

STAMP HISTORY

## British Painters:

### Sir Joshua Reynolds, Sir Henry Raeburn

Date of issue: 4 JULY 1973



The Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) first discussed the 1973 stamp programme on 20 October 1971. There were six possibilities taken from over 100 suggestions, covering important events, anniversaries and 'themes'. It was suggested there was room for at least two 'thematic' issues, and among those under serious consideration was a British Paintings issue commemorating the 250th anniversary of the birth of Sir Joshua Reynolds and the centenary of the death of Sir Edwin Landseer whose animal paintings would have wide appeal with the public. Among the Committee's recommendations was that a British Paintings issue should feature Reynolds and Sir Henry Raeburn, rather than Landseer. It was thought possible to add work of other artists, although none was named and the idea seems to have been dropped very quickly.

#### PROGRAMME AGREED

On 28 October E G White, Director of Marketing, and Stuart Rose, Design Advisor to the Post Office, met to discuss the programme. A minute would be drafted within the next 10 days to be sent to the Managing Director Posts (MDP) outlining the arguments for and against the subjects tentatively included. A paper was also circulated to the Managing Director's Committee (Posts and Giro). With the MDP's approval it was next a matter of approaching the Post Office Management Board and subsequently the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. The Board was reminded that there had been previous issues on the paintings theme in July 1967, August 1968, and the 1967 Christmas stamps. These had all proved very popular with the public, but the modern Ulster paintings in 1971 had not been so well received. The recommendation was that anniversaries of two great British painters, Raeburn and Reynolds, be commemorated in 1973, as 'a series with paintings by these two artists should prove attractive generally and of particular appeal to thematic collectors who

specialise in paintings on stamps'. The idea was to have one self-portrait and one other portrait by each artist.

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## **PLYMPTON GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

The Headmaster of Plympton Grammar School wrote to Postal Headquarters on 10 December 1971 saying that as July 1973 was the 250th anniversary of the birth of Sir Joshua, 'Is it possible that the occasion is worthy of being marked by the issue of a commemorative stamp?' Sir Joshua was educated at the school, where his father had been Headmaster, and the original school buildings remained. In July the following year PHQ wrote to the Headmaster to say there was to be a stamp, but no further details were given.

A similar suggestion came from the Entertainments Department of Plymouth Council writing to Plymouth Post Office on 20 December 1971 to ask if consideration could be given to a stamp for Sir Joshua in 1973 to tie in with its proposed celebrations.

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## **BRITISH PAINTERS TO BE INCLUDED**

On 15 February 1972 the Chairman of the SAC, E G White, outlined the 1973 programme: of the six issues planned only four had been agreed. One was the British Paintings issue, now called 'British Painters - Raeburn and Reynolds'. Material was being collected and it was hoped to show the Committee a selection of the artists' work at the next meeting. In assembling the material it was necessary to approach, in confidence, the various trustees of the paintings under consideration and ask if photographs could be taken for reference purposes. It was explained that should a painting be considered suitable for a stamp, discussion over copyright would take place before proceeding.

At the SAC meeting held on 23 March 1972 the Committee was told that advice had been given by the Secretary of the Royal Academy, Sydney Hutchinson, and Professor E K Waterhouse, Director of the Paul Mellon Foundation, and an authority on the works of Reynolds. Reproductions of works of the two artists were shown to the Committee.

Sir Henry Raeburn RA:

Self-portrait, held at National Portrait Gallery Scotland

The Skater Reverend Robert Walker, held at National Gallery of Scotland,

MacDonald of Glengarry, held at National Gallery of Scotland

Miss Scott Moncrieff, held at Royal Company of Archers, Edinburgh

Boy and Rabbit, held at Royal Academy of Arts, London.

Sir Joshua Reynolds:

Miss Keppel Mrs Thomas Meyrick, held at Ashmolean Museum Oxford

Lord Heathfield, held at National Gallery

Warren Hastings, held at National Portrait Gallery

Nelly O'Brien, held at Wallace Collection

Prince William Frederick of Gloucester, held at Trinity, Cambridge

Self-portrait with spectacles, held at Dulwich College  
Sir Joshua Reynolds DCL in university robes after being made Doctor of Civil Law, held at Royal Academy of Arts  
Self-portrait, held at Dilettanti Society  
Col John Hayes St Ledger, held at Waddesdon Manor (National Trust).

These were chosen because 'they were available for the public to see, because they had some significance as paintings, and were not controversial'. It was agreed that designs should be prepared using:

Raeburn - A self-portrait and 'The Skater'

Reynolds - A self-portrait (showing the painter in his Doctor of Civil Law gown) and 'Prince William of Gloucester'.

Stuart Rose, Post Office Design Advisor, produced designs that incorporated the paintings suggested by the SAC. As with earlier 'Paintings' issues he had paid attention to the problems of placing the Queen's head and value.

On 5 July 1972 Postal Headquarters was informed that the Minister of Posts and Telecommunications had approved the 1973 programme. Thus on 17 July a Press and Broadcast Notice was released announcing another series of classic British paintings to be issued in July 1973 to mark the 150th anniversary of Sir Henry Raeburn's death and the 250th anniversary of the birth of Sir Joshua Reynolds. The values were to be 3p, 5p, 7½p, and 9p and would feature two works by each painter.

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### **FURTHER DESIGNS PRODUCED BY STUART ROSE**

Further designs had been produced for the SAC meeting on 27 July 1972. The Committee suggested that the Reynolds self-portrait would be best for a 3p stamp, with the other self-portrait as the 5p value. It had no strong views on the other values and no reason was given for this preference. It was agreed that the names of the painters should be spelled out in full and the title of the painting be included. The Committee felt it would be unwise to go ahead with the use of the Reynolds' painting of Prince William of Gloucester without first advising the Queen of the Post Office's intention. D M Elliot, representing the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications on the Committee, agreed to arrange this. On 2 August Sir John Eden, Minister of Posts and Telecommunications, wrote to the Private Secretary to the Queen explaining the Post Office's proposal to use the Reynolds' portrait and asked to be informed of the Queen's wishes. Two days later Sir John was informed that the Queen had no objection.

Proofs were shown to the Committee on 7 September. The designs were without typography and were shown to give an idea of what the stamps would look like. The Chairman explained that, following the recent tragic death of Prince William of Gloucester, 'some in the country would think it unseemly for us to use this portrait when there is such a wealth of other material': the decision not to show this portrait met with full support. The Queen was advised of the change, noted 'with appreciation'. It was necessary to choose an alternative painting and Stuart Rose had already consulted Professor E K Waterhouse to

ascertain the 'most highly regarded alternatives'. The Committee viewed those for which reproductions were available and after discussion agreed that the portrait of Nelly O'Brien with the dog was the best.

However, E G White wrote to Stuart Rose on 12 September saying, 'Despite the views expressed by the SAC members last week, I have serious misgivings about using the portrait of Mrs O'Brien on a stamp which must carry the Queen's portrait too.' White said he would deal with this at the next meeting but there was a need to have an alternative to put forward when the question was re-opened. White added that he recognised that they were 'reproducing the Reynolds painting, rather than noticing Mrs O'Brien herself', but doubted whether the public would see this distinction so clearly. He concluded that they could not 'ignore sensitivities likely to be reflected in public criticism of our own respect for the Monarch'. Unfortunately the files do not contain a reply by Rose. However, although the SAC could see the point of the remarks, it could not agree. Most members of the Committee felt the stamp series would be commemorating Reynolds, the painter, and not the subject. They looked at reproductions of other paintings by Reynolds but concluded that the O'Brien portrait had been recommended as a fine work of art and therefore strongly recommended it be used. In fact they added they did not wish to select an alternative subject.

On 8 November D W Barker, Marketing Department, wrote to E G White regarding the proposed use of the portrait of O'Brien:

There is no specific book or article on Miss O'Brien and it is exceedingly difficult to find more than passing references to her dubious career. The most information that the general public would be likely to hear exists in the official catalogue of the Wallace Collection, this says 'The sitter (d.1768), a famous beauty of her time, is mentioned by Walpole in a letter to George Montagu of 29 March 1766 as mistress of Lord Bolingbroke and others. She died in Park Street, Grosvenor Square. She was a frequent sitter to Reynolds, noted first in November 1760, then in December 1761, in January and May 1762, May 1764 and often during that summer, May 1765, March 1767.' Her early life is obscure and only after considerable research have we discovered that she was an actress and prostitute, she became famous because she was a mistress and entertainer of the wealthy, she lived with Reynolds and had an illegitimate son in 1764 and that she died in 1768.

The official catalogue also emphasises the artistic merit of the picture: six other portraits were painted by Reynolds, are apparently for pleasure, and in this the sitter inspired him to one of his finest works. There are few in which he rendered a woman's face with so much sympathy and delicacy.

Barker asked that perhaps White would consider adopting the Committee's choice 'Because of the SAC's very strong recommendation on the artistic merit of the painting ... and bearing in mind that it is difficult to find more than a passing reference to her background.' The Post Office files do not contain a reply by White and one can assume he eventually accepted the case for the portrait of Nelly O'Brien.

In a separate letter, also dated 8 November, Barker explained to White that at an earlier SAC meeting it had been decided that the two self-portraits should be the lower values, and, after consultation with Stuart Rose, it was proposed to use 'Nelly O'Brien' as 7½p and 'The

Skater' as 9p. There was said to be no significance in this other than the order in which the painters were presented.

Originally it had been intended for the date of issue to be 18 July, as this was closest to the anniversary of the birth of Reynolds. The date of issue was considered to be of minimal importance and was now changed to 4 July. This date change had been suggested by White and, although no reasons were given, was most probably for operational reasons. On 20 September J S Evans, South Western Postal Region, asked Postal Headquarters (PHQ) London to consider changing the date of issue to 16 July, the actual date of birth of Reynolds. Reynolds was born at Plympton, a suburb of Plymouth, and Evans urged that the day of issue coincide with the city's festivities to enhance the philatelic marketing activities. This request was evidently refused and, although no reply is held in the files, it was presumably due to the fact that Wednesday was the preferred day of issue in the early 1970s.

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## FIRST ESSAYS PRODUCED

On 8 January 1973 the printers Harrison and Sons forwarded the first essays to PHQ. These were shown to the SAC on 18 January, together with the photographic miniatures seen earlier, showing details of the two heads and also a colour panel at the top. Stuart Rose felt that designs required radical changes, especially of the two self-portraits, and suggested they would have more impact as stamps if they showed only a detail of each picture. It was suggested that the similarity of the two self-portraits could cause some confusion within the postal system and to ease this the Raeburn should be re-essayed to a larger scale. Some members were against this and felt that the balance of the original pictures should be retained by including the whole composition. The Committee put forward several suggestions for alternatives that were discussed at length. Finally Stuart Rose suggested essaying the alternatives he had been working on.

The members then agreed that:

- all four stamps should be essayed with amended typography;
- background colours for the top part of the stamp to be taken out of those colours used in the reproduction of the paintings;
- denominations to be reversed white out from the background colour and the remainder of the type overprinted in black and the Queen's head to be in black;
- the two self-portraits to be essayed with the best detail treatment.

It was also agreed that the printers should look again at the original painting of O'Brien to ensure that the colour reproduction of the essay was a good match.

In 1967 and 1968 Rose had been instructed to make the paintings fill the entire space, and had placed the Queen's head and value on the reproduction. Rose did not feel this was the best way to design stamps and with subsequent paintings issues, 1973 included, they were kept clear of the painting. Rose later wrote that he had wanted to reproduce a detail of some of the artists' portraits, rather than show the whole painting. He prepared a set of designs on this basis, but when it came to Sir Joshua's self-portrait, which it was generally

thought could not be ignored, Rose said it was made quite clear that the Post Office would only get the President of the Royal Academy's permission to reproduce if the whole painting was included. Rose recalls, this was 'a pity really, because it is nearly eight feet tall!'

On 13 and 14 February Harrisons forwarded further essays to PHQ. These essays, which incorporated the amendments as suggested previously, were shown to the SAC on 14 February. There was a difference of opinion within the Committee regarding the merits of the two self-portraits, which now showed only detailed heads. Much discussion took place resulting in a show of hands with 5 to 3 in favour of showing the full painting. It was agreed that all four stamps would have the Queen's head in gold, values in black and revised typography. The Committee was then informed of problems in the designs from a Post Office operational perspective. For effective manual sorting of letters it is essential that the postmen can readily differentiate the various values in a series of stamps. With this set the colour panels of the 5p and the 7½p were insufficiently distinctive. It was agreed that one of the panels should be in another colour. The Post Office chemist had tested the essays and found that 'the colours were not acceptable phosphor-wise for the purposes of electronic sorting'. By having a wider than normal margin between each stamp, by either reducing the design area of the stamp or the introduction of an extra perforation down and across, the signal produced when items were sorted by automatic letter facing machines would be improved.

On 15 February D H Beaumont of PHQ wrote to R F York of Harrisons explaining the amendments required following the SAC meeting. Harrisons had already let it be known that it could reduce the design area of each value to enable the margin between each stamp to be extended from 0.10 inches to 0.15 inches. Beaumont said that the chemist had been consulted on this and had stipulated this would only be acceptable if there was a guarantee of 'central perforations within the bounds of 10% of total production'. The amendments were listed as:

Common to all designs - (i) Queen's head in gold, (ii) values in black, (iii) revised typography;  
Reynolds - full painting;

Raeburn - full painting with revision of the green and red tones. Hold colour at top (rectangle) until instructed of final choice by Mr Rose;

Nelly O'Brien - possible change of colour of rectangle - Mr Rose will give final choice shortly;

The Skater - a possibly less sombre tone may be required for the rectangle - await instructions from Mr Rose. Colour of actual painting reproduction to be same as second essay.

On 19 February Beaumont wrote again to Harrisons, apologising for giving wrong information about the central perforations. Where the first letter had said central perforations were to be kept in the bounds of 10 per cent of total production, it should have read 'central perforations within a tolerance of plus or minus 10%'. This, said Beaumont, was 'a very different kettle of fish'. York replied that the company would do its utmost to keep within the required tolerance.

Until this time the Post Office had referred to O'Brien as 'Nellie' despite the Trustees of the Wallace Collection preferring 'Nelly'. This was to change as Stuart Rose wrote to R F York on

27 February simply saying he had just got a repro for 'Nelly', and asking to have it stripped in to replace 'Nellie' as it was incorrectly spelt.

Harrisons provided these further essays on 27 March 1973, shown to the SAC on 28 March and incorporating the following amendments:

- a) values in black;
- b) the Queen's head in gold;
- c) revised typography;
- d) revised colour panel.

It was now decided that the whole of the printing area would be reduced: York told the members that 'this would be done on the cylinder'. On examining the revised colour panels it was decided that the 7½p should be slightly darker. One of the Committee members, B T Batsford, MP, said he would like to see less emphasis on the 'p' and felt it would be preferable to drop it altogether. The Chairman pointed out that this question had been raised before in relation to the Royal Silver Wedding issue and proposed to look into the matter as it might be possible to omit the 'p' this time. This was not to be: the 'p' had been retained for the Silver Wedding issue on the advice of the Solicitor's Office, pointing out that the Post Office's own regulations dictated that 'The figures would not indicate the denomination of money; the denominations could only be expressed by recognised symbols.' By omitting these symbols the Post Office could be accused of 'not meeting the requirements of its own schemes' and be open to adverse comment. It was also said that there might be difficulties with the international services.

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## PERMISSION SOUGHT

On 21 February Sidney Hutchinson, Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts, wrote to Miss K Parkyn, Marketing Department PHQ, saying the President and Council had readily given their permission for the Post Office to reproduce their self-portrait by Sir Joshua Reynolds. They had expressed hope that the design might include some reference to Reynolds' association with the Royal Academy, perhaps 'President of the Royal Academy' or just the letters 'PRA'. When Parkyn outlined the wishes of the Royal Academy to Stuart Rose the response was 'Normally we don't include honorifics or qualifications after a subject's name, largely on account of space. Already on this stamp we've got his name, date, title of painting and value. We are saying quite a bit about the Royal Academy in the [presentation] pack.' The designs were not altered to accommodate the wishes of the Royal Academy.

On 28 February S M Ellis, Secretary National Galleries Scotland, wrote to Miss Parkyn granting permission to reproduce the two portraits by Raeburn. Enclosed was an invoice for copyright fees of £10.50.

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## ROYAL APPROVAL GIVEN

On 6 April E G White wrote to A Currall, Managing Director Posts, enclosing a set of essays. White explained that because of the colour density of the subjects it was necessary to print



the stamps with 'all-over phosphor and wide margins to obtain maximum signals for operational purposes'. The 3p stamp had been printed in this manner but the remaining three specimens had been printed with normal margins and would not be available in the required format for at least a fortnight. White proposed that the stamps be forwarded for approval in order not to delay printing. This was agreed and on 10 April A Currall wrote to the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications asking that the essays be submitted to the Queen. On 26 April the Ministry informed the Post Office that the Queen had approved the designs.

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## PRESENTATION PACK AND FIRST DAY COVER

On 29 March Peter Shrives, Design Co-ordinator, wrote to Charity Boxall, wife of the designer Jeffery Matthews, confirming an invitation to write the text for the 'British Painters' presentation pack. Details of the Post Office's requirements had been discussed earlier and Shrives offered a fee of £60.

On 29 March Shrives also wrote to Jeffery Matthews confirming the invitation to design the first day envelope and presentation pack. Matthews was offered a fee of £20 for the rough sketches for the envelope and if accepted a further fee of £43. For the presentation pack a fee of £30 was offered in respect of the rough sketches with a further fee of £54 for the finished design, if accepted. The repro, additional work and variations were to be charged extra. On 3 April Matthews was invited to design the cancellation for use at the Philatelic Bureau. He was offered a fee of £10 for the rough sketches and a further £15 on completion.

The Post Office also published a souvenir book of the stamps. During January 1973 Stuart Rose sent a manuscript of the proposed text to Sidney Hutchinson, Professor Waterhouse and the two galleries involved. The designer of the book had suggested including illustrations and asked for advice on the most appropriate.

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## THE PROBLEM OF DESIGN

The stamps were shown to the press on 22 May, around six weeks before the date of issue.

Stuart Rose spoke of the problem of design, and how 'It would have been presumptuous to have considered the design of stamps commemorating two such painters as Reynolds and Raeburn other than by the reproduction of their own work.'

The printing quality was 'exceptional', wrote Rose, but as 'examples of postage stamp design they must inevitably suffer from a fundamental contradiction in trying to adapt to the limitations of one medium an original prepared for totally different purposes'. There were, in addition, 'practical problems imposed by such an excessive reduction in scale increase out of all proportion the number of design compromises which have to be made'. Three factors dictated which paintings were suitable for reproduction on stamps:



the quality of the paintings relative to the painters' other work;  
the dimensions of the canvas being close enough to the proportions of the stamp to avoid excessive cropping;  
the decision whether a detail from a painting or the complete work should be reproduced.

The decision to reproduce as much of the canvas as possible had reduced the choice of paintings that were suitable.

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## THE STAMPS ARE ISSUED

All four stamps were vertical with all-over phosphor and slightly larger than double definitive size. Printed in photogravure, the stamps were issued in sheets of 100.

Values and colours were:

3p - yellow, pink, red, buff, black, blue and gold

5p - black, red, pink, blue, green, yellow and gold

7½p - yellow, pink, red, blue, black and gold

9p - blue, buff, pink, red, grey, black and gold.

An official first day envelope, designed by Jeffery Matthews, was provided by the Post Office. A pictorial handstamp, incorporating two letters 'R' facing in opposite directions from one central stem, was in use at the Philatelic Bureau, Edinburgh. Philatelic posting boxes were provided at 186 post offices throughout Britain for collectors who wanted to post their own covers with the new stamps singly or in combination. Items posted in these boxes were given the ordinary first day of issue cancellation. A presentation pack was also available, containing one of each of the stamps.

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## QUANTITIES SOLD

The quantities sold were:

3p - 52,330,100

5p - 8,372,500

7½p - 6,674,200

9p - 5,306,500

Presentation pack - 104,830.

The stamps were withdrawn from sale on 3 July 1974.

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## THE SUBJECTS

### **Sir Joshua Reynolds 1723-1792**

Sir Joshua was born at Plympton Earl's in Devonshire, on 16 July 1723. The Dictionary of National Biography refers to him as 'The greatest portrait-painter that England has produced, and one of the greatest painters of the world.' As a young man, however, he was

undecided on whether to be a painter or apothecary and in fact said he would rather be an apothecary than an ordinary painter.

In 1740 he was apprenticed to Thomas Hudson, the portrait painter, in London for four years. After his father's death in 1746 Reynolds returned to Plymouth to live, where he painted the portraits of many eminent members of local society. In 1749 he met Commodore Keppel who, in command of the 'Centurion', put into Plymouth for repairs. Reynolds, having accepted the offer of passage, sailed for Lisbon on 11 May, and visited Cadiz, Tetuan, Gibraltar, Algiers and Minorca. It was in Minorca his horse fell down a precipice: the result of the injury sustained to his lip can be seen in all subsequent portraits of the man.

On his return to England many of the aristocracy were persuaded to sit for him and his success can be measured by the increase of the number of sitters to 120 in 1755, 150 in 1758, and to 156 in his busiest year 1759. During this period he painted three members of the royal family; at least twelve dukes and several of their duchesses and 'very many other peers and persons of wealth and fashion'. His prices rose first to 15 guineas for a head, 30 for a half length and 60 for a full length; and in 1759 to 20 for a head and the rest in proportion. To keep pace with this demand for his portraits he employed Peter Toms as an assistant. In 1764 he raised his prices again to 150 guineas for a full length.

In the autumn of 1768 (9 September to 23 October) he made a trip to Paris. During his absence the scheme to establish the Royal Academy came into effect. Reynolds had not been consulted regarding the formation of the academy, in which the King took the first step by letting it be known that he would patronise such an association, taking a great personal interest and drawing up some of the laws himself. It was, however, Reynolds who was from the beginning selected as President, with the consent of the King. Reynolds was not in high favour at court and George III did not actually like his pictures; his selection was therefore due to the position he enjoyed in his profession. A meeting of 30 artists named by the King was held at which the laws were accepted and the officers named. Reynolds refused to attend at first but relented just in time before the meeting collapsed. With the King's assent given, the first meeting of the Academy was held on 14 December. He took a leading role in organising the Academy and its schools. Reynolds was knighted on 21 April and the first exhibition of the Royal Academy was opened five days later, to which he sent four pictures. Despite this rise in status the number of sitters continued to fall to about fifty or fewer in a year, possibly due to the pressure of academic duties. His style changed to 'pictures of his imagination' with beggars, old men and children his most frequent sitters.

The design of the 3p stamp incorporates a self-portrait, showing Reynolds in his robes as Doctor of Civil Law (Oxford), and a bust of Michelangelo. The original (panel: 50 inches by 40 inches) was painted for the RA around 1773 and in 1973 was to be found hanging at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The 7½p stamp reproduced a portrait of Nelly O'Brien (canvas: 50¼ inches by 40 inches), a frequent sitter for Reynolds between 1760 and 1767. This portrait was painted in the period between 1760 and 1762 and when the stamps were issued was in the Wallace Collection, London.

### **Sir Henry Raeburn 1756-1823**

Raeburn was born on 4 March 1756 at Stockbridge, Edinburgh and has been called 'The Scottish Reynolds'. He was left an orphan at the age of six and educated at Heriot's Hospital. Leaving the hospital at fifteen he was apprenticed to a goldsmith and jeweller in Edinburgh by the name of Gililand. Within a year he had started painting watercolour miniatures of his friends. Gililand, impressed by the artistic skills of the young Raeburn, introduced him to the fashionable portrait painter David Martin. Although Martin gave Raeburn a free run of his studios he offered little practical help. This lack of technical training had a restraining effect at first but, having extended his practice to oil painting, his determination drove him to success. By the age of 22 he had made a name for himself locally and the commissions rolled in. One of his sitters, a daughter of a small laird, he recognised from an earlier meeting. Mutually attracted they were married within a few months. Marriage and success in his profession took him out of the poverty of his childhood.

Raeburn was soon to recognise the shortcomings in his skills and resolved to seek training abroad. Following an introduction with Reynolds, Sir Joshua urged Raeburn to study in Rome, and more particularly the works of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel. Raeburn gratefully accepted introductions from Reynolds to many leading men in Rome including Pompeo Battoni. Apart from these two years of studying in Rome he spent his life in the city of his birth, and ventured to London on just a handful of occasions. It is recorded that on one such visit he considered moving to London, a move that some argue would have been unsuccessful simply because of the competition of other established artists in the area. As it was he had a 'career of some thirty years as a fashionable portrait-painter ...of unbroken professional and social success'.

In 1812 he was made President of the Society of Artists in Edinburgh and in 1814 he sent his first contribution to the Royal Academy London. He was immediately elected as an associate and the following year a full member. Regarding his election, he had allowed his paintings to speak for him, telling a close friend 'If it can only be obtained by means of solicitation and canvassing, I must give up all hopes of it, for I think it would be most unfair to employ those means.' In 1822, during the famous visit to Edinburgh by George IV, Raeburn was knighted 'in recognition of his distinguished merit as a painter'. In May the following year he was appointed 'His Majesty's first limner and painter in Scotland'. Unfortunately he did not enjoy these honours for long as, following an annual archaeological excursion to St Andrews from which he seemed to return in good health, he 'was seized by a mysterious atrophy'. His doctors were unable to help him and after a week of rapid deterioration he died on 8 July 1823.

The 5p stamp shows a self-portrait (canvas: 35¼ inches by 27½ inches), painted around 1815, and is said to be 'one of the finest examples of his fully matured style'. The 9p stamp reproduced Raeburn's painting of Reverend Robert Walker skating on Duddington Loch (canvas: 30 inches by 25 inches). It was painted in 1784 and is commonly known as 'The Skater'. At the time of issue the paintings were hanging in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.

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## THE REV WALKER, ON THIN ICE WITH MISTRESS NELLY

It might be said that the reservations held by some in the Post Office of showing Nelly O'Brien on a stamp were warranted. On 23 May, the day after the press showing, the 'Daily Express' published an article by John Rydon under the headline 'The Rev Walker, on thin ice with Mistress Nelly'. Rydon suggested that 'The Rev. Robert Walker, once a pillar of the Scottish Kirk, must be turning over in his grave at the artful way the Post Office had linked him with Nelly O'Brien'. He pointed out that although Nelly was a 'sweet girl' she was also Sir Joshua's 'mistress for about seven years' and suggested that the Reverend would not have chosen 'to be just 1½p away from a woman of ill-repute'.

Andy Pendlebury  
July 1995

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