

Northern Ireland pre-decimal regionals by Brian Warren

Although they do not attract the same level of attention as national definitives, 'Regionals' or 'Country' definitives can provide the specialist collector with much of interest, reflecting the many changes in the national definitives of the period. Particularly noteworthy for their variation in designs are the £sd issues.



AS A COLLECTOR of the modern definitive issues of my native Ireland, I have always taken an interest in the 'Regionals' issued for use in Northern Ireland. The 'Regionals' as they are known by us collectors or 'Country' definitives as the Royal Mail prefers to call them do not appear to generate as much interest as the national definitives. However, they provide a specialist collector with much of interest, reflecting the many changes which have occurred in the national definitives during the same period. Their great advantage is thankfully the Royal Mail's continued policy to confine the series to the four principal postal rates. This enables a basic collection to be expanded without undue cost and difficulty. The £sd issues are particularly interesting given the variation in designs and, therefore, this article is confined to the pre-decimal issues.

The campaign for Regional issues In October 1946, there was a proposal for Regional issues and tentative designs were prepared by Harrisons. This was not proceeded with, although a Liberation issue for the Channel Islands was issued in 1948 and could be regarded as the first regional issue, given that they were primarily for sale on the Islands. In 1953, a campaign for pictorial national definitives was launched and in June 1956 *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* published a series of pictorial designs for a proposed issue, several showing regional scenes. In July 1956, the Postmaster General announced that The Queen had approved the issue of regional stamps but





This page The five final designs, left, and the three issued stamps of 1958, above.

Opposite page Cylinder blocks of 1967 9d and 1968 4d olive-sepia with perf encroachment in the bottom margin

that The Queen's portrait was to remain the dominant feature. Local advisory committees were appointed for each of the regions and design competitions were arranged.

The 1s d designs In the case of Northern Ireland, the committee agreed that a number of local artists should be invited to submit preliminary designs and that five symbols representative of the regions should be incorporated – the Red (right) Hand of Ulster; the Arms of Northern Ireland (without supporters); the six-pointed Crowned Star with the Ulster Red (right) Hand on it; the Flax Plant (with or without leaves); and a field-gate with typical Ulster pillars. The Red Hand of Ulster was to be incorporated in all the designs together with the letters 'ER' if practicable. Apart from the Arms of Northern Ireland, all were to appear on the final set. Twenty four designs were submitted of which eight were shortlisted for completion.

The final five designs subsequently produced are shown above, with the issued stamps: 3d (by William Hollywood), 6d (Leonard Pilton) and 1s 3d (T Collins). The committee's reserve choice was another of William Hollywood's designs which was featured on a National Postal Museum card issued in 1983 to mark 25 years of Regionals. The issued 1s3d design was one of three stamps featured on the cover of a £1.46 definitive booklet issued in the same year to mark the same anniversary. The original artwork for the issued designs was featured on one of the book-

let panes contained within the Northern Ireland prestige booklet issued in 1994. All stamps incorporated the Dorothy Wilding portrait of The Queen. Further details of the initial design process from which the foregoing summary has been extracted is set out in Jean Farrugia's article published in the October 1978 issue of the *Bulletin*.

The initial issues All of the 1s d issues were photogravure printed by Harrison & Sons. The first 3d stamp for the inland letter rate appeared on 18 August 1958 on paper watermarked multiple crowns without the royal cypher; the regionals were the first stamps to be issued on paper with this watermark. 6d (European letter rate) and 1s 3d (airmail letter rate) stamps followed on 29 September 1958. The stamps were on sale at all offices in Northern Ireland in place of the equivalent value in the Wilding series. The 3d (and later 4d and 5d) values were double pane printings consisting of two panes (no dot and dot) each of 240 stamps set out in 20 rows of 12 stamps, the panes being guillotined before issue. The 6d, 1s 3d (and later 9d and 1s 6d) values were from single pane (no dot) printings. Initially, the 3d, 6d and 1s3d stamps were printed on a cream paper but from early 1962, a 'whiter' paper was introduced on a national basis and used for subsequent printings of these and all later values. It is difficult to distinguish the two papers in the absence of marginal copies/blocks. Under a uv lamp, the 'whiter' paper gives a slightly brighter reaction.



The three 4d, 5d, 9d and 1s6d stamps of 1966-69, above, and a slogan advertising the new 4d and 5d stamps in 1968



Rate and paper changes Following an increase in postal rates in 1965, a new 4d value (letter rate) in the same design as the 3d was issued on 7 February 1966. New 9d and 1s6d values were issued on 1 March 1967 to replace the 6d and 1s3d which had been rendered obsolete due to the increase in rates. The 9d and 1s6d values were the first Northern Ireland regionals to have phosphor bands (2 bands – violet phosphor) following the now widespread use of automatic letter facing equipment. The 3d value (postcard rate) was re-printed and now incorporated a single phosphor band (9 June 1967) followed by the 4d (2 bands) on 2 October 1967. The foregoing stamps were also printed on watermarked crowns paper with gum arabic.

During 1967-68, the national 'Wilding' definitives were replaced by the Machin design but there was no move to change the design of the Regional issues until after decimalisation. The new Machin stamps were printed on unwatermarked chalk-surfaced paper and, as a result, all subsequent regional printings appeared on the new paper. At the same time, the Post Office was changing over from gum arabic to PVA gum. The 4d (2 bands) was the first Northern Ireland value to appear on un-watermarked paper and exists either with gum arabic or PVA gum. The PVA version does not appear to have ever been on sale in Northern Ireland and was not discovered until after this 4d ultramarine printing was withdrawn from general sale in September 1968. The stamp remained on philatelic sale and in October 1968

sheets with PVA gum were sold at the London Philatelic Counter and at the British Philatelic Exhibition Post Office. Although the total number of sheets sold are estimated at about 50, given that they were all philatelic sales, the individual stamp remains relatively common. The 1s6d was re-issued on 20 May 1969 on un-watermarked paper with PVA gum. The 9d value did not appear on un-watermarked paper.

The introduction of two tier postage in 1968 necessitated the re-issue of the 4d with a single phosphor band and the release of a new 5d value (2 bands) on 4 September 1968. The use of un-watermarked paper and PVA gum was now standard. The opportunity was taken to bring the colour of the 4d in line with the equivalent national definitive by changing it from ultramarine to olive-sepia. An innovative special slogan cancel was used to publicise the new stamps. It was soon realised that in poor light it was difficult to differentiate by reference to colour, the first class (5d Royal blue) and second class (4d olive-sepia) stamps due to their dark colours. Both national and regional 4d values were altered to vermilion and the new Northern Ireland 4d was released on 26 February 1969.

During the pre-decimal period, no Northern Ireland regionals were printed on more than one cylinder although as noted above there are a number of paper, phosphor and gum variations. A full list of all values, papers and cylinder blocks is set out in the accompanying table. In addition, a number of perforation format variations occur



Stamp book cover of 1983, showing 1s3d stamp of 1958

Value	Issue date	Description	Cylinder	No dot	Dot
3d	18.09.58	Watermarked: Cream paper	3	●	●
3d	21.05.62	Watermarked: White paper	3	●	●
3d	09.06.67	Watermarked: 1 phosphor band	3	●	●
4d Blue	07.02.66	Watermarked: no phosphor bands			●
4d Blue	02.10.67	Watermarked: 2 phosphor bands	1	●	●
4d Blue	27.06.68	Unwatermarked: 2 phosphor bands (GA)	1	●	●
4d Blue	23.10.68	Unwatermarked: 2 phosphor bands (PVA)	1	●	○
4d Olive	04.09.68	Unwatermarked: 1 phosphor band	1	●	●
4d Vermillion	26.02.69	Unwatermarked: 1 phosphor band	1	●	●
5d	04.09.68	Unwatermarked: 2 phosphor bands	1	●	●
6d	29.09.58	Watermarked: Cream paper	1	●	○
6d	04.06.62	Watermarked: White paper	1	●	○
9d	01.03.67	Watermarked: 2 phosphor bands	1	●	○
1s 3d	29.09.58	Watermarked: Cream paper	1	●	○
1s 3d	09.11.62	Watermarked: White paper	1	●	○
1s 6d	01.03.67	Watermarked: 2 phosphor bands	1	●	○
1s 6d	20.05.69	Unwatermarked: 2 phosphor bands	1	●	○

During the pre-decimal period, no Northern Ireland regionals were printed on more than one cylinder although there are a number of paper, phosphor and gum variations. This table shows a full list of all values, papers and cylinder blocks.

● exists

○ does not exist

on the 3d (White paper), 3d (1 band), 6d (both papers) and 1s 3d (both papers) values eg the 3d (1 band) cylinder block from the 'no dot' sheet exists with either a single extension hole in the left margin and an imperf bottom margin or vice-versa. A number of constant varieties are also readily available which enable the collector to expand a basic collection.

First day covers and presentation packs First day covers exist for all basic value and colour changes although there was no official FDC service provided by the Post Office, except for the 9d and

1s6d values issued in 1967 and the 4d and 5d values issued in 1968. A 'first day of issue' slogan cancel was available for the initial 4d value issued in 1966. The only individual presentation pack was produced in 1970 containing the seven values then available (3d, 4d olive-sepia, 4d vermilion, 5d, 9d, 1s3d and 1s6d). Earlier, in 1960, all 12 regional stamps of the period including the three Northern Ireland values were issued in presentation packs, one for sale in the UK and a rarer version for sale in New York ●