay in September, would be marked by stamps. There was a feeling within the GPO that a third issue would be too much, a view expressed in the reply to Sir Roland's request, dated 16 December 1960. While offering special postmarking facilities, this 'discouraging' letter stated that a third issue in one month was 'out of the question'. The letter was signed by the Assistant Postmaster General (APMG), Miss Mervyn Pike MP, who privately thought differently: a memorandum signed by her the same day shows she strongly supported the idea of an issue to mark the Conference: 'I think this is of the greatest importance and that we should issue a special stamp no matter what the difficulties. I appreciate the difficulty about the date, but feel that we would not be justified in making that a reason for saying No.'

In a letter of 27 January 1961, support for an issue was justified as stamps had been issued in 1957 to mark the 47th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference, an event very similar to the CPA Conference - to refuse one after previously honouring the other would invite criticism of GPO policy governing stamp issues. It is clear that the GPO now supported Sir Roland

Robinson's request, determined to proceed, whatever the difficulties issuing three special series in a short space of time. A memo sent to the APMG on 10 February discussed practical steps regarding the special stamps for 1961, including an issue to commemorate the CPA Conference planned for 25 September. The Post Office Savings Bank Centenary stamps had been moved to 28 August.

Sir Roland Robinson was told on 14 February his request had been successful: the APMG asked for his co-operation in arranging a Parliamentary Question so that the GPO's decision could be made public, announcing the three special issues for 1961. Sir Roland would be consulted regarding themes for the stamps and the special. Unfortunately he was out of the country so it was his Vice-Chairman, Mr Creech-Jones, who put a question in the House of Commons on 8 March, the APMG announcing stamps to mark: the Post Office Savings Bank Centenary; the Conference of European Postal and Telecommunications Administrations; the Conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. A Press and Broadcast Notice was published the same day with this information.

INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

As time was limited there was insufficient to organise the usual design competition among artists nominated by the Council of Industrial Design (CoID). A memo suggested designs be commissioned from Lynton Lamb and Harrison & Sons and that the final selection be through informal discussions with the CoID rather than the Stamp Advisory Panel (SAP).

On 17 March Miss Knight (PSD) invited two artists to submit two designs each, namely Lynton Lamb FSIA, FRSA, RDI, the designer of the Castles high value stamps, and Faith Jaques MSIA, who designed the 1960 Tercentenary 1s 3d stamp. The artists were only given until 17 April to submit their work.

Included were instructions and suggestions from discussions the CPA, such as - both designs should include 'Seventh (or VIIIth) Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference'; the inclusion of '1961' might be convenient but not essential; to demonstrate the Parliamentary angle it is desirable to include something associated with Parliament in at least one of the designs. An illustration of the Palace of Westminster featuring the clock tower or Westminster Hall (in which the Conference will be addressed by the Queen) might be suitable; the Commonwealth angle should also be introduced if possible but flags or symbols associated with any particular nation should be avoided because of the present political situation and difficulties of precedence, etc.

The artists were told there were to be two stamps, 6d and 1s 3d, should be predominantly purple and green respectively, printed by photogravure in two or three colours, the secondary colours left to the discretion of the artists. To help the artists, colour charts or 'wedges' were enclosed. The artists could submit both horizontal and vertical designs but only as completely finished artwork in full colour. The fee for each such design was 60 guineas with a further 190 guineas for any design used.

SUBMITTED DESIGNS

On 5 April a PSD memorandum to Supplies Department stated that quantities for all the 1961 special issues should be no more than could, hopefully, be 'sold to exhaustion' within a sales period at post office counters of no more than four weeks per issue. It was hoped to avoid the experience in 1960 when both sets had still been on sale five months after issue.

Both Miss Jaques and Lynton Lamb accepted the invitation and submitted their designs by 17 April. Lamb had asked for additional time, but Miss Knight explained that the strict timetable imposed by the issue date did not allow for 'any material extension'. The designs submitted were as follows.

FAITH JAQUES

6d - Parliament represented by the hammer-beam roof of Westminster Hall. A crown served to symbolise the Commonwealth.

1s 3d - the Clock Tower of the Houses of Parliament. A globe surmounted by a crown symbolised the Commonwealth.

LYNTON LAMB

6d - A representation of Westminster Hall and the House of Commons (very similar to Lamb's earlier design used as the 'stamp' on the 1957 Air Letter which marked the 46th Inter Parliamentary Union Conference).

1s 3d - the Queen's Mace and a plant with spreading roots which the artist suggested as a Commonwealth symbol.

DESIGN SELECTION

Design selection proceeded swiftly with the first meeting on 18 April attended only by Miss Knight and F J Langfield of PSD, S G Hutton of Supplies Department, and B T Coulton and R F York of Harrison & Sons. Various observations were made regarding the design and printing qualities of the submitted work. It was felt the detail of the shadow cast by the building on Lamb's 6d might not match the time shown on the clock, and that the shading would look like poor quality printing. On Lamb's 1s 3d it was felt the mace was poor in both proportion and accuracy and needed to be re-drawn. Much work would be needed by the printers to print it correctly. With regard to Miss Jaques' work it was recommended that the crown be removed from both designs as a courtesy to republican nations of the Commonwealth. Also the details of both designs were thought to be inaccurate, but were nevertheless acceptable as stylised representations.

The next day, 19 April, the designs were viewed informally by Sir Gordon Russell, chairman of the Stamp Advisory Panel (SAP). He preferred Miss Jaques' upright design of the Palace of Westminster, recommending that the Crown and globe be removed. His second choice was Lamb's drawing of the Palace of Westminster although, if it was not possible to have two designs showing Parliament, he recommended Miss Jaques' design featuring the Westminster Hall roof.

On 20 April the designs were shown to Sir Roland Robinson and other representatives of the CPA at the House of Commons. Miss Jaques' 6d design depicting Westminster Hall roof was considered favourably although with doubts that it would be recognised overseas. It was suggested the crown to the left of the Queen's head be removed and replaced by the CPA badge symbol. Miss Jaques' 1s 3d was not so admired; however Miss Knight made Sir Gordon Russell's approval known, added to which two stamps by the same designer would give the issue a unity which would be lacking if the stamps had different designers. Sir Roland Robinson preferred Lamb's design depicting the Palace of Westminster and was not deterred by its similarity to the stamp on the 1957 Air Letter. Lamb's design featuring the mace was felt inappropriate since it was not used in all countries of the Commonwealth (the CPA symbol in fact featured the mace crossed by the black rod). Furthermore the plant was disliked as it was similar to that used by many countries on stamps to mark World Refugee Year. It was felt unanimously that, unless the APMG felt differently, this design be rejected.

The decision was made to prepare essays of Miss Jaques' designs, together with Lamb's design of the Palace of Westminster as an alternative. However, certain adjustments had to be made: Miss Jaques was contacted in late April and agreed to make modifications, which were completed by 1 May, as follows:

6d (Westminster Hall Hammer Beam Roof) -

to replace the crown with the CPA badge symbol;

to make the 'th' more legible;

to draw the design in purple, white and black for the 6d denomination (it had been originally drawn in green).

1s 3d (Palace of Westminster) -

to remove the crown and globe;

to put the denomination below the Queen's head;

to extend the drawing of the Palace of Westminster.

On 2 May the designs were shown to the APMG, who approved the recommendation that Miss Jaques' two designs be adopted adding that she did not wish to see Lamb's Palace of Westminster design chosen because of its similarity to the 1957 Air Letter. It was agreed that this similarity would be mentioned in the submission to the Palace, together with the recommendation that it would be better to avoid issuing a stamp so similar to a recent one.

On 3 May (two days after the programmed date) the three designs were sent to Harrison & Sons to be prepared as 250-line screen colour essays. Instructions were as follows.

LYNTON LAMB - Palace of Westminster:

background and head – purple, Palace of Westminster – green, lettering - white on green;
value – white;

background and head – green, Palace of Westminster – purple, lettering - white on purple,
value - white.

It was requested the lettering be strengthened as necessary, Lynton Lamb being asked to contact the printers if he was uneasy about this. The stamp was to be considered for either the 6d or 1s 3d.

FAITH JAQUES - Palace of Westminster (vertical design):

background – green, head in an assortment of blues, mushroom and pink as on sketches and coloured tabs enclosed, lettering, design and value - white.

FAITH JAQUES - Westminster Hall roof:

background and head – purple, roof – black, lettering, value and mace, etc - white.

(These two designs had been drawn in the opposite colours to those that it is now intended to use.)

Delivery was expected by 12 May, but the essays were not delivered until 13 June (one day after the date by which essays should have been returned to the printers as approved). The essays comprised:

Faith Jaques' 6d Westminster Roof design in purple, with either a black, silver or gold arch; Faith Jaques' 1s 3d vertical Palace of Westminster design with either a red, umber, brown, blue or light blue head;

Lynton Lamb's 6d Palace of Westminster design in either purple with a green Palace, or green with a purple Palace.

The essays of Miss Jaques' 6d design with the details of the roof-beams in silver and gold were presumably ordered as an afterthought to the original order of 3 May, but no details of how or when this decision was taken are available. On 28 June, even though formal ministerial and Royal approval had yet to be obtained, Harrisons was instructed to start work on the stamps, both Jaques' design, the 6d as per an essay with gold arch and the upright 1s 3d as per an essay with blue head. The idea of retaining Lamb's design as a reserve had been abandoned. Harrisons replied on 1 July that work on the cylinders would begin immediately. Essays of Faith Jaques' designs were forwarded to the Queen on 30 June: approved was received on 4 July. The approved essays were sent to Harrisons on 13 July. The artists received their payment in mid-July; Miss Jaques was paid 500 guineas (£525) for her accepted designs; Lynton Lamb received 120 guineas (£126).

PRESS CONFERENCE

A Press Conference was held on 16 August confirming details of the stamps to be issued on 25 September, the opening day of the Conference, and available from all post offices for about six weeks. The APMG, chairing the Press Conference, stated the GPO was more adventurous in its special stamp issues with all eight stamps issued in 1961 printed in either two or three colours. Improved definition in printing had been achieved by using chalk-surfaced paper and a 250 line-screen. The decision to issue three sets in one year was defended on the grounds that this was not the first time it had happened, with sets in 1948 to mark the Silver Wedding of King George VI, the Liberation of the Channel Islands and the holding in London of the Olympic Games.

PRINTING AND SUPPLY DETAILS

At the beginning of September Harrison's supplied proof sheets for the 1s 3d; on 5 September S G Hutton of Supplies advised that a few minor flaws needed correction. He added that 'Generally, the Queen's face is liberally sprinkled with white spots and streaks which are fortunately not common to both sheets. I trust these will be corrected during printing.'

A proof sheet of the 6d was approved with similar qualifications on 9 September.

A GPO 'Circular' of 26 July informed Postmasters of the issue and advised them to place initial requisitions no later than 8 August, to be based on two weeks' demand and to include provision for local stamp dealers. A second 'Circular' on 13 September contained specific instructions concerning the treatment of mail bearing the special stamps before 25 September: such items were to be withdrawn and a note made of the address, office of origin, date of posting and any other details likely to help in identifying just where or how a premature release occurred. A further 'Circular' on 20 September reminded Postmasters that the issue date was Monday, 25 September, and that stamps were not to be put on sale prior to this date. This concern over premature release is likely to have been the several well-publicised incidents involving the Post Office Savings Bank Centenary stamps that had caused the GPO considerable embarrassment.

Although the due date for delivery by Harrison's of initial supplies was 21 August, this did not occur until 12 to 15 September. Nevertheless the stamps were issued as scheduled on 25 September without Supplies encountering any problems meeting Postmasters' requisitions. The stamps were printed on chalk-surfaced paper in sheets of 120: the watermark was the multiple Crown which appeared upright on the 6d stamp and sideways on the 1s 3d. The stamps were not treated with phosphor.

POST OFFICE GIFT PACKS

The GPO prepared the customary gift cards for 'distinguished people': files do not contain an example of the gift card, so precise details are not known.

The recipients of gift cards included The Queen; Princess Margaret; Sir Winston Churchill; the Prime Minister; the Speaker of the House of Commons; previous PMGs/APMGs still in Parliament; members of the Stamp Advisory Panel; the PMGs (or equivalent) of self-governing Commonwealth countries. Additionally copies of the gift card were presented to the officials and delegates of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference. Altogether, a total 274 cards were distributed.

On 10 July Harrison's had been told that the required quantities would constitute 'not more than will cover a sales period of 4 weeks plus a further quantity to maintain postal sales for 6 months', the last referring to philatelic sales through London Chief Office. Both

denominations were reported as still available in early February 1962; it was not until a Press and Broadcast Notice of 30 May 1962 that stocks were reported as exhausted, confirmed in a GPO 'Circular' on 6 June. Total production figures were reported: 6d - 162,000 sheets ordered, 139,000 'good' sheets delivered, wastage 14.2 %; 1s 3d - 72,000 sheets ordered, 48,000 'good' sheets delivered, wastage 33.3 %. It appears from the production files that the issue was practically 'sold to exhaustion'.

Some of the essays were retained for record purposes, two went to the Royal collection, while the remainder were officially destroyed.

POST OFFICE GIFT PACKS

Following the announcement on 8 March of the issues for 1961, the reaction of the philatelic press was somewhat sceptical. The 'Philatelic Exporter' of April said the GPO was 'smelling a little bit of profit', referring to the three special issues. The same month's 'Gibbons Stamp Monthly' commented 'they are likely to be a drab lot, almost certainly in heavy-toned photogravure, with such limitations set upon the artists ... that any outstanding designs are most improbable'.

However, when full details were given on 16 August a warm and enthusiastic response came from the press. The use of colour on all three issues was particularly praised, being called 'Britain's brightest-ever stamps' by the 'Daily Sketch' of 17 August. 'The Daily Telegraph' pointed out that the 6d stamp was the very first British stamp to be printed in gold. Several publications highlighted that this was only the second time in the history of the GPO that three special issues had been produced in one year. Rather than seen as the GPO exploiting the philatelic community for the sake of profit, it appears as if this was interpreted, together with other innovations, as marking a positive change in the GPO's attitude towards commemorative issues.

In late January and early February 1962 Supplies conducted an 'inquest' for PSD into the causes which had bedevilled production and supply of 1961's three special issues. This demonstrated that the CPA stamps, although behind schedule throughout the production process, had been least affected in comparison with the other issues. Stock shortages had made it necessary to withdraw all but the 2d value of the CEPT stamps from general sale by the end of October; the Savings Bank Centenary 2½d and 1s 6d had been out of stock for much of September, and only the 1s 6d was still on general sale after early November. It was apparent that most of the problems had arisen or been exacerbated 'because the three sales dates were so close together' - the Savings Bank set had been issued on 28 August, CEPT on 18 September, and the CPA stamps on 25 September. For future issues 'it would be helpful if they could be more widely separated than in 1961'.

THE DESIGNER

FAITH HEATHER JQUES was born in Leicester on 13 December 1923. She was educated at Wyggeston School, Leicester, before attending Leicester School of Art and the LCC Central

School of Arts and Crafts. On leaving in 1948 she went straight into freelance design work and became a Member of the Society of Industrial Artists the following year. Her work included book and magazine illustrations for publications such as 'Radio Times', 'Lilliput' and 'Strand', book jackets for various publishers, typographical ornamentation, and greetings card design. She also taught at Guildford School of Art and was a staff member of the Graphic Design Department at Hornsey College of Art. As well as the 7th CPA Conference set she also designed the General Letter Office Tercentenary 3d of 1960.

SIMON BATES
8 JANUARY 1993

REFERENCES

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