

## General Anniversaries

Date of issue: 25 AUGUST 1971



At the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting on 21 October 1969, J R Baxter, Secretary of the SAC and a member of the Operations and Overseas Department (OOD), said that an early start in planning the 1971 stamp programme was desirable. He proposed that the subjects should include: the bi-centenary of the birth of Walter Scott, an architecture series and the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament. This shortlist had been drawn from ideas generated within the Post Office and suggestions from interested bodies, and were considered the more important subjects: it was agreed these be included. Subsequently it was proposed that a literary anniversaries series would commemorate Scott, Keats and Gray, the architecture series would feature new university buildings and the theme for Northern Ireland would possibly be tourism.

At the SAC meeting on 4 March 1970 the Chairman, George Downes, Director of Operations and Overseas, said it had become practice to include a general anniversaries series. The Post Office received many suggestions for special stamps and an anniversary series provided a good opportunity to include four or five of the anniversaries considered of major importance and appeal. However, 1971 was a very busy year for the Post Office with the change to decimal currency involving new low value decimal stamps in February and a new regional issue, probably in May. Counter staff had urged that there be no special issues before mid-May, to which the Post Office agreed. The Chairman asked the SAC to consider whether a General Anniversaries series should be issued in 1971. Anthony Lousada was unanimously supported by the rest of the Committee when he said that 'subjects chosen for previous anniversaries issues had been of only minor sectional interest' and that 'it seemed a mistake to lower our standards by including subjects of small importance'. The Committee recommended that General Anniversary stamps should not appear in 1971, partly because the most interesting anniversaries in 1971 were already included in the Literary Anniversaries and Northern Ireland issues, and partly because of the already-heavy stamp programme. Following this Downes wrote to Mr Vieler, Managing Director Posts (MDP), that the recommendations for special issues in 1971 were: 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament, Literary Anniversaries, British Architecture, and Christmas. Around 50 suggestions for stamps had been put forward, most of which had to be excluded – the following were considered the more important:

- 10th anniversary of the Antarctic Treaty (suggested by Lord Shackleton, the Foreign Office and the Bishop of Norwich, but rejected under the Post Office 50 year rule, although it was acknowledged that pressure to follow suit might be exerted if all the other countries involved issued a stamp);
- British Legion (50th anniversary), rejected on the grounds that the association's following had diminished;
- Robert Owen (200th anniversary) – Mrs J Hart MP had requested an issue, along with a number of Co-operative branches and individuals, but the idea was rejected as similar stamps had been issued for the centenary of the TUC in 1968, and the 75th anniversary of the International Co-operative Alliance in 1970;
- Discovery of Insulin (50th anniversary), suggested by the British Diabetic Association and rejected as unlikely to be a good design subject and might be more appropriate for a future British Discoveries issue;
- The Building Research Station (50th anniversary), suggested by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Buildings and Works, but rejected as not having much popular appeal;
- The National Association of Youth Clubs (60th anniversary), suggested by Angus Ogilvie and rejected under the 50-year rule;
- Richard Trevithick (200th anniversary), suggested by the Institute of Civil Engineers and the National Museum of Wales, as Trevithick was an engineer who had designed the first rail-borne locomotive but was not considered well known and therefore rejected;
- Wolsey (500th anniversary), suggested by the Attorney General in his capacity as MP for Ipswich, but rejected as 'not a very inspiring subject, and hardly relevant to the problems of today';
- The City Of York (1,900th anniversary), suggested by the regional Office of the Ministry of Housing and York City Council, but rejected as York Minster been featured on a stamp the previous year, while to celebrate one city's anniversary might start a flood of other applicants that would be difficult to refuse.

The view within OOD regarding anniversaries was detailed in an internal letter dated 24 March from B T Sproat to Langfield. Sproat said that each year the Post Office was committed to celebrate a number of important anniversaries, of which none warranted a set to itself. To issue four or five separate stamps was financially prohibitive and it was felt best to mark these miscellaneous anniversaries in one series. This was not thought ideal as the result was often far from cohesive. Following the SAC's recommendation not to include an anniversaries series in 1971 Sproat suggested that OOD would seek to drop this kind of issue permanently. The policy then would be to celebrate:

- major anniversaries that could not be ignored that would have a set to themselves as with the 50th anniversary of Northern Ireland;
- a group of anniversaries with a common theme as with the literary anniversaries series.

The Managing Director Posts (MDP) submitted the proposed stamp programme to the Post Office Board, which gave its approval. Two months later, on 19 May 1970, the Post Office announced that for 1971 there would be four special stamp issues: three stamps to mark the 50th anniversary of the Northern Ireland Parliament in June; three stamps commemorating three important literary anniversaries in July; a further issue on the theme

of British architecture in September, this time illustrating four of Britain's newest university buildings; and finally the traditional Christmas issue in October. Full details of values and dates of issue were to be announced later.

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### **BRITISH LEGION 50th ANNIVERSARY**

On 9 June 1970 Mr Vieler, MDP, was approached by the British Legion requesting that a stamp marking the 50th anniversary be reconsidered. Vieler explained that, although the Post Office recognised the great importance of the work of the Legion, it had, albeit reluctantly, decided to exclude the anniversary from the 1971 stamp programme. This was regarded as unsatisfactory by the British Legion and on 9 July General Sir Charles Jones, President British Legion, wrote to Lord Hall, Chairman of the Post Office, asking that the matter be reconsidered. Lord Hall replied that having again examined the circumstances closely and sympathetically, he regretted that he could see no justification for altering the original decision. This was by no means the end of the matter as on 7 September Mr Chataway, Minister Posts and Telecommunications, wrote to Lord Hall saying that both he and the Prime Minister, Edward Heath, had received a number of representations about the omission of a British Legion stamp. Chataway added that, as the Prime Minister felt a stamp should be issued due to the special nature of the British Legion, the matter should be reconsidered as a matter of some urgency. Lord Hall set about this immediately and asked George Downes to furnish him with the reasons why the British Legion 50th anniversary was excluded from the programme and what problems would arise if it was now included. Downes replied that the British Legion, although a worthy cause, had a diminishing following and possibly meant less to the younger generation, whom the Post Office was trying to attract as collectors of the future. Such a stamp was also unlikely to have much appeal abroad and at that time the Post Office had begun to realise the importance of the overseas market as a main growth area.

A change to the programme once announced was always regretted by the Post Office as it made it harder to resist change on future occasions. Planning ahead on a firm basis was considered a prerequisite for producing the best stamps both artistically and technically. Although a change at this stage was thought unlikely to inconvenience stamp collectors or traders there was a need to keep the total cost of the 1971 issues to a reasonable level (they had already exceeded the £1.50 limit that was felt right). Adverse reaction was likely to come from the City of York and the Rugby Football Union (RFU) that had both fought hard for a stamp.

There would be additional costs for the design, production, distribution and philatelic services. A single stamp at 3p would not produce much, if any, philatelic profit (a 3p stamp would only cover the cost of posting and not any special first day services provided) but if a 3p stamp was issued together with a higher value then the costs of around £11,000 would be covered and a philatelic profit would be made.

The Post Office had, at first, feared that the heavy 1971 programme would put a strain on Harrison and Sons, the stamp printers, but learnt that the company could in fact add to its schedule in the latter half of 1971. The main problem was seen as fitting in an extra issue

within the final seven months of 1971. Special stamps remained on sale at all offices for two months after issue, and a further ten months from the Philatelic Bureau only. An overlap of one issue and the next was to be avoided, and while the interval of two months was not always possible, a period of only two or three weeks would cause problems for the counter staff. Bearing all this in mind the only convenient date appeared to be late August with issues rearranged at monthly intervals to follow. This was considered a very heavy programme but, technically speaking, could be achieved.

On receiving this information the Post Office Board reconsidered the position and decided to include a 'British Legion' stamp.

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## CENTENARY OF THE RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

A suggestion of a stamp marking the RFU was first put forward in 1965, when Sir Ian Orr-Ewing wrote to the Postmaster General (PMG), Anthony Wedgwood Benn, saying that a representative of the RFU had asked him to forward the suggestion. Sir Ian was told that, provided the stamp policy had not changed, the idea would be borne in mind.

The suggestion was next raised on 16 June 1966 when D L Harrison, the President-elect RFU and also Chairman of its Centenary Sub-Committee, wrote to the PMG asking for a stamp marking the centenary. In reply Harrison was told that providing the stamp policy had not changed the idea would happily be considered and that he should write again early in 1970 giving details of any special events to mark the centenary.

On 21 November 1966, in the Houses of Parliament, Hector Monro, MP for Dumfries, asked Edward Short, who had replaced Wedgwood Benn as PMG, if a special stamp was to be issued to commemorate the centenary of the first rugby union international played in Edinburgh on 27 March 1871. Short was unable to give a firm ruling, but said he would certainly bear it in mind.

On 5 February 1970 R E Prescott, Secretary of RFU, wrote to Post Office Headquarters again suggesting a stamp. He went on to explain that the centenary was to be marked by special events, the main being a 'Rugby Congress' with representatives from nearly all countries in the world where the game is played, and special matches against a Fiji touring side and against the Centenary President's XV made up of overseas players. Prescott was informed that the stamp programme for 1970 had already been published and it was impossible to add to it in any way. The programme for 1971, however, was not likely to be finalised until the summer of 1970 and the Post Office was pleased to add the suggestion to the list for consideration. Later the Post Office replied that the special stamp programme for 1971 had been decided and that, unfortunately, a stamp for the RFU could not be included. On 10 August Brian Batsford, MP and member of the SAC, who had been unable to attend the meeting when it was decided not to have a RFU stamp, feeling strongly about the matter, wrote to George Downes of his intention to urge the Minister for Posts and Telecommunications, Christopher Chataway to reconsider the matter. Downes thought this a 'curious course of action for one of our members' and regretted on constitutional grounds

this approach to the Minister. Chataway, having consulted Downes, replied that although appreciative of any disappointment felt he was unable to intervene as the Post Office had good reason for not including an anniversaries series.

Batsford's next move was to write, in his capacity of member of the SAC, to Whitney Straight, Deputy Chairman of the Post Office, on 30 September 1970, stating that, although fully aware of the reasons behind the decision, now there was to be a British Legion stamp could not two more stamps be issued to make a general anniversaries series. He stated that delegates at the Centenary Congress from some 50 Rugby Unions throughout the world had been 'astounded to hear that the Government had refused [the] request although the Postal Authorities had first been approached as long ago as 1965'. Straight replied that now a British Legion stamp was being included the matter would be discussed again by the SAC. On 8 October Eldon Griffiths, Minister for Sport, wrote to Lord Hall, Chairman of the Post Office, saying that he had met many people who attended the Centenary Congress and a constant comment was the lack of a stamp. Many of the delegates found it 'inconceivable that there was to be no special stamp in this country - the birthplace of rugby', especially as special stamps were being issued in France, Rumania, Czechoslovakia, New Zealand, South Africa, Fiji, Japan and Thailand.

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## **1,900TH ANNIVERSARY OF YORK**

The first recorded request for a stamp for York was in October 1967 by G M Wedd of the Regional Office, Ministry of Housing and Local Government. This was followed two years later, in May 1969, when the Town Clerk of York made a similar request. In July 1970 Alex Lyon, MP for York, wrote asking that the Post Office give the matter serious consideration. The MDP wrote to Alex Lyon on 27 July 1970 informing him that a stamp commemorating the City of York would not be issued.

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## **GENERAL ANNIVERSARIES**

George Downes, Chairman of the SAC, explained to the Committee on 22 October that a British Legion stamp was now being included in the 1971 programme and that, as a one-stamp issue was unprofitable and reopening of the 1971 programme would inevitably lead to interested parties renewing pressure for a stamp, perhaps it would now be better to have a General Anniversaries issue. After discussing the matter the Committee recommended a General Anniversaries series commemorating the following anniversaries:

- a) 50th anniversary of the British Legion (a stamp having already been agreed),
- b) Rugby Football Union Centenary, and
- c) 1,900th anniversary of the City of York. (These latter two were considered the most important of those originally excluded.)

On 16 December Prescott was told that, following the decision to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the British Legion, the Post Office Board had decided (on 9 November) that stamps for two other anniversaries should be issued at the same time: one to mark the

1,900th anniversary of the City of York, and the other the Centenary of the Rugby Football Union. Naturally Prescott and those around him were delighted with this news.

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## INSTRUCTIONS TO ARTISTS

On 8 January Fritz Wegner, Andrew Restall and Broom Lynne were invited to submit designs. The requirements and conditions were set out in the accompanying 'Instructions to artists'.

The artists were told that as the three subjects were totally different in character there was a need for some kind of common denominator to give uniformity to the series. A theme suggested was to use flowers such as a poppy for the British Legion, a white rose for York and a red rose for rugby. Another theme suggested was the use of figures, although the designers were free to think of other ways to link all three designs. The designers were told that the City of York authorities had said they would like the coat of arms to be included but this was not obligatory. The designers were to discuss the question of theme with the Post Office Design Director, Stuart Rose.

The stamps would be printed by Harrison and Sons at High Wycombe, Bucks using multicolour photogravure that reproduces a number of graduated tones, so the designers were advised to use artists materials that permit the photography of each tone in its true value. A shade card was enclosed as a guide to the overall tone range. Not more than four colours were to be used for each stamp: black was not to be used as a background while the background colours used should be no deeper than mid-tone.

For each completed design the artist would receive £150 with a maximum of £450. For each design selected for use, an additional £150 was to be paid with a total of £300 for each successful design.

All designs submitted and the copyright therein was to become the absolute property of the Post Office.

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## ARTWORK RECEIVED

Artworks were received from each of the three artists of one design for each anniversary: Broom Lynne on 22 January 1971); Fritz Wegner on 25 January 1971; and Andrew Restall on 25 January 1971.

At the SAC meeting on 28 January 1971 the Committee examined these designs. After some discussion it was agreed that Wegner's designs go for essaying. The Committee suggested that the following amendments be made to improve two designs:  
British Legion - delete 'frieze' at top of design and let the characters 'float';  
City of York - change colour of present orange panels, and incorporate the sword, mace and cap in the Coat of Arms.

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## PAYMENT TO ARTISTS

On 19 February Lynne and Restall were each advised that on this occasion their designs had not been accepted and each received £450 in payment. Wegner was informed the same day that the SAC had chosen his designs for essaying and that the Post Office would write again when final approval by the Queen had been given. Enclosed was a cheque for £450 in payment for three completed designs.

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## FIRST ESSAYS EXAMINED

On 24 February the Post Office received the first essays of Fritz Wegner's designs: the British Legion being a 3p value, the City of York 7½p value and the rugby the 9p value.

These essays were examined by the SAC that day. It was explained that the following amendments were still to be made.

a) British Legion:

Lower the four figures, more definition to poppy, raise '50th Anniversary', remove medal from nurse, webbing to be khaki, black kerchief to sailor, yellow lettering on hat and darker blue on sailor's uniform.

b) City of York:

Dot 'i' in 'Anniversary', toned (modelled) cameo head - not gold - to bring into line with other two stamps, more definition in tower and wall, grey field to shield not silver, grey sword, gold on mace and lions, tower and wall more definition and more yellow in soldiers helmet.

c) Rugby Football Union:

Greater definition of players' hands, arms and jerseys, stronger colours throughout, less white on rose, and lettering centred on reverse panel.

The left hand panels on all three essays were to be reduced in width, although it had not yet been decided whether to do this to the right hand panels as well. The value numerals were to be raised to be visually centred between head and motif. The Committee agreed that all these amendments could be undertaken by the printer during production and in close liaison with the designer.

The essay of the York anniversary stamp was shown, in conjunction with the other two essays, to the Mayor of York, the Alderman and the Town Clerk on 2 March. Although they would possibly have preferred the design by Broom Lynne, which showed the Coat of Arms as the prominent feature, they were pleased that a smaller version had been incorporated in Fritz Wegner's design. Two reservations were raised: the present silver field to the shield and silver sword in the Coat of Arms should be retained as shown in the essay and not changed to grey as proposed; a great deal more definition should be given to the tower and wall in the background in order to show up the angles of the multi-angular tower.

The files in the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) contain no mention as to whether any action was taken on these points. However, the silver shield does appear to have been retained on the issued stamp

The three essays were also shown to the General Secretary of the British Legion and the Secretary of the RFU, who both expressed satisfaction and pleasure with the results.

On 30 March Harrison and Sons forwarded further essays of the 7½p York design.

The SAC next met on 31 March when it was shown a final essay of the York stamp incorporating the amendments previously described. The printer had not been able to produce final essays of the other two designs because of insufficient time and therefore the amendments were being incorporated during production. The Committee approved the York essay subject to one further amendment: the value figure should be the same size as those on the earlier essays and moved slightly to the right to give the appearance of being central.

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## THE QUEEN'S APPROVAL

On 6 April George Downes wrote to Geoffrey Vieler, Managing Director Posts (MDP), giving the SAC's recommendations. Downes asked that the essays be forwarded to the Private Secretary to the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications in order that, with the Minister's agreement, they be submitted for the Queen's approval. On 8 April the Minister, Christopher Chataway, being in agreement, forwarded the essays to the 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:

British Legion - Lower the four figures; give more definition to the poppy; slightly raise the words '50th Anniversary'.

City of York - Move the value figure slightly to the right.

Rugby Football Union - Give greater definition to the players' hands, arms and jerseys; make the colours rather stronger.

In addition, the coloured panels and value figures of the British Legion and Rugby Football Union stamps were to be made the same size as those on the City of York stamp.

Sir Michael replied on 13 April that he was 'commanded to say that Her Majesty approves all three designs ... subject to the minor modifications suggested by the Post Office'.

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## MOVEMENT OF ESSAYS

On 19 April the Operations and Overseas Department forwarded to the Supplies Department essays, which had been approved by the Queen subject to slight amendments.

A similar set of essays was sent to Harrisons the same day, again outlining the amendments to be made.



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## FINAL PAYMENT

On 30 April the Post Office sent a cheque to Wegner for £450, the fee for three successful designs.

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## BRITISH LEGION PROOF SHEET DIFFERS FROM ESSAY

On 18 May OOD wrote to the Supplies Department, Hemel Hempstead informing them of observations made on the recently received proof sheets of the 3p British Legion stamp. The figures were said to be 'washed out' and lacking the definition of the essay and there was too much white especially on the soldier to the left. Although the printers had been instructed to print the webbing in khaki it was in fact almost white-out. Finally it was noted that the legend '50th Anniversary' was less heavy than the essay and, although OOD preferred this version, there was a need for consistency with the lettering similar on all three stamps. OOD, acknowledging that the production run had started, asked that Harrisons be informed of these points in the hope that improvements could be made. The files contain no further correspondence on this matter and examination shows that the webbing on the issued stamp is as described above which suggests no further amendments were made at this stage.

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## THE PRESS SHOWING

With the day of issue scheduled for 25 August, the press showing, held as normal at Postal Headquarters, London, was arranged for six weeks prior, on 20 July.

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## STAMPS ISSUED

The stamps were issued on 25 August 1971.

The 3p stamp marked the 50th anniversary of the British Legion and featured representatives from the three armed services and the Nursing Associations. The famous Flanders poppy was shown in the right hand panel beneath the Queen's head. The colours used were black, blue and dark blue, brown, grey, orange, red and green.

The British Legion was founded by Field Marshall Earl Haig and came into being on 1 July 1921. The patron is the Queen.

The 7½p stamp commemorated the 1,900th anniversary of the founding of the City of York and featured a Roman centurion, with the ancient multi-angular tower fortification in the

background. The coat of arms was portrayed in the right hand panel beneath the Queen's head. The colours used were black, grey, mauve, silver, mustard, brown and gold.

The City of York was founded in 71AD by the Roman Governor of Britain, Quintus Petilius Cerealis. The Roman occupation lasted 340 years. York was visited by Emperors Hadrian, Severus and Constantius.

The 9p stamp marked the centenary of the Rugby Football Union and featured players of a century ago in action. The red rose, symbol of the English international team, was shown in the right hand panel beneath the Queen's head. The colours used were green, olive green, red, black, blue, brown and yellow.

The design of the stamp was derived from a painting by William Barnes Wollen that was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1879. The RFU believed the match portrayed was between Cambridge University and Newport, although the ground and the year the game was played were unknown. The painting came into the possession of the RFU in the late 1960s, when it was discovered under a draught excluder in the basement of Lloyds Bank headquarters. It was restored and presented to the RFU by Lord Melrose, Chairman of Lloyds Bank, and now hangs in the Committee Rooms at Twickenham. On the stamp the players are running in the opposite direction to that depicted in the painting; the 'Cambridge Evening News' reported on 26 August that a Public Relations Officer for the Eastern Region of the Post Office said 'This may be because if they had been shown as running as in the painting their backs would have been towards the Queen's head.'

The game is alleged to have been devised at Rugby School in 1823. It was not until 26 January 1871 that 21 clubs banded together in London to form the Rugby Football Union when the first laws of the game were drawn up. The Scottish Rugby Union was formed in 1873, the Irish Rugby Union in 1874, and the Welsh Rugby Union in 1880.

All three stamps were printed in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Ltd with phosphor bands and were slightly larger than double definitive size. They were designed by Fritz Wegner, the Austrian-born artist whose past successes had included the popular 1969 Christmas issue.

This series of stamps is correctly known as General Anniversaries; however, some publications refer to it as British Anniversaries.

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## QUANTITIES PRINTED AND SOLD

The quantities printed and sold were:

3p - 69,000,000; 55,211,706

7½p - 14,250,000; 7,026,973

9p - 12,500,000; 5,705,637.

The stamps were withdrawn on 24 August 1972.

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## FIRST DAY COVERS

The first day envelope was available from the Philatelic Bureau and all Head Post Offices at a cost of 3½p each and was designed by Sutherland Hawes and Associates.

Total postings for this issue in the philatelic philatelic boxes was 597,936 of which 65.06 per cent bore full sets. A further 31,119 items were extracted from the normal post. There were 195,812 envelopes sold at post office counters - these represented 32.75 per cent of postings in the philatelic boxes. The estimated revenue from postings in the philatelic boxes, including 'normal postage' was £84,080. With estimated staff costs at £2,252 the estimated net revenue, excluding 'normal postage' was £61,736.

A presentation pack containing one of each stamp and costing 24p was available from the Bureau and all Head Post Offices from the date of issue. A total of 94,059 presentation packs were sold.

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## SPECIAL POSTMARKS

Pictorial handstamps were used on the day of issue at Maidstone, Twickenham and York. The design for Maidstone showed the British Legion Poppy, for Twickenham the Rugby Union Rose and for York the City Shield and Verderer's cap. These were the same as appeared on the stamps.

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## FRENCH PRIZE FOR THE YORK STAMP

At the 1971 Paris Autumn Philatelic Exhibition, the stamp marking the 1,900th anniversary of the City of York was judged to be the best design of the year from another European country. The prize, a cup and a diploma, followed on the success from the previous year when Britain won a gold medal, awarded by the Indian Philatelic Society for the best Ghandi stamp issued by any country in the world.

Andy Pendlebury  
October, 1994

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