

British Special Stamps

3. Silver Jubilee of King George V, 1935



May 6th 1935 was the 25th anniversary of King George V's accession, an event for which the Post Office issued (on the 7th) four stamps - $\frac{1}{2}d.$, $1d.$, $1\frac{1}{2}d.$ and $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ - in a uniform design featuring the 'MacKenna' head of the King, as used in the 1934 series of definitives (the first GB photogravure-printed types).

The 'Jubilees' were noteworthy stamps in several respects - they were designed by a pre-eminent artist, lithographer and book illustrator, Barnett Freedman; they were Britain's first photogravure commemoratives, indicating that the Post Office and the printers, Harrison & Sons Ltd., had finally accepted and adopted the printing process which is still in vogue today; and they inadvertently provided collectors with one of the rarest GB 'varieties' - the $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ 'Prussian Blue'.

Numerous artists were invited to submit designs - they included Harold Nelson (of 'Wembley' and 'PUC £1' fame) and Edmond Dulac - and the full story of the preparations for this important issue was published in the *Philatelic Bulletin* for June and July 1971. It will suffice here to say that the final design selection was whittled down to that submitted by Barnett Freedman.

The printers submitted essays in vertical and horizontal format, comprising the 'Van-dyke' and 'MacKenna' heads of the King in two sizes. The smaller 'MacKenna' head in the horizontal design was the ultimate choice.

Barnett Freedman, 1901-58, was a superb craftsman, particularly in the field of lithographic illustration, or 'auto-lithography', which he pioneered. Born in London's East End, he was bedridden in his youth for several years, then won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art. His first important commission - a series of pen-and-wash illustrations for Sassoon's 'Memoirs of an Infantry Officer' (1931) - was followed by George Borrow's 'Lavengro' (1936) and his greatest work, the illustrations for the six volumes of Tolstoy's 'War and Peace', published in New York (1938).

During World War 2, he was an official war artist to the British Expeditionary Force and one of the last to escape from Boulogne in 1940. Undaunted, he became an Admiralty artist and spent much of the war at sea, sketching scenes at Dunkirk and later on the Normandy beaches, where he landed with the first wave of troops. For these services he was created CBE in 1946.

of rendering the labels more readily adhesive; with this view the paper will be made thinner and less sized'.

Plate 7 was used for printing sheets of the One Penny on these experimental papers; and a block of nearly 15 full horizontal rows from Plate 7 with '24 lbs' written in each margin was formerly in the Crawford Collection. The sheet of specimen stamps from The R M Phillips Collection illustrated above is interesting and of importance because it includes copies printed on each of the three trial weights of paper, shows the use of the experimental 'concentric circles' cancellation and (on the three specimens in the top line), shows the effect of three different types of gumming. A parallel sheet of Penny Blacks printed on various sample papers exists in the Queen's Collection.

Correspondence between Rowland Hill and J B Bacon shows that none of these lighter-weight papers tried proved suitable, chiefly owing to the gum showing through the sheets, and on 4 July Hill agreed with the printer that a weight of 30 lbs per triple ream was the most suitable for future supplies.

A G RIGO DE RIGHI

Engraved on History

The stamp engraver is an artist working in miniature – it is his interpretation and skill which have determined the quality of the majority of stamps since Rowland Hill introduced the Penny Post 134 years ago.

His art and craft can be seen at an exhibition at the National Post Museum where over 200 items are on show, including the master die of the very first adhesive postage stamp, the Penny Black. The recess engraving process used for this die can also be seen on the 1969 £1 stamp die showing the familiar Machin portrait of the Queen.

Other types of postage stamp printing involving the work of the engraver are also shown: surface printing (letterpress) which the Post Office employed from 1855 until it

was last used, for 'postage due' stamps, in 1970; embossed printing, seen on stamped stationery; and photogravure, used on the commemorative and low-value definitive stamps of today.

The precursor of today's ready-stamped stationery – the engraved Mulready Envelope, showing Britannia sending letters to the peoples of the world – is also on show. And so are some of the caricature envelopes which, along with questions in the House, and a denunciation in *The Times*, hastened the end of this ornate stationery.

The engravers featured include Charles and Frederick Heath, who together engraved the die for the Penny Black; Jean Ferdinand Joubert de la Ferté, chief engraver of early British and colonial stamp dies for Thomas de la Rue and Co; and J A C Harrison who engraved nearly all the surface and recess stamp dies used in the UK from 1910-48.

The exhibition incorporates items on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Library, British Museum.

Forthcoming Exhibitions

The British Philatelic Exhibition will be held at Seymour Hall, London W1 between 30 October and 2 November 1974. A Post Office Sales Counter will be provided from which the full range of items may be purchased.

The Seventh Annual Exhibition of the Dorchester and Weymouth Stamp Club will take place on Saturday 9 November 1974 from 11am-6pm in the United Reformed Church Hall, South Street, Dorchester, Dorset.

1974 Christmas Air Letter

This year's air letter will be on sale from Post Offices from 28 November, price 7p. It was designed by Peter Gauld FSIA and is printed by McCorquodale Printers Ltd.

It depicts traditional Christmas subjects – angels, shepherds, and a "partridge in a pear tree".