

QEII first day covers For many years, acquiring a FDC was

TODAY, the first day cover is a fully recognised part of collecting: for many a lay person, it is the essence of stamp collecting. There is a commonly held belief that the only way to collect any issue is on first day cover – and most Post Offices around the world are happy to oblige.

But while we are used to a slick service these days, with carefully designed envelope and cancellation, both complementing the stamps, which are neatly affixed to the envelope, with or without address, it was not always so.

The importance of the first day of usage has always been widely recognised. In many cases it provides evidence of when a stamp was initially put on sale, and first came into use. A good example is the debate that has ensued over the years as to when the Twopence Blue was actually issued.

However, until the British Post Office came to grips with stamp collecting in the early 1960s, those wanting first day covers were left very much to fend for themselves. The trouble taken over the Jubilee Jamboree issue in 1957 (recorded in last month's *Bulletin*) was very much an exception. Despite the actions of the Post Office on that occasion, it did not supply specially designed envelopes.

If we consider just the stamp issues of the present reign, it is not uncommon to find the earlier first day covers being created from ordinary blank writing envelopes. This was particularly true for those trying to obtain new definitives on cover. If specially designed envelopes were made available, they were privately produced. For a time the Philatelic Traders' Society representing the dealers (often in conjunction with the British Philatelic Association, essentially for the collectors) would produce blank pictorial envelopes appropriate for each new special issue. Another prominent producer was the stamp wholesaler John Lister Ltd.

One might be led to believe that, since special issues were such a rare occurrence in the early years of the reign, there would be plenty of time to design special envelopes that perfectly fitted with the design of the stamps. The truth was that

announcements about forthcoming issues were made fairly close to their actual release: as far as the actual designs were concerned, these were not revealed until the last possible moment.

Nevertheless the private producers did manage to provide very acceptable and pleasing special envelopes and since, back in the 1950s/1960s, there was such a generous sprinkling of stamp shops around the land, it was fairly easy for a collector to buy one of the envelopes in advance of the day of issue.

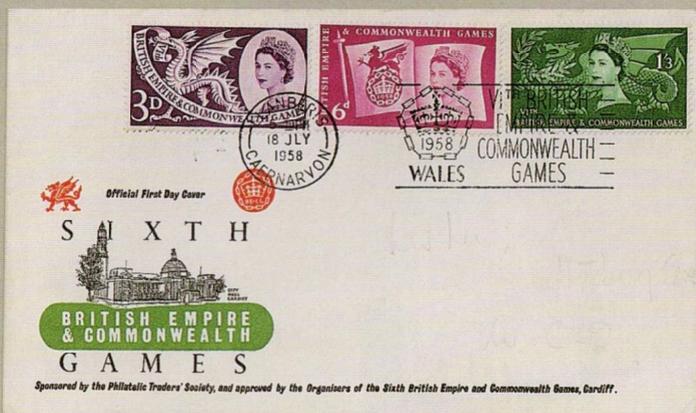
Life was a little more difficult for those wanting definitives on cover, particularly if interested in recording changes, such as of watermark. With no Philatelic Bureau, and no *British Philatelic Bulletin*, to keep collectors informed, many would have remained ignorant that a new variation had been put on sale until after the event.

Surprisingly, for the FDC collector, the question of cancellation was relatively easy. The cover could, of course, be simply put in the post to receive an everyday machine cancellation. However, in those days it was far easier to arrange for items to be hand-cancelled (albeit operational, rather than pictorial sponsored), and many early FDCs were so treated.

However, because special issues were such an uncommon occasion, their significance was that much greater. There was a good chance that a slogan cancellation would be in use that linked with the subject of the stamps.

Last time, reference was made to the Jubilee Jamboree slogan, appropriate to the stamps in 1957. Back in 1953, for the day of issue of the Coronation stamps, on 3 June, the slogan 'Long Live The Queen' was brought into use. Likewise for several other commemorative issues, appropriate slogans were available, including: vith British Empire & Commonwealth Games, Wales, 1958 (two different designs); CEPT European Conference of Posts & Telecommunications (in 1961); Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference 25-30 September 1961; National Productivity Year November 1962-63; and Freedom from Hunger Week 17-24 March 1963.

not easy, as Richard West reveals in part 2 of his new series



From top: Slogan postmarks on covers for the 1958 British Empire and Commonwealth Games, Freedom from Hunger campaign in 1963, and CEPT Conference of European Posts and Telecommunications in 1961.





FDC for the first phosphor line commemorative issue in 1962, and a pictorial handstamp for the 46th Parliamentary Conference, 1957.

While the 46th Inter-Parliamentary Union Conference in 1957 did not justify a specially designed stamp, only an amended definitive, such was the view of such matters at the time, nevertheless this event did warrant a pictorial handstamp, turning what might have been a fairly dull FDC into something more pleasing. The handstamp, showing the Palace of Westminster, reads '46th Parliamentary Conference London SW1'.

With no Bureau, another problem could affect the producers of first day covers, that of obtaining the stamps concerned. I am not necessarily thinking just of changes such as of watermark. The original graphite-lined stamps were only put on sale in the Southampton area. Supplies of the stamps would soon reach stamp shops, but it was often down to the locally-situated dealers actually to produce FDCs.

Southampton-based dealer, J Sanders, was able to provide FDCs for the phosphor band versions of the National Productivity Year stamps of 1962, the first commemorative to be released with phosphor bands in addition to the 'ordinary' version. At the time, I lived in an area that used 'ordinary'

stamps; fortunately, one of my grandparents lived in a part of London where phosphor stamps were soon to be brought into use. I had to provide meticulous instructions as to how to produce a first day cover – and hope the stamps bought on the day of issue would indeed have phosphor bands.

There would be many who would claim that those were far more interesting times. Stamp collectors did not have everything presented to them on a plate. Sometimes a fair amount of initiative was needed to procure a 'distinctive' FDC. Finding a place with a close association for each new issue, and then organising the FDC, was a challenge. Perhaps that is the reason that, even today, some still strive for something which is different.

There are a number of catalogues produced that detail British first day covers; these reveal the variety of cancellations which are appropriate for each issue, whether special slogans or operational handstamps.

However, early in 1963 the Post Office would awaken to stamp collectors, and for those collecting first day covers, a new chapter would begin ●