



ELIZABETH QUEEN & ICON

IN CELEBRATION OF HER MAJESTY'S 80TH BIRTHDAY

1. Portraits of The Queen through the ages

PRINCESS ELIZABETH was born on 21 April 1926, daughter of the Duke and Duchess of York, and first grandchild of King George V. Since then, and particularly since she became Queen, her face has been captured repeatedly on film and canvas. Many of these images have been the source of several stamps, and even more proposed stamp designs.



First stamp to show Princess Elizabeth – Newfoundland 1932, based on a photograph by Marcus Adams



As Princess she appeared on a number of stamps from the Commonwealth, in particular Newfoundland, Canada and New Zealand. These were based on photographs by Marcus Adams, Cecil Beaton, Dorothy Wilding and others. Another court photographer, Bertram Park, made a collection of these and



New Zealand Health stamp of 1943 from a photograph by Cecil Beaton



other royal photographs (in particular of King George VI), most signed by the creator. Some of these are displayed for the first time.



Proposed stamp – the King's first grandchild

No stamp was issued for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip in 1947, which caused an outcry. However, in 1948, there was a proposal for a stamp for the birth of their first child, or rather the King's first grandchild. This was to be dependent on the King's own wishes, and he remained cool to the idea. Designs were commissioned from Percy Metcalfe and Reynolds Stone in great secrecy. One by Metcalfe showing portraits of the parents with a representation of the baby was recommended for the 2½d value but nothing then came of the proposal. It had been intended to issue two stamps within one week of the birth. No reason for the abandonment of the issue is given in official files but it was probably because it was regarded as highly personal by the King, and there had already been three stamp issues that year.

Unadopted stamp artwork

After her accession to the throne in 1952 there have been various royal stamp issues. On occasions such as



Unadopted design by Martin Newton for The Queen's 60th Birthday issue

her 60th birthday in 1986 and Golden Jubilee in 2002 many portraits from throughout her life were tried out in proposed designs for stamps. Some were issued but others were not. This exhibi-

tion traces her life through images on issued stamps and proposed designs for British stamps.

2. The Queen as an icon and symbol of Britain

BRITAIN is unique in not having the country name on its stamps. Since the world's first stamp, the Penny Black, it has been represented by the monarch alone. The Queen is thus a symbol of Britain around the world and her stamp images have become icons.

From a stamp and coin point of view on the death of a monarch the first requirement is a photograph of the new one to act as the basis of their designs. Inevitably, this has to fit in with many other urgent tasks and so preliminary work often takes place with existing photographs. In the case of Queen Elizabeth a preliminary photographic sitting by Dorothy Wilding took place at Clarence House on 26 February 1952, almost three weeks after the death of her father, King George VI. Wilding was briefed beforehand by both Post Office and Royal Mint officials with their different requirements.



Final retouched photograph by Dorothy Wilding

From this session three-quarter profile photographs of The Queen wearing a tiara were used by artists for initial stamp designs. However, from a heraldic point of view, it was felt that she should be wearing a coronet and so a fresh photographic session took place on

15 April. In a brocade gown with the sash and star of the Order of the Garter, The Queen now wore the diamond diadem made for George IV in the 1820s, designed to be worn outside a Cap of State. This had also been worn by Queen Victoria on the Penny Black and all her subsequent stamps.



The Wilding portrait on The Queen's first stamps and as used on one of the last commemoratives in 1965

The new three-quarter photograph selected was approved by The Queen on 5 May but with the proviso that The Queen felt it showed the coronet too far back on her head. This was then altered in the retouching which also clarified the outline of the diadem for reproducing at stamp size. All British definitive stamps, printed in photogravure, bore this portrait from 1952 until replaced in 1967 by the sculptured head by Arnold Machin. It was also incorporated into all commemorative stamps, though in later years with more issues the three-quarter format was to cause problems for designers.

Postal stationery

Postal stationery (envelopes, registered envelopes, postcards and lettercards) was not printed by the same method. For envelopes and registered envelopes printing was by embossing; for postcards and lettercards it was by letterpress or surface-printing. Both of these printing techniques required different types of designs from that produced for postage stamps printed in photogravure, where a photograph was the best origination.

With embossing there were great similarities with coins and medals. As a result, as early as August 1952 photographs of newly created coin designs were sent

by the Royal Mint. One was by Cecil Thomas, approved for use on colonial coinage and certain medals. It showed an effigy of The Queen crowned but facing right.



Photograph of the Thomas coin effigy as supplied to the Post Office in 1952

On 6 May 1953 Thomas was commissioned to create a design for an embossed stamp on envelopes and he submitted two on 10 July. One featuring a Tudor rose with the head now facing to the left (as required for stamps) was shown to The Queen in September. She liked it but her comment was “too many roses” and



Revised design for embossed stationery approved by The Queen

suggested that the inner rose design surrounding her head should be made into a black circle. When Thomas returned the new design to the Post Office he wrote:

“I enclose photographs of the stamp design amended in accordance with Her Majesty’s suggestions. May I say I think the design much improved thereby.”

Two versions were shown to The Queen in November, one following The Queen’s advice exactly, and described as “really charming” and “a striking improvement” on the original. A second version had a thin white circle in place of the inner rose. The Queen preferred the latter and, most unusually, initialled a bromide as approved. It finally appeared on a registered envelope issued on 29 November 1954.

De La Rue’s letterpress drawing

For postcards and lettercards the printing process was letterpress. This required an engraved profile head and the only people who could prepare this were De La Rue, the security printers. Using as a base a full profile photograph taken by Dorothy Wilding at the same time as that shown



on stamps they delivered the required head in August 1953. Three artists were invited to provide frames – John Brinkley, Eric Fraser and John Farleigh – and their designs were submitted in September.

The Stamp Advisory Committee of the Council of Industrial Design asked Farleigh to amend his design, adding to the frame. After The Queen’s reaction to Thomas’s Tudor Rose design Brinkley was asked to make one of his less fussy. Both of these were then proofed from February 1954 onwards. It was not until 16 July that The Queen approved John Farleigh’s frame design. The die was then engraved at the Royal Mint and various modifications were made through

Initial frame design submitted by John Farleigh for letterpress stationery stamps



to January 1955, often at the request of the artist. The first postcard was eventually issued on 6 April 1955, with lettercards following shortly thereafter.

These designs by Thomas and Farleigh appeared on all British postal stationery, other than airletters, in various denominations until replaced by versions of the Machin head in the late 1960s.

“Off with her head!”

In the mid 1960s there was a revolution in British stamp design. Tony Benn was appointed Postmaster General in 1964 and one of his first actions was to change, and expand, the criteria for issuing commemorative stamps and invite ideas from the public and stamp designers. David Gentleman responded with many ideas for new stamp subjects and designs and in particular with the suggestion that the Queen’s head might be omitted. There were problems fitting the three-quarter Wilding portrait in to a larger stamp and he wanted to have a profile portrait, preferably small, or no Queen’s head at all.



Benn was captivated with Gentleman’s ideas from political and design points of view. Various suggestions were made

1965 essays of Gentleman designs with Great Britain or U K postage in place of the Queen’s head



during 1965 to reduce the Queen’s head in size, or replace it with wording such as GREAT BRITAIN or U.K. POSTAGE. At Benn’s insistence Gentleman’s designs for the Battle of Britain and Sir Winston Churchill memorial issues were also essayed without the Queen’s head. At the same period, revised artists’ instructions for the Robert Burns issue allowed other designers to submit similar, non-traditional versions. At the same time, Benn commissioned an album of experimental designs from Gentleman and work proceeded on a new profile head of The Queen for definitives.

At an audience in November The Queen informed the prime minister, Harold Wilson, that she did want her head to appear on all stamps, but would approve the use of a silhouette format. Fearing a political row, Benn accepted the situation but pressed ahead with the use of a cameo silhouette.

Gillick cameo head



Mary Gillick and her plaster cast

When the first photographs were taken of The Queen by Dorothy Wilding back in 1952 she was briefed beforehand by both Post Office and Royal Mint officials. For coinage photographs were then shown to the Royal Mint Advisory Committee to help artists as

the basis of their designs. Four artists had personal sittings, among them Cecil Thomas and Mrs Mary Gillick in May 1952. The effigy chosen for use on British coinage was one by Gillick, uncrowned and facing right. After her sitting with The Queen Gillick exclaimed "I am now her devoted slave for ever!"



Versions of a cameo head based on Gillick's coinage by David Gentleman

Looking for a new profile head in 1965 Gentleman now took Gillick's coinage head and reversed it so that it faced left into the envelope, as all monarchs' heads do on stamps. Reduced to a small cameo this could be used much more easily in larger designs than the three-quarter profile Wilding. It was ready by October and shown to Benn who enthusiastically approved. He insisted that it be essayed on the forthcoming 1966 Landscapes pictorial stamps and recommended it to The Queen. She approved the Landscapes designs and made no comment on the new cameo.

The use of the Gillick head had not been cleared with the Royal Mint, however, and this was the cause of some friction.



Landscapes essay with alternative cameo

In varying sizes, and also facing the other way, this Gillick cameo was to be used on all commemorative and special stamps from 1966 until 1968, and it continued to be used occasionally thereafter until 1973 when it was finally replaced by the Machin laurel wreath head.

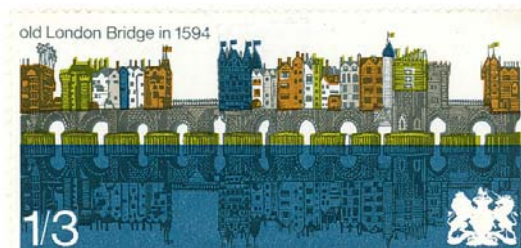
David Gentleman album

Throughout 1965 David Gentleman worked directly for the Postmaster General, Tony Benn. Part of his commission was to produce an album of non-traditional designs. These were to prove revolutionary

and seminal. The extent of change was dramatic. Amongst the subjects originally proposed were regional landscapes, architecture of various types, birds, animals, fish, flowers, transport, the industrial revolution and famous men and women. When eventually refined, subjects were grouped, introduced

by a page of British racehorses designed specifically to appeal to The Queen. Other subjects included bridges, aircraft and Kings and Queens of Britain. A new, larger size of stamp was also proposed.

Old London Bridge essay with coat of arms, from the Gentleman Album



Designs were ready in October 1965 and a number were prepared as essays to show the effect as printed stamps. Others were represented by stamp-size colour photographs. The range and style of designs were quite different from what had gone before and were to prove extremely influential in both subject matter and appearance over many years.

One very important aspect was the introduction of the Gillick cameo head to represent The Queen. At the same time designs were essayed with different formats of the royal coat of arms or a crown in place of the Queen's head. By the time the album was created and presented to The Queen, she had already decided against any other symbol or name. Nevertheless, the designs were the subject of a stamp seminar in 1966 causing great interest in the philatelic and design worlds.

The Machin Head

The Machin head of The Queen, which replaced the Wilding and Gillick heads, has become an icon of Britain. With an estimated 180 billion stamps printed so far it is undoubtedly one of the most reproduced images ever. It resulted from the ferment unleashed by Benn's quest for more interesting stamp designs and the argument over The Queen's head.

That a new profile portrait of The Queen was required, was universally agreed and approved in early 1965. However, it was not until the end of that year that five artists were commissioned to provide one. These were Reginald Brill, Stuart Devlin, David Gentleman, John Ward and the sculptor Arnold Machin.

Machin was invited because of his successful work on the head for the new, as yet un-issued, decimal coinage. Both he and Gentleman had already worked on the photographs taken by Lord Snowdon especially for that. These photographs now formed the basis of the work for the new stamp profile.



Machin's initial work was preferred by the Stamp Advisory Committee and over a period of a year he worked to simplify his designs, harking back to the classic simplicity of the Penny Black. By October 1966 he had a very simple design taken from a plaster cast showing The Queen wearing a tiara. Other photographs were taken by John Hedgecoe featuring the diadem as seen on the Penny Black (and the Wilding portrait). The diadem was preferred and Machin revised his sculpture accordingly.

When essays were shown to The Queen the effigy was couped, or cut off at the neck. She said that she



The first Machin and an essay of the latest Pricing in Proportion stamp



would prefer a corsage and this Machin added to produce the final, classic bust. The plaster cast was photographed many times to get the lighting just right and then The Queen chose a dark olive-sepia shade for the inland letter rate, deliberately to emulate the colour of the Penny Black.

The first stamps with the new head were issued in June 1967 and it has been reproduced in many different formats since, a timeless symbol of the monarchy and of Britain.

Machin's commemorative head

Machin's head was intended for definitive stamps, standing alone apart from the value. For commemorative and special stamps a smaller version was required to replace the small Gillick head. Reducing the definitive head did not work and so Machin created a new, simplified plaster cast without the diadem but with a laurel wreath and ribbons in the hair. This could be used as a detailed drawing or as a simple, solid silhouette. As with the Gillick cameo it could also face in either direction, and be applied easily to larger designs.

Machin's laurel wreath plaster cast with 1968 essays at different sizes



It was first introduced in 1968 and has been used for nearly all special (and some definitive) stamps since.

Snowdon photograph

In the early 1980s there was a move to replace the Machin head on definitives. When The Queen's approval was sought the reply came back from her Private Secretary:

“Before giving a definite reply to your proposal, ... The Queen would very much like to know who you had in mind to produce the new effigy. It is a difficult thing to do and Her Majesty is very content with the Machin effigy and thinks that a work of real quality is required if this is to be replaced.”

It was agreed that new photographs would be taken by Lord Snowdon. Under the supervision of Jeffery Matthews a number of artists were asked to produce portraits based on these and work continued for several years. Various designs featuring more or less realistic portraits were essayed, but none was regarded as suitable. Later, different versions of the Machin head were tried but again were not seen as either sufficiently different or an improvement.

The Snowdon photograph was, however, used on postal orders and banknotes, and as part of one of the stamps celebrating The Queen's 60th birthday in 1986.

3. Celebrating The Queen's 80th Birthday

TO CELEBRATE the 80th birthday of The Queen, Royal Mail issued eight stamps on 18 April 2006. Designed by Sedley Place, these feature informal photographic portraits taken throughout her life. Printing was by Enschedé in tritones, where three identical images are printed on top of each other, giving a richer appearance.

Alternative designs were proposed by Kate Stephens, featuring both formal and informal photographs from the life of The Queen. Other proposals were submitted by Why Not Associates, who based their submissions on 'Equanimity', the holographic portrait by Chris Levine commissioned by Jersey to commemorate 800 years of allegiance to the crown.

**Douglas N. Muir - Curator, Philately
April, 2006**

References

POST 122/1118-20 Stamped Stationery
BPMA stamp histories – 1948 Proposed Grandchild; 1965 Sir Winston Churchill;
1965 Battle of Britain
Benn, Tony *Out of the Wilderness – Diaries 1963-67* 1987

This free exhibition runs from 18 April 2006 until Spring 2007 at The Royal Mail Archive, London.

The exhibition can be seen during all archive opening hours:

Monday to Friday
10.00am - 5.00pm,
Thursdays 10.00am - 7.00pm.

The Archive is also open on selected Saturdays
10.00am - 5.00pm.
See our website or call for dates.

The Royal Mail Archive records four centuries of the British postal service. It is an outstanding resource for social - and postal - history, and collections in the archive have been Designated by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council as nationally important. It is managed on behalf of Royal Mail Group plc by The British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA).

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