

The first GPO logo Douglas Muir describes the background to the 'monogram' of 1935

PUBLICITY, public relations, logos and branding are all things taken for granted today. Yet it was not until the 1930s that the Post Office had its own logo (called at the time a 'monogram' or 'badge'), the inspiration of Sir Stephen Tallents, a civil servant, who was an early, remarkably skilful, enthusiast for publicity and managing public opinion. Tallents House in Edinburgh is named after him.

Tallents began his civil service career in 1909, at the Board of Trade. Badly wounded serving in the Irish Guards during the First World War, he went on to work in various government ministries. From 1920 he was in Ireland, at a critical period in Anglo-Irish history, becoming Imperial Secretary for Northern Ireland from 1922 until 1926.

It was then that Leo Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, selected Tallents to be the first Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board, due to his reputation for 'initiative, vision and great driving power'. The Empire Marketing Board, or EMB, was established in May 1926 to develop and market the food and goods produced by Empire countries, and to promote the idea of the Empire. It was Tallents' enthusiasm for selling the idea of

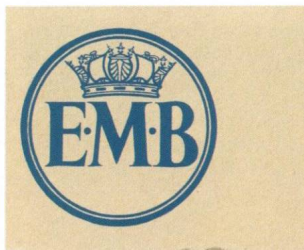
Empire that formed the rest of his career. He organised press and poster campaigns, exhibitions, Empire shops, radio talks etc, but perhaps most famous was the creation of the EMB Film Unit led by John Grierson.

From 1931 Tallents also served on the Telephone Publicity Committee of the Post Office, and when the Empire Marketing Board came to an end in 1933 the Postmaster General, Sir H Kingsley Wood, immediately wanted his services. The high-level post of Public Relations Officer was established for him and when he transferred to the Post Office he took Grierson and the Film Unit with him, to create the GPO Film Unit, later to become world-famous for experimental documentaries and, of course, *Night Mail*.

Development of the first GPO logo While still at the Empire Marketing Board, Tallents wrote to G H Taylor of the Post Office Telephone Publicity Department saying he felt 'the need for a single dignified design, which could be used throughout your telephone publicity in the same way as we use our emblem of the Crown and the initials "EMB"'. He suggested as an artist MacDonal Gill, who had prepared several maps for the EMB. This was agreed at a fee of approximately £20. Shortly before taking up his GPO post, Tallents wrote to confirm that Gill was willing to accept the work. ▶



Sir Stephen Tallents, first Secretary of the Empire Marketing Board and later Public Relations Officer at the GPO. The GPO logotype was his inspiration.



The Empire Marketing Board logo. Tallents suggested that the Post Office should have an 'emblem' of their own, for use in publicity.



MacDonal Gill's experience of designing the regimental badges for war graves was highly relevant in his task for the GPO. Above: a detail of one of his designs, on a war grave in Takoradi, Ghana.

Above: MacDonal Gill, by Howard Coster, 1930. Right: the six proposals submitted by Gill in January 1934. The accepted version (number 6) is at bottom right.





Artwork developed from Gill's design no6 was supplied on 1 February 1934. This was used in publicity and advertising (as left). The typeface, Gill Sans, was designed by MacDonald Gill's brother, Eric.

MacDonald (Max) Gill was the architect and designer brother of the more famous Eric Gill, whose typeface (Gill Sans) he was to use in his design. Well-known for his Empire posters, in the early 1920s he had also drawn various maps of the London Underground. Less well-known, but highly relevant, was his experience in designing the badges for war graves.

In January 1934 Gill submitted six designs on tracing paper for what was described as a GPO 'monogram' or 'badge' (shown opposite). Most of these incorporated stylised birds' wings, with the letters GPO surmounted by a crown. The accepted version (no 6) had no wings, but only a crown (with eight pearls on either side) over the letters GPO within a double circle. Type was in Gill Sans, unlike the other designs which used a serif font. Artwork was supplied on 1 February, and this was then used in publicity such as press advertisements. However, it was felt it could be improved. Tallents wrote to Gill on 30 April: 'Such criticisms as I have heard, and they have not been numerous, have been (1) that the crown seemed a little to overweight the lettering, and (2) that the adjustment of the inner circle to the outside letters might be improved – perhaps that a single circle would be more effective.'

In Gill's preliminary sketch (no 6) he had suggested alternatives or variants of the bounding lines. He now tried out a number of variations omitting the inner or outer line. The newly appointed Director General of the Post Office, Col T M Banks, suggested that a post-horn be included and this was passed on to Gill in June. (This post-horn was that used in the jack, or standard, flying on mail ships and aircraft.)

At the beginning of July Gill submitted 'a design... for the GPO Badge incorporating the bugle.' On the original artwork he noted that the 'P' should be better centralised (see illustrations overleaf). For the sake of legibility he thought it best to limit the number of pearls to seven a side: 'In the many cases in which I have designed crowns for the War Graves Commission I have varied the number of pearls in deference to the size and the demands of the material. These designs have received the King's assent and approval.' ▶



Refining the crown: details of the original logo of 1934, top, and the final version of 1935. Changes included a reduction in the number of pearls.

The design incorporating a post-horn (left) was prepared at the suggestion of the new Director General of the Post Office, and later simplified (centre). It was subsequently rejected in favour of Gill's final design (right), which followed advice from the Poster Group.



References BPMA files:

POST 69/1,2,7 Post Office Board papers & proceedings. 1934, 1935, 1937

POST 109/925 Artwork for the redesign of the GPO logo

POST 121/431 Sir Stephen Tallents, Public Relations Officer: appointment papers

POST 122/8388 GPO Monogram. Suggestion from Sir Stephen Tallents

POST 122/8391 GPO Monogram. PO emblem used for publicity posters

This 'bugle' design was intended for a Post Office Board meeting in July, which was postponed until October. In the meantime, the drawing of the strap and horn was simplified. Nevertheless, the design 'did not altogether commend itself' to members. Tallents, a member of the Board, was asked to consult the 'Poster Group' and come back with a revised drawing.

The 'Poster Group' had been set up in April 1934 to advise on subjects and artists for Post Office posters, especially for schools. It consisted of: Kenneth Clark, Director of the National Gallery and Keeper of the King's Pictures; Clive Bell, a writer on art and literature; and J L Beddington, Publicity Officer for Shell-Mex. As a result of their advice Gill produced a drawing on 19 November based on the original no 6 sketch but without the outer circle or post-horn. This was approved by the 'Poster Group' and Tallents submitted it to the Post Office Board where it was also approved on 5 February 1935. It gradually came into use through 1935 and the beginning of 1936, when it was first used on the *Post Office Magazine*.

Tallents sent out a memo to the Heads of the various Post Office departments to announce the new 'monogram', but he wanted to control its use. 'The General Post Office monogram... has been approved for all publicity purposes. Cases may occur in which its use for more general purposes seems appropriate. Such cases require special sanction, and should be referred in the first instance to the Public Relations Department.' This rule was partly ignored and resulted in a series of requests, some of which were refused. The Gill monogram continued to be used until May 1953, when it was replaced with a new design embodying the St Edward's Crown.

Shortly after the logo's introduction, Tallents went to the BBC as a Controller (in October 1935) and later returned as a civil servant to government work. Subsequently he was twice President of the Institute of Public Relations and died in 1958. (His papers are held at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.)

National Stamp Day postmark 2006 When the BPMA was considering having a postmark for National Stamp Day on 6 May this year, we decided to use the 1935 first GPO logo as its basis. Serviced covers (left) with a specially printed insert illustrating the development of the logo are available at £2.95 + P&P, and may be ordered through the BPMA direct on 020 7239 5125 or online at www.postalheritage.org.uk/shop ●

