

1970 Literary Anniversaries

Date of issue: 3 JUNE 1970



At a meeting of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) on 11 February 1969, a discussion took place on the 1970 stamp programme in which the Secretary, J R Baxter, Operations & Overseas Department of the GPO, listed some of the many anniversaries that had been suggested. He noted that two literary anniversaries 'stood out for special consideration'. These were the centenary of Dickens' death on 9 June 1870, suggested by the Dickens Fellowship, and the bicentenary of the birth of William Wordsworth on 7 April 1770 that had been put forward by Mr J F Blake. Baxter's suggestion was that there should be four stamps at 5d, the basic first class letter rate, for the Dickens anniversary, possibly illustrating scenes from his novels, and a single 1s 6d issue for Wordsworth, this being the 'Zone B' airmail letter base rate which broadly covered most of the world outside Europe apart from the Arab nations, Far East and Australasia.

On 3 March A Wolstencroft, the Managing Director (Posts), submitted a minute to the Postmaster General (PMG), John Stonehouse, detailing the need to finalise the 1970 stamp programme at an early stage. First was the proximity of Vesting Day, 1 October 1969, when the GPO would become the new Post Office Corporation: 'we are really obliged to commit the future PO Board in advance to the subjects of the 1970 programme ... to produce good stamps and market them well we need to start early on design work. Time is becoming even more critical now that we are penetrating overseas markets.' Aside from this unashamedly commercial motive, there were also sound operational reasons: the Post Office's production and supply machinery would be fully extended for the second half of 1970 in preparing for decimalisation. Printing of all special stamp series for 1970 would have to be completed in the early part of the year, and the design process begun correspondingly earlier than usual.

The PMG met with the MDP, the Director of Operations & Overseas, G R Downes, and Baxter on 20 March, during which Wolstencroft's minute was broadly agreed. Subsequently the MDP considered whether the Dickens anniversary might be combined with the 1970

Christmas stamps; however, it was accepted that it would be difficult to associate Wordsworth with this, and also noted that most events organised to mark the Dickens centenary would take place six months earlier in June. Failure to synchronise the stamp issue with these 'would thereby both annoy the organisers and lose marketing opportunities'. At the SAC meeting on 26 March Baxter announced that the literary anniversaries issue was among those agreed for 1970; the four 5d Dickens stamps should form a block, while their subject matter (novel scenes or otherwise) was left open.

The 1970 stamp programme was announced in the House of Commons on 27 March, without giving details of values or precise dates, as these had yet to be agreed with the Chairman-designate of the new Corporation, Viscount Hall. This was a necessary as the PMG's authority over stamp issues was not to be carried over into the succeeding office of Minister of Posts & Telecommunications. From 1 October onwards the Chairman and not Stonehouse would have the last power of decision before the Queen, except where matters of acute political controversy or sensitivity were involved. Due to the difficulty of arranging meetings with Viscount Hall amid the pressure of other events, it was not until 22 July that the Chairman agreed the 1970 stamp programme, after being persuaded that an additional issue celebrating 'the Seventies' was not practicable and was best held over as a candidate for the 1971 programme.

FIRST ARTWORK RECEIVED

A few days earlier, on 16 July, Baxter had noted in a memorandum to the MDP that artwork for the literary anniversaries issue had been commissioned and was expected by mid-August. No details are available of the instructions issued to artists, the total number of invitations sent, or the dates on which artwork was subsequently received, but the submitted artwork held in the British Postal Museum & Archive is as follows:

M Richards - four at 5d Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870

Clive Abbott - four at 5d Dickens 1812 - 1870

Bradbury Wilkinson - four at 5d Dickens Centenary, 1s 6d Wordsworth Bicentenary 1770 - 1850

Unknown designers - 1s 6d Wordsworth Bicentenary 1770 - 1970

Sally Stiff - 5d Mrs Peggotty / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, 5d Oliver Twist / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, three sets of four at 5d, Samuel Pickwick / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, Mrs Peggotty / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, Scrooge / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, Oliver Twist / Charles Dickens 1812 - 1870, two at 1s 6d William Wordsworth 1770 - 1830 [sic], a design without caption or value, five at 1s 6d William Wordsworth 1770 - 1830 [sic]

Rosalind Dease - two at 5d 1812/1870 Charles Dickens / writer's autograph, one at 5d 1812/1870 Charles Dickens / writer's autograph / Scrooge and Marley's Ghost, three at 1s 6d 1770/1850 William Wordsworth / writer's autograph, 1s 6d 1770/1850 William Wordsworth

/ writer's autograph / Grassmere [sic], 1s 6d 1770/1850 William Wordsworth / writer's autograph / Rydal Water.

THE DICKENS (5d) DESIGNS

Both the Richards and Bradbury Wilkinson sets of designs reproduced original illustrations of the texts as first published. These, up to and including 'A Tale of Two Cities', were from etchings by Phiz (Hablot Knight Browne) except for 'Oliver Twist' where the artist was George Cruikshank. The illustrations used for the two sets have been identified by Doctor David Parker, Curator of the Dickens House Museum, London WC1 as follows:

Bradbury Wilkinson

I am married, from 'David Copperfield'

Quilp surprises the premature mourning party, from 'The Old Curiosity Shop'

Christmas Eve at Mr Wardle's, from 'Pickwick Papers'

Nicholas engaged as tutor in a private family, from 'Nicholas Nickleby'

M Richards

Restoration of mutual confidence between Mr and Mrs Micawber, from 'David Copperfield'

Mr Chadband 'improving' a tough subject, from 'Bleak House'

The carriage, from 'The Old Curiosity Shop'

The Pensioner-Entertainment, from 'Little Dorrit'.

Rosalind Dease also reproduced a Phiz illustration from 'A Christmas Carol' for her design subtitled 'Scrooge and Marley's Ghost'. Clive Abbott and Sally Stiff chose to draw their Dickens characters in their own style rather than reproducing original etchings, although to judge from their treatments of the same scene from 'Oliver Twist', both artists seem to have paid close attention to the originals. Only Stiff and Dease identified their subjects by name or novel. The Clive Abbott set is drawn from 'Oliver Twist', plus Little Nell and Grandfather from 'The Old Curiosity Shop', and Mrs Peggotty from 'David Copperfield'. Clive Abbott also used portraits of both the younger and older Dickens (two of each) as did Rosalind Dease (one of each), while Richards incorporated the head of the older Dickens throughout his set. Rosalind Dease was alone in submitting two designs portraying Dickens only without scenes from the novels.

THE WORDSWORTH (1s 6d) DESIGNS

Of Rosalind Dease's treatments, two were portraits (a seated pose, and a head-and-shoulders) and two reproduced old landscape engravings, Rydal Mere from 'Lakes of Lancashire Westmoreland & Cumberland' by Joseph Farrington RA, published in 1816, and a view of Grasmere from Whellan's 'History of Cumberland & Westmoreland', published in 1860 but containing engravings dating from 1810-15. A fifth combined the head-and-shoulders portrait of Wordsworth with a background of Rydal Water, this being taken from Whellan rather than Farrington. Sally Stiff's central concept was a portrait of the poet framed within an oval circlet of daffodils; two large size and four stamp-sized versions were simply variations in different colour combinations. Another large size design repeated the concept minus lettering or value, and one in stamp size showed the daffodils as a horizontal border in the background of the portrait rather than an oval frame around it.

Of the two remaining designs, one by Bradbury Wilkinson and one submitted by an unknown artist, it seems possible but not provable that both originated from the printing firm's staff artists, though not from the same individual. This is suggested by the similarity of concept and caption.

The artwork was seen by the SAC on 28 August. It concluded that no designs were suitable as they stood, but that Rosalind Dease's work could be used, subject to alterations. The decision was taken to proceed with the two head-and-shoulders 'autograph' portraits by Dease (of Wordsworth and the younger Dickens) and also to make further use of original etchings from the Dickens novels in the style of her 'Scrooge' design; the bright backgrounds of the Dickens designs should, however, be replaced by paler shades. The Wordsworth designs should be developed showing a bust of the poet against the background of a Lakeland scene, ideally reproduced direct from contemporary engravings for the sake of homogeneity throughout the set. Stuart Rose, Design Director, undertook to consult with Miss Dease on these matters.

Sally Stiff was singled out for praise for the fine designs she had contributed to her first commission in this field, and it was decided to bear her in mind for future occasions (she designed the 1970 Christmas issue). She had studied under Andrew Restall when he had held the Fellowship in Minuscule Design at the Royal College of Art during 1965-67 and had produced some experimental designs that were included in his final report. More recently she had been among the suggested artists from the Council of Industrial Design for the 1970 General Anniversaries issue, although the Post Office had not acted on that particular recommendation.

On 21 October the SAC examined essays of Rosalind Dease's designs produced by the printers Harrison & Sons Ltd. The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA) albums show that these included at least five Dickens portraits and four of Wordsworth in various background shades of green, yellow and brown, and with the 'autograph' below each portrait variously in silver, pale gold, or gold. However, it was decided that the issued stamps should consist of four scenes from Dickens novels and a view of Grasmere.

Dease had prepared four new Dickens designs incorporating the following original etchings:
Mr Pickwick and Sam in the Attorneys Office, by Phiz (essay title 'Mr Pickwick and Sam')
I make myself known to my Aunt, by Phiz (essay title 'David Copperfield's Aunt')
The Restoration of Mutual confidence between Mr & Mrs Micawber, by Phiz (essay title 'Mr & Mrs Micawber')
Oliver asking for more, by George Cruikshank (essay title 'Oliver asks for more').

The Grasmere view was taken from Joseph Farrington's book published in 1816, which Dease had already used as a source for her original designs.

The SAC recommended that the colours on the 'Pickwick' and 'Micawber' essays be softened, and that the Queen's head should be in gold rather than silver. The captions should also be limited to the title of the relevant book (the 'David Copperfield' scene's title had already been cut down from 'David Copperfield & Aunt Trotwood' during essaying). The recommendation for the Grasmere stamp was that an essay in black and white only should be prepared. The captions on all stamps were to be in normal print rather than in manuscript style and confined to the gutter of the design.

The Dickens essays seen on 21 October appear to have been a card-mounted block of four with 'Pickwick' in black on an orange background, 'Micawber' on magenta, 'David Copperfield' on violet and 'Oliver Twist' on olive-yellow, the captions being at the foot of the design in silver manuscript-style print. There is no record of the subsequent design process or other reference to the literary anniversaries issue in the SAC minutes or any other file for the period, but it seems from the material in the BPMA albums that at least three more sets of essays were produced before a satisfactory result was achieved. The SAC's recommendation that captions should be in normal print in the gutters was not followed, presumably as a result of further discussion between Miss Dease and Stuart Rose.

FURTHER ESSAYS

Changes to the essays are recorded as follows:

'Oliver Twist' changed to blue background. Captions remain in silver but changed to 'Pickwick Papers', 'David Copperfield' (for scenes of both Micawber family and Copperfield meeting aunt) and 'Oliver Twist'.

'Pickwick' background changed to brown, 'Micawber' to violet-brown, 'Oliver Twist' back to olive-yellow. Captions changed to black and wording to 'Pickwick', 'Micawber', 'Copperfield', 'Oliver'.

A block of the Dickens novel scenes had 'Copperfield' removed and replaced with an essay of the younger Dickens portrait head. The 'Pickwick' background was changed to violet, 'Micawber' to brown, and 'Oliver' to violet-brown. Captions changed back to silver.

In the set of the Dickens essays finally approved the 'Pickwick' background was changed back to the original orange, 'Micawber' to magenta, 'Oliver' to olive-yellow and 'Copperfield' to light blue. A series of 'Grasmere' colour trials was also produced: first, in black or brown on a white background with the caption in black, gold, or pale gold; next, in black on brown backgrounds with captions in black, brown or pale gold; last, in black on various shades of green, with the caption in gold or silver. The finally approved version was in black on a light green background with a silver caption.

SALES AND SPECIAL POSTMARKS

Full details of the stamps were announced in a Press & Broadcast Notice on 21 April 1970, and the issue went on sale on 3 June, printed in photogravure on coated unwatermarked paper, each stamp measuring 41mm by 22 mm with two phosphor bands and with the Queen's head embossed in gold. The stamps were in sheets of 120, the 5d being in seven-tenant blocks of four throughout. Total sales were 83,472,440 of the 5d and 10,913,360 of the 1s 6d; There were 113,770 presentation packs produced, including versions with text in Dutch, German or Japanese on separate insert cards, at a cost of £17,074, with 106,726 sold. Production costs of the stamps were later estimated as £3,200 for 'development' (proofs, essays, plates, cylinders) plus £22,236 for printing. The issue was finally withdrawn from sale on 3 June 1971.

An official first day cover was available, which Rosalind Dease designed; a press notice of 6 August stated that some 360,000 of these were sold. Total 'first day of issue' postings were reported to be 886,983. Special handstamps for the first day of issue were available in a number of locations (mainly associated with Dickens) additional to the facilities normally provided. Special posting boxes for this purpose were provided as follows:

The Old Curiosity Shop, Portsmouth Street, London WC2
Lancaster House, Serene Place, Broadstairs, Kent (arranged by the local branch of the Dickens Fellowship)
Bonchurch PO, Ventnor, Isle of Wight (the postmark for Winterbourne, where Dickens had stayed in 1849 during the first publication of 'David Copperfield')
Corsham PO, Wilts (the postmark for nearby village of Pickwick)
the King's Head public house, Chigwell, Essex (the handstamp reproduced the mid-19th century 'E78' obliterator for Chigwell Road)
Rochester, Kent (Dickens' place of death).

For handstamps commemorating the Wordsworth bicentenary special posting boxes were provided at Cockermouth, Cumberland where the poet was born, and at Cambridge, where he had attended St John's College. Subsequent to the day of issue, a special handstamp was available at the Dickens Birthplace Museum in Portsmouth on the actual birth date of 9 June, while a slogan postmark at five inner London district offices during 10 to 30 June advertised the Victoria & Albert Museum's Dickens Exhibition. A 'First Day of Issue' slogan postmark was used in Broadstairs, Kent. Other special handstamps with no obvious Dickens or Wordsworth connection are those for the Society of Radiographers 24th Annual Conference, London EC2 (3 to 5 June) and the Living Exhibition '70, in Sheffield (27 May to 6 June).

Examples of both accepted and unaccepted artwork for the Dickens stamps were displayed in Harrods in Knightsbridge, London SW1 from 26 May to 6 June at a special sales counter with a full range of philatelic items, this being part of the store's commemoration of Dickens' death as its contribution to the Festival of London Stores. The Dickens artwork was again put on display at the Philypia 70 stamp exhibition in September. In October the Philatelic Bureau put on sale a special wallchart designed by Fritz Wegner, who had previously produced much admired work for the Christmas 1969 and 1970 General Anniversaries stamp issues. The wallchart included a block of the Dickens 5d stamps mounted to complement drawings of Dickensian London and the author's famous characters.

Rosalind Dease designed a large number of stamps for the Post Office from 1962 onwards, both alone and in collaboration with her former husband, David Gentleman, her final success being the UPU Centenary issue of 1974.

GILES ALLEN
21 January 1994

REFERENCES

British Postal Museum & Archive files:

- Post 54 / SAC minutes 1968-70
- MKD/AN/601 (presentation packs policy)
- MKD/BS/2142 (special stamp issues 1970)

British Philatelic Bulletin

Vol. 7, no. 8, p.9; no. 9, pp. 4-5, 7; no. 12, pp. 8-9; vol. 18, pp. 232-233.

Press & Broadcast Notices:

- BR95, 21 April 1970;
- BR110, 4 May 1970;
- AR136, 26 May 1970;
- JD199, 6 August 1970

Books

- Parson, Peachey & Pearson, 'Slogan Postmarks of the Seventies', 1980
- George R Pearson, 'Special Event Postmarks of the UK', 1984
- N C Porter, 'Collecting British First Day Covers', 1993
- Stanley Gibbons Great Britain Great Britain Specialised Stamp Catalogue, Vol. 3 - QE II Pre-decimal Issues, Stanley Gibbons Ltd