

*Gentleman*  
*On Stamps*



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# gentleman On Stamps

## Introduction

David Gentleman designed his first stamps for Royal Mail in 1962 (for National Productivity Year). Since then he has been the most prolific and acclaimed stamp designer in Britain, with 103 issued stamps to his name. These range from trains and boats and planes; to architecture, domestic and religious; flora and fauna; and representations of historical events, in a variety of styles. His latest issued stamps were in the "Millennium Timekeeper" miniature sheet of 1999.



*The Gentleman Album, Puffin, Essays in stamp design, 1965*

Perhaps his greatest influence on British stamp design was the Album of experimental designs commissioned by Tony Benn as Postmaster General in 1965. In that he vastly expanded the choice of possible subject matter, created a new shape for pictorial stamps, and standardised the use of a small cameo head of the Queen. These revolutionary designs were to influence British stamp design for over 20 years.

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With his Social Reformers stamps of 1976, a particular favourite of his, Gentleman dramatised the harsh and repetitive conditions of factory workers, miners, prisoners and climbing children, underlined by the repeating patterns of a block or sheet of stamps.



*Issued stamp, Robert Owen, Pioneers of Social Reform, 1976*

Many of Gentleman's commissions were not adopted for the final stamps. Sometimes, the proposed stamp issue did not take place. Almost 1,000 sketches and pieces of artwork held in the Royal Mail Archive, have never been seen by the public before.



*Unadopted presentation visual, Narrow Water Castle, County Down, Regional Definitives, 1994*



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## David Gentleman Selects Design into Print

David Gentleman's original brief had been to design a set of stamps about Trade Unionism, but the title had hurriedly been changed to the less politically charged one of Social Reformers. The series comprises four stamps commemorating the work of important nineteenth century reformers.



*Issued stamp, Thomas Hepburn, Pioneers of Social Reform, 1976*

Instead of portraying these campaigners through portraiture, the more traditional approach to celebrating individual achievement, Gentleman concentrated on the evils that each reformer wanted to eradicate. Thomas Hepburn, the pioneer of the first miners union is represented by the hewing of coal, the visionary cotton mill owner Robert Owen by the pulley-wheels and belts of the textile factory, Lord Shaftesbury, the campaigner for improved working conditions, is represented by the brush of a chimney sweep, and Elizabeth Fry, champion of women prisoners, by the bars of a cell.



*Issued stamp, Lord Shaftesbury, Pioneers of Social Reform, 1976*

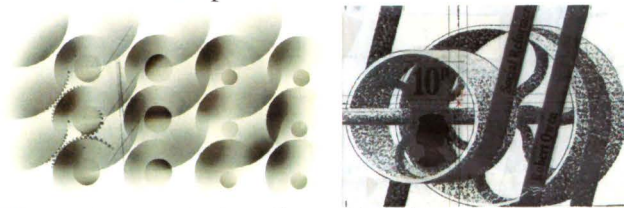


*Issued stamp, Elizabeth Fry, Pioneers of Social Reform, 1976*

A visual theme running throughout all four is the symbolic use of hands. Using strong imagery, the stamps dramatise the shared suffering experienced by many of the underprivileged in nineteenth century society. The harsh and repetitive conditions are underlined by the repeating patterns of a block or sheet of stamps.



*Robert Owen and welfare in cotton mills First design submitted to the Post Office, incorporating hands*



*The development of the pulley and belt theme for the Robert Owen and cotton mill design*

The working sketches show how this idea gradually took shape.



*Sheet of issued stamps, Robert Owen, Pioneers of Social Reform, 1976*



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## A Revolution In British Stamp Design The David Gentleman Album

In 1965 Tony Benn, the new Postmaster General, announced new criteria for issuing stamps, at that time restricted to the marking of outstanding national and international events as well as Royal and postal anniversaries.

Keen to address the visual limitations imposed by the inclusion of the monarch's head on British commemorative stamps, Gentleman wrote to Benn about the possibilities of alternative approaches. In the resulting "Essays in Stamp Design", later known as "The Gentleman Album", two significant proposals were made. The monarch's head should be replaced by an alternative symbol of national identity such as the Crown or Royal Cypher or words such as "Great Britain" or "UK".



*Essays in Stamp Design, Fly agaric and Elm Tree*

Gentleman also proposed new commemorative stamps on a much wider range of subjects, including birds, trees, regional landscapes, coastlines, transport, architecture, industry and

famous men and women. The final revolutionary Album, consisting of 17 themes, remained highly influential on British stamp design and themes for more than 20 years.

Although the suggestion to replace the monarch's head with alternative symbols of identity was rejected, Gentleman's proposal to use a different portrait of The Queen was accepted. A variety of ideas were tried out to replace the three-quarter Dorothy Wilding portrait, resulting in a small cameo based on the coinage head by Mary Gillick.

The proposals also included a single sheet of se tenant stamps featuring each of the eighteen rulers of Britain since the Anglo Scottish Union of 1603, which David Gentleman describes as one of the most interesting subjects to design.



*Essays in Stamp Design, Rulers of Great Britain since the Act of Union*



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## Unadopted Designs and Issues Stamps We Never Saw

### 1960s

David Gentleman was already working on new ideas for memorial stamps when Winston Churchill died in 1965. For the Churchill stamp he submitted designs with a small Queen's head to the right of the wartime leader and also a proposal to replace the monarch's head with the



*Unadopted essay, Sir Winston Churchill, 1965*

words "Great Britain". The issued stamp has a white line symbolically separating the two portraits, the Queen's from that of a commoner.

### 1970s

Forty two stamp size design roughs featuring various Ulster scenes were submitted by Gentleman for a series to mark the 50th anniversary of Northern Ireland in 1971. These small rapid sketches demonstrate his ability to think stamp size, focusing on an idea and excluding non-essential elements.



*Stamp size design rough, Ulster painting, 1971*

### 1980s

A series of designs for the Ecology and the Environment series commissioned in the 1980s featured sensitive subject matter. Highlighting the effects of industrial farming

techniques, acid rain and heavy industry, the series never came to fruition.

*Unadopted presentation visual, Endangered Species: bird's eggs and tractor, 1986*



### 1990s

This series of regional stamps features castles in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Gentleman represented these historic buildings were in various mediums, demonstrating his understanding of the possibilities and limitations of specific printing techniques.

*Unadopted presentation visuals, Castle Girnigoe, Regional Definitives, 1994*



*Engraving*



*Lithograph*



*Watercolour*

### 2000s

Buildings and landscapes are used to represent English culture and identity in this series of English Definitives. Ranging from the pictorial to the abstract, these designs incorporate natural and man-made features.



*Unadopted presentation visuals, Left: Westbury White Horse, Right: Bankside, English Definitives, 2001*





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## On Stamps

## Publications

Also available are two superb and informative books on David Gentleman are available through the BPMA Shop. Both examine the full range of Gentleman's work in different media, including his ground-breaking stamp designs.

### **Artwork: David Gentleman**

A beautifully produced collection of work by the renowned artist

The lives of most people in Britain, whether they realise it or not, have been touched by the work of David Gentleman. From his many stamp designs, in which he radically transformed the way The Queen appears, to his timeless logos for corporations such as British Steel and the famous Eleanor of Castile murals at Charing Cross underground station, David Gentleman's graphic works have both shaped and given voice to the changing design climate of five decades.

### **Price**

£30

### **Buy**

Order online or telephone 020 7239 5125

### **Image Credits**

*Three images of artwork showing development of design for Social Reformers Robert Owen stamp © David Gentleman*

### **David Gentleman Design**

by Brian Webb and Peyton Skipwith, with a foreword by Alan Bennett

This beautifully designed book provides an introduction to one of Britain's most eminent designer-artists, David Gentleman. It includes Gentleman's early wood engravings, stamp designs, book and magazine covers, and illustrations and posters, including his war protest and National Trust posters, the 100-metre long Charing Cross Station mural and more.

### **Price**

£10

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