

## Edmund Dulac, the integrated designer by Philip Parker

FROM THE LATE '30s to the early '50s, Edmund Dulac was responsible for some of the finest UK stamps ever produced. As a tribute to the artist, a stamp pane in the forthcoming prestige book *A Perfect Coronation* features a special arrangement of the recently re-issued Wilding definitives designed by Dulac (one from the miniature sheet issued on 5 December 2002, another from the sheet from 20 May 2003), as well as his coronation stamp at a £1 value (issued originally in this form for Stamp Show 2000). The stamps are shown below; the complete pane is shown on page 274 of this *Bulletin*.



## A philatelic tribute to the artist and his legacy

It is arguable that the mid-1930s were something of a golden age for Post Office 'arts'. It was the era that John Grierson's film *Night Mail* was defining the documentary genre, and the process of photogravure printing was becoming established in British stamp production, while a relaxation of the stiff formality of stamp issues was resulting in interesting designs. The brazenly modernist 1935 Silver Jubilee stamp by Barnett Freedman is one example. One of the unadopted designs for this issue was by Edmund Dulac (right); an exuberant, rather gallic design where the King is flanked by modernist renderings of Britannia and Mercury (the winged messenger).



Born in Toulouse in 1882, Dulac first studied law but his artistic interests led him to the Ecole de Beaux-Arts, leaving in 1903 to take up a scholarship at the Academie Julien in Paris. However, he soon moved to London and established himself as a book illustrator. In 1911 he won two gold medals at the Barcelona International exhibition and the following year he became naturalised as a British citizen. At the outbreak of war in 1914 the *Daily Mail* commissioned him to produce a series of charity stamps for the Red Cross – his labels featuring Greek heroes were a taste of designs to come.

In 1936 there occurred the exchange of letters in the pages of *The Times* which was to associate Dulac ever more with stamps. The definitives featuring the photographic portrait of the new King Edward VIII and pared-back design caused a lively debate, and letters by Eric Gill and Dulac set out their respective stalls regarding stamp design. Dulac championed an integrated approach, where the relationship between all parts of the design was as important as the individual components.

Following the abdication, Dulac and Gill were asked to produce new stamps – and they refined the new simplified formula for definitives with details such as Gill's lettering and Dulac's delicate iconic plants representing the constituent parts of the UK. The profile of George VI was based on a small plaster relief prepared by Dulac, and he fashioned a head in an heroic, classical style (below left). Indeed, this portrait of the King was to adorn almost every UK stamp of the reign. As a tribute to the King, this head was reproduced as a label in a pane of mixed definitives published in the Royal Mail prestige book, *A Gracious Accession* (February 2002).

Dulac's 1937 coronation stamp (far right) broke new ground in depicting the monarchs face-on. Definitives and commemorative stamps display his preoccupation with an integrated design. The dignified features of the monarchs are surrounded by symbolic imagery, imperial crown and distinctive lettering to form a harmonious whole.

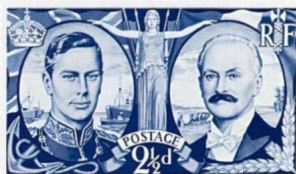


Unadopted design by Dulac for the centenary of the Penny Black in 1940. The Post Office deemed this approach not to be 'in harmony with British ideas of stamp design'.

Below: design for (unissued) Anglo-French stamp, and the issued 1948 Olympic Games stamp.



Dulac's further experiments with an heroic head integrated with graphic elements are shown by the unadopted designs for the centenary of the Penny Black in 1940 (above).



Dulac's wartime work for the French postal authorities is equally important. He was approached by the French leader in exile, General de Gaulle, to design stamps for the Free French Colonies, an appropriate commission since Dulac had worked with Gill on a joint Anglo-French stamp at the beginning of the War (left). His later commission for a French definitive for issue after the liberation again shows his fascination with heroic, classic design – the profile of Marianne centred in the design and the ordering of type and symbolism echoing his British definitives (see contents page).

Dulac's postwar designs explored the wider landscape format in a determined expression of 'controlled freedom' in design. His stamp for the 1948 London Olympics (left) again utilised the head of the King, but demarcated it within an oval while his classical figure strides across the Earth. The curve of the globe, the circular motifs of the Olympic logo and the radical departure of undulating lettering all echoed the sense of movement – again, many elements beautifully integrated.

With the advent of the new Queen, Dulac's final stamps were no less masterpieces. His framework in reversible tones for higher value Wilding definitives first appeared in 1953. His 1s3d value for the coronation is a remarkable rendering of the young queen – an unusual full-face portrait in coronation regalia – and an echo of his previous coronation design of 1937. Again, the national emblems are subtly integrated into the design, almost like woven details in a tapestry. Tragically, Edmund Dulac died on 25 May 1952, just days before his coronation stamp was issued on 3 June •