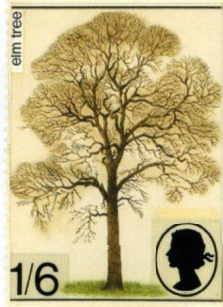
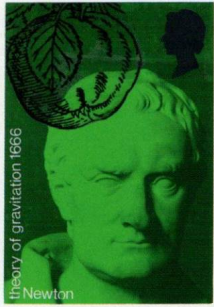


Off with her head! Douglas Muir concludes



OF THE DESIGNS handed over to Tony Benn in October 1965 there were 17 themes including proposed definitives based on the Snowdon photographs. These themes had been refined from the original listing, and now consisted of those shown below left. The last entry had been added as a deliberate sop to The Queen knowing her great interest in horseracing, which had amused the Prime Minister greatly when he was told.

It was decided to have one example from each series essayed, with the others presented as colour prints at stamp size. Each of the designs to be essayed should be with the Gillick cameo head in one version and the royal coat of arms in another. All designs were in the new, larger size.

Towards the end of January 1966 the first essays were proofed but it was not until February that the new perforating tool required was available. Then all chosen designs were essayed and sent to Benn, Gentleman and the Post Office from Harrisons, the printers. Various types of royal coats of arms were tried out, and also in one instance a crown, but all designs were also essayed with the Gillick cameo. Gentleman explained: 'When it became clear that the Palace and Harold Wilson between them were unwilling to remove the Queen's head from any commemoratives, I simply replaced the proposed alternatives – Great Britain, UK, the Royal Arms – with a silhouette version of the royal profile then used on the coinage.'

On 25 February Benn wrote to The Queen's private secretary saying that the album of experimental designs was now ready. 'These are, of course, all samples and there is no question of the Post Office committing itself to accepting any of them for issue as stamps. They have been prepared solely to show what could be done and to encourage a more intelligent and widespread interest in British postage stamps.'

Mention was made of possible plans to show the designs at Stampex in March which Benn was due to open. However, politics now put this on hold. A general election was called and such controversial proposals were postponed. It was not until 5 April that the album of designs was sent

The 17 themes in the Gentleman album of October 1965

1 Sixteen definitives (one sheet) using new cameo profile showing alternative colours ● 2 Eighteen rulers of the UK (one sheet) showing possible colour sequence for one value block sheet ● 3 Period costumes: four examples for one value block sheet ● 4 Famous men: two versions shown of John Dalton 1766 and his atomic theory ● 5 Famous events – two versions of Newton's theory of gravitation, 1666 ● 6 Butterflies: one example shown (others on a separate sheet) ● 7 Fungi (on one sheet): four examples ● 8 Trees: four examples ● 9 Birds: four examples (and others on a separate sheet) ● 10 Bridges: five examples including Severn Bridge 1966 ● 11 Aeroplanes: eight examples in different treatments ● 12 Trains: two examples shown, and a set of four in a strip of a complete train (and other examples on a separate sheet) ● 13 Regional architecture ● 14 Regional landscapes: eight examples (two from each region) ● 15 National coastlines: Operation Neptune (five examples) ● 16 Famous events: Fire of London 1666 four versions ● 17 Nationally owned works of art (racehorses)

the series of articles taken from his new book



to The Queen, with Benn emphasising their experimental nature but indicating that he would like to have a public seminar on stamp design at which these would be shown.

Martin Charteris, The Queen's Assistant Private Secretary, then took up the thorny subject of the experimental designs. He wrote to Benn a month later. 'I have had several telephone conversations with your Private Secretary about your letter to Adeane of 5th April and the album of experimental stamps which you sent with it. You will therefore know already that the Queen is quite agreeable to these experimental designs being made available for inspection by the Press and the Public.

'You do not ask in your letter for the Queen's approval to any or all of these designs and it is of course understood that Her Majesty's agreement to their display does not imply her approval for their use as postage stamps. Her Majesty has none the less examined them with the greatest interest, particularly the use of the cameo silhouette on many of the designs, and the Queen's preliminary view is that the cameo is perhaps too miniature to be significant as an indication that the stamps are British.

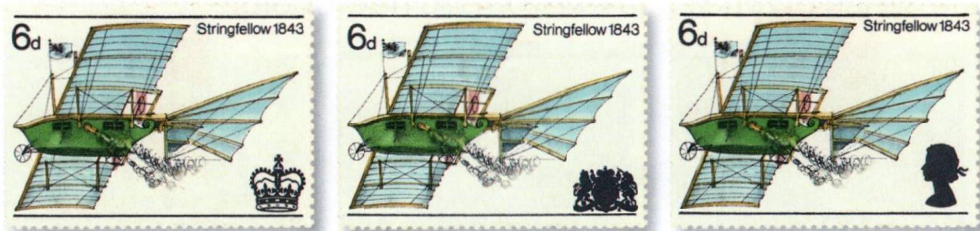
'The use of the Royal Arms with the heads of past sovereigns has certainly produced some very interesting designs, but here again Her Majesty considers that very careful thought will have to be given to whether or not such designs are appropriate before they are adopted.'

By this time the Landscapes stamps had just been issued, the first non-commemorative special issue. These had caused another row between Benn and the Stamp Advisory Committee and a remarkable number of designs had been essayed. Most importantly, Benn had insisted that the new Gillick cameo be tried out as well as the traditional Wilding portrait. In the end, the accepted Landscape designs by Leonard Rosoman (as shown right) were the first stamps issued to show the Gillick cameo, and The Queen had already approved the designs without any comment on the silhouette. The cameo there had been rather larger than that used on Gentleman's experimental designs.

In the meantime, yet more problems arose with the use of the Gillick cameo. Postal officials realised that there might be a question of copyright, and wrote to the Royal Mint to enquire, but only on 8 February. An immediate response stated that the Mint would have an objection to the use of the coinage head on postage stamps. This created a problem, as work had already reached an advanced stage. Benn wrote to James Callaghan, the

Above and opposite: designs from the David Gentleman album of 1965. The 'monarch' above is from the 'Rulers of Great Britain' se-tenant sheet, shown in full in the June 2006 Bulletin (page 311).





Above: essays of some album designs were produced to illustrate various proposals for replacing or re-designing The Queen's head. Opposite: a full page from the album showing 'Regional Stamps'.

Chancellor of the Exchequer and, as such, Master of the Mint. He told him about new designs of stamps, but without specifically mentioning the problems. On 10 May a meeting took place at which Callaghan gently rapped Benn's knuckles: '... the Chancellor saw the Postmaster General yesterday on a number of subjects. One of these was the question of the coinage effigy and postage stamps. The Chancellor asked the Postmaster General to ensure that, in future, he approached the Master of the Mint [ie himself] before approaching the Palace. The Postmaster General appeared to accept this advice.'

In early 1966 the Stamp Advisory Committee also fought a continuing battle over the size of the Gillick coinage head. They tried to reject it for the World Cup stamps, especially designs by David Gentleman. Then they complained about its small size, but it had become standard.

Stamp design seminar The 'informal' seminar on stamp design took place on 23 June at Fleet Building in Farringdon Street, London EC. When Benn had informed The Queen about it he received an apparently enthusiastic, but carefully worded, reply from Adeane. 'Her Majesty is interested to read about the seminar which is to be held this month, and she hopes that the wide public interest in British stamp design which you have aroused in this country will continue to have fruitful results. You can rest assured that this is far from being a subject which Her Majesty regards in any way as "routine"; she looks forward to the designs which you submit because she realizes that the postage stamp, which we invented, remains one of the best ways of reminding the world of what we are and what we are doing.'

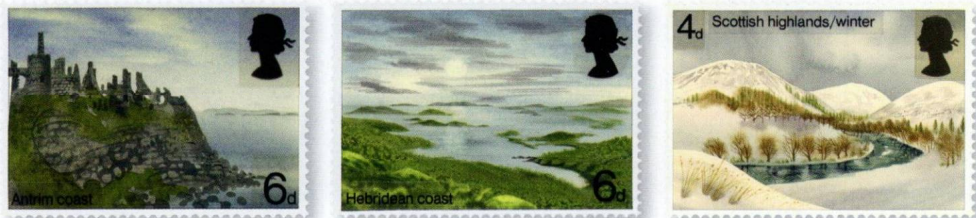
Benn showed Gentleman's album to the Stamp Advisory Committee before the seminar. This was at a regular meeting on 15 June, towards the end of the period from which minutes have survived. 'The Postmaster General stressed that the surface had so far only been scratched and that there were many other possibilities – stamps on Road Safety or Public Health, for example. The page in the album showing stamps of British Monarchs suggested a very interesting issue.'

At the seminar a week later there were 12 frames of the Gentleman Album essays and original artwork. The successful and unsuccessful designs for the British Birds stamps, to be previewed that afternoon, were also on show, as were the stamps and essays previously mentioned, and a selection of children's paintings submitted for the Christmas issue. In the discussion which took place, opinion was divided about whether too many stamps

Regional stamps



Designs of particular regional interest:
architectural, artistic, industrial
or archaeological subjects



Proposed issues in David Gentleman's album included views of the UK countryside: Antrim and Hebridean coasts, and Scottish Highlands.

were being issued. When it came to The Queen's head, designers were 'disturbed' by the difficulty of integrating it into the design. Minutes record that: 'The head must retain an element of permanency, a classic, ageless quality; yet every artist had his own way of working and there must therefore be a number of heads from which he could choose or one basic head from which a number of treatments could emerge. However the introduction of a variety of symbols/ciphers/heads might lead to our being challenged on the fact that we were not conforming to UPU Regulations.'

On 1 July Benn wrote to The Queen to inform her of the success of his seminar, mentioning the favourable comments and specifically ideas for the 1967 programme. Adeane's reply on the 4th referred to this: 'You mention specifically your 1967 programme and the 'Rulers of Great Britain' series from the Gentleman Album. The Queen has, of course, seen this already, but she would very much like to have another look at the block before considering the problem of whether the Royal Crest or the Gold profile should be used to identify these stamps. Could you very kindly have it sent round for Her Majesty to inspect again?'

However, it was not to be necessary, as Adeane would certainly have known when he wrote the letter, for Benn had been promoted to the Cabinet as Minister of Technology. As he was no longer Postmaster General, nothing further was to happen with the contentious Rulers issue, nor royal crests or ciphers: the revolution was over, with Benn sidelined. Nevertheless, the aftershocks of the ferment he had created in the Post Office continued to be felt long thereafter. Everything to do with stamps had changed – reasons for issue, the number of issues, subject matter and design.

Many new aspects of stamps were still in course of preparation or production (the first Christmas stamps with children's paintings for example), but some did not come about, as a result of Benn's no longer being there to force things through. However, a new definitive portrait had been commissioned and work was already in train.

Gentleman's Album was seminal. It introduced a new size of stamp, and themes and designs which were to influence stamp issues for almost 20 years. Many still look remarkably modern, and very much as if they had been issued. Themes such as bridges, ships, aircraft, buildings, literature, famous people, trees, trains, flowers, animals and many others, became the norm, often with designs by David Gentleman. The 1960s was a period of remarkable social change in Britain. An era of deference was swept away and with it extremely old-fashioned attitudes to stamp-issuing policy ●