

A uniform issue Richard West visits Atelier Works, and meets illustrator Graham Turner

'STAMPS ARE ALL ABOUT DETAIL.' The words of Quentin Newark, who has created the designs for a set of six stamps being issued on 18 September, the second in the series of three depicting service uniforms. The first set, issued last year, focused on the Army; this year it is the RAF, celebrating its 90th anniversary; next year it will be the Royal Navy's turn. Quentin is a founder and director of Atelier Works and has designed all three sets using illustrations by Graham Turner.

The relationship between Atelier Works and Royal Mail began in 2004, with the set marking the 150th anniversary of the Crimean War. Ian Chilvers, another of the directors of the design group, had previously worked for Mike Dempsey, and so was already known to Royal Mail. The Crimean War project became his. He discovered that the war brought several significant changes: it saw the first use of the war correspondent, bringing news of the battles home to the public; the acceptance of the idea of the Nightingale hospital ward, with spaces between beds and a central aisle; and the first use of a balaclava. Would the public immediately understand a set that focused on these innovations? What was important was not to glamorise war. In the end, the solution was a series of portraits that Ian came across, radically cropped and re-framed, with much retouching needed 'on screen' before these could work as stamp designs.

Ian next worked on the stamps that marked the 150th anniversary of the Victoria Cross, issued in 2006. Given this proven record, Royal Mail again turned to Atelier Works for a series of three sets on service uniforms. Ian felt that this time the challenge should be passed to Quentin, who sought 'a way of creating individual sets that are meaningful in themselves but that are part of a grand series of 18 stamps that would chart the rich variety of uniforms across the spectrum of British armed forces'.

Depicting uniforms Quentin considered different ways of showing the uniforms: depicting each one alongside an enlargement of a particular aspect, such as a button; featuring each against an illustration that puts the uniform in perspective; and using a longer vertical format, so that the entire uniform could be included. Further questions arose as to how to proceed: possibly photographing actors wearing the uniforms; using uniforms as seen in paintings or through sculpture; showing the uniforms as depicted in the popular culture of the day, such as on cigarette cards, Toby jugs and posters; or using contemporaneous depictions of the uniforms, from paintings, print or photographs. Quentin particularly liked the idea of including a detailed enlargement. ▶



The Crimean War and Victoria Cross issues, designed by Ian Chilvers of Atelier Works.



Quentin Newark of Atelier.



RANK AND FILE

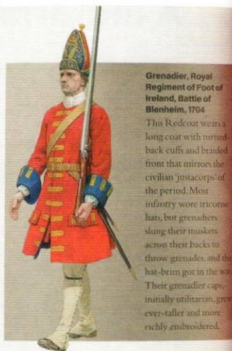
Early uniform sought to impress the observer with the wearer's height and grandness. It also reflected the fact that little attempt was ever made to conceal soldiers on the battlefield, both organization and tactics alike, emphasized uniformity. Regiments had their distinctions,

sometimes very obvious, like the ornate feather bonnets and kilts of the Highlanders, and some more restrained, like the coloured cuff and lapel 'facings' that marked the individual regiments of infantry of the line. The expression says it all: there was no room for individuality in a line of battle.



Top: The 'Red' Line, the 53rd Foot, 18th century line, regiments, mounted with bayonet, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th.

Left: The 'Red' Line, the 53rd Foot, 18th century line, regiments, mounted with bayonet, 20th, 21st, 22nd, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th, 27th, 28th, 29th, 30th, 31st, 32nd, 33rd, 34th, 35th, 36th, 37th, 38th, 39th, 40th, 41st, 42nd, 43rd, 44th, 45th, 46th, 47th, 48th, 49th, 50th, 51st, 52nd, 53rd, 54th, 55th, 56th, 57th, 58th, 59th, 60th, 61st, 62nd, 63rd, 64th, 65th, 66th, 67th, 68th, 69th, 70th, 71st, 72nd, 73rd, 74th, 75th, 76th, 77th, 78th, 79th, 80th, 81st, 82nd, 83rd, 84th, 85th, 86th, 87th, 88th, 89th, 90th, 91st, 92nd, 93rd, 94th, 95th, 96th, 97th, 98th, 99th, 100th.



Grenadier, Royal Regiment of Foot of Blenheim, 1704.

The Redcoat wears a long coat with turned back cuffs and breeches from that mirrors the civilian jostacorp of the period. Most infantry wore tricornes hats, but grenadiers slung their muskets across their backs to throw grenades, and the hat-brim got in the way. Their grenadier caps initially imitated the eye-taller and more richly embroidered.

The front cover and the Army Uniforms stamp panes from the prestige book issued last year. The book, designed by Atelier, gives an opportunity to see all the stamp illustrations uncropped.

However, all ideas must go to Royal Mail and its Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC). Quentin comments, 'The SAC provides an overview of the stamp programme, and ensures that each set is unique. As a result, collectors receive something appropriate and fresh in a wide context. The members of the SAC come from all walks of life, and provide a popular vote.'

In the case of the Army Uniforms, that 'vote' was in favour of closely-cropped illustrations, using different poses to make each stamp distinguishable. Quentin worked closely with Richard Holmes, the broadcaster and writer, and a member of the Territorial Army, to pinpoint key historical moments to include, and exclude. Quentin admits that he would have liked to feature dress uniforms, avoiding an association with conflict, opting for flamboyant characters such as the Hussars and Lancers. He particularly favoured a Pioneer Sergeant of the Coldstream Guards, unique in being able to sport a beard, and whose ceremonial dress includes a white leather apron and a giant brass axe. Richard, however, preferred to convey a world of practice and practicality, from the flamboyant to the dour: the challenge was to encapsulate centuries of history in just six stamps.

The illustrator Graham Turner was entrusted with the task of translating ideas into finished paintings. Graham, whose father Michael is also an artist, is principally noted for his military paintings. He also has a passion for mediaeval history, which accounts for his love of jousting. Not only does he have the vital skills and knowledge, he also appreciates how a uniform 'moves' depending on a particular gesture. Quentin made suggestions, discussing with Graham the important aspects of each figure that should be focused upon. This helped Graham decide how to depict each figure, bearing in mind the position of the Queen's head, denomination and caption. At this juncture, the idea of pale grey background illustrations, such as of a tank or gun, had not been discounted. Graham consulted photographs and examined mannequins to develop a set of pencil sketches, taking particular care over postures while adhering to the constraints that a stamp imposes. Although these were just sketches at this stage, Graham was aware of the colouring, ensuring that the result was a balanced set. Initially the direction in which each figure was looking had not been finalised, as the final position of the Queen's head on each stamp had not been resolved.



British Scarfart
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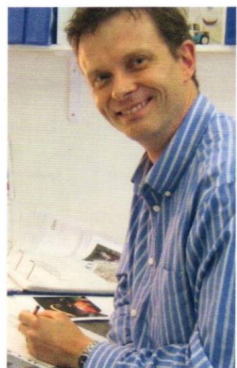
As the work progressed, a gradual refinement of the sketches became beneficial. The selected sketches were then imported into stamp frames, for further consultations with all parties involved: Quentin, Graham, Richard and Royal Mail. At any stage, the SAC might still recommend changes.

With all satisfied, Graham could produce final, fully-coloured illustrations. At this stage, any modifications, if essential, can only be minor. His work emphasises his keen eye for the detail so essential for a perfect stamp design. His paintings featured the uniforms in full, from head to foot, even though it had been decided earlier that they would be close-cropped on the stamps. It might come as a surprise to some that so much depends on hand-finished work, from sketches to illustrations. However, the computer is not neglected, and Quentin acknowledges the skill of his assistant, Paola Faoro, in making the fine adjustments to achieve the delicate balance within the final stamp, and to meticulously examine every part of the design to ensure everything is perfect. This is done by making the stamps many times their actual size, which is where the computer excels; the finest imaginable corrections and adjustments to the positioning of the elements and spacing of the lettering can be undertaken at this super-scale.

After the designs have been sent for printing, initial digital proofs are examined to ensure the composition and colour balance of each is as required, while further printed proofs confirm that the colouring is exact.

RAF uniforms Quentin did not feel that the same approach necessarily had to be used for the second set of the series, that dedicated to the RAF. He wondered whether parts of aircraft might be additionally featured. However, Royal Mail determined that the style that had been established with the Army Uniforms should be continued for the RAF and Royal Navy. Thus the illustrator would again be Graham, giving him the opportunity to have greater input from the outset. One challenge faced was to bring colour variety to the RAF set, rather than seeing the familiar blue throughout: the answer came from a padded flight suit and waterproof wet suit.

Expert advice was sought, from Richard Holmes once more, and from Andrew Cormack of the RAF Museum, embodying all aspects of the work of the RAF from catering to engineering, from flying helicopters to jets. ▶



Graham Turner, illustrator of the service uniforms series.



Above and opposite: these preliminary drawings show how an idea for an image is gradually refined before work begins on the final illustration.

Ideas for the six stamps were developed. The first design returned to the advent of the RAF by featuring the Royal Flying Corps of the First World War, inspired by a painting by William Orpen. Next was an acknowledgement of the women who worked in Battle of Britain 'plotter rooms', with headset and microphone. The initial idea for the third stamp was of an engineer on a Lancaster, but such a person would not wear a distinctive uniform. Andrew suggested that a yellow buoyancy suit would add colour, and a photograph of a Jamaican Lancaster Air Gunner provided the ideal reference. The fourth design features a classic depiction of a post-Second World War jet pilot, namely a Hawker Hunter fighter pilot from the Korean War. The first idea for the fifth stamp was to show a Loadmaster undertaking humanitarian work in Ethiopia in the 1980s, wearing a bright vest. However, it was felt that a man or a woman in camouflage fatigues manhandling a giant box was too generic a figure, so another suggestion from Andrew was adopted, of a rescue scene, with the figure dangling from a helicopter. The final stamp focuses on the Central Band of the RAF. In order to achieve the right stance on the stamp, the current Drum Major was photographed, thus ensuring the detail is perfect, such as the precise angle of his staff, and the movement in his sleeve as his arm is swung.

The approach has been incredibly thorough. As Graham explains, 'the research is interesting in the depth needed, and I have learned so much'. Visits to the RAF Museum revealed a great deal, not least in seeing how the uniforms hang and fold on the mannequins. Graham has even been photographed in various poses, to appreciate the correct posture of arms and legs. It is essential that a uniform is absolutely right for the period depicted. In the early years, flying clothing developed dramatically to counter the freezing conditions experienced by airmen. Ideas were tried, such as elec-

trically heated flying gloves powered by their own generator – until they started to burn the airmen's hands! Oxygen masks, goggles, gloves – all have to be accurate. Poses had to be carefully considered, so that the RAF stamps would be visually different from the Army set. Graham reveals a few of the aspects he has learned. The Air Gunner was in the coldest part of the aircraft, with no space for a life jacket, so his suit was buoyant and in an easily-spotted yellow. The 'Plotter' is seen looking up at the Officers, pusher stick and block in hand, to mark the position of aircraft. In the early days of jet flight, uniforms were based on those previously worn, so pilots still used a cloth flying helmet – with a 'hard hat' on top. Graham knew that his figures would again be close-cropped, but he once more produced his final paintings with the full uniform. Sadly this means that none of the boots, just as meticulously researched, feature on the stamps.

And beyond Work is now well in progress on the final set in the series, focusing on the Royal Navy. This time the experts are drawn from the Greenwich Royal Maritime Museum, the Portsmouth Royal Naval Museum and the Royal Marines Museum.

For Graham the series was a fascinating challenge, and a great honour to produce stamps for Royal Mail. He found that working with designers helped, admitting he would not have thought of close-cropping the paintings, but that doing so improves the stamps. He hopes that one day Royal Mail might use his love of mediaeval history for future stamps. His one disappointment is in seeing only one of his stamps on his incoming mail.

There has also been a disappointment for Quentin with the RAF issue, in that he has not been asked to design the ancillary items. The designers and illustrator build up so much knowledge, it seems a pity not to exploit this in employing them to design the first day envelopes and all the other items that support the stamps as a coherent package.

What is evident from meeting both Quentin and Graham, is that what has resulted is a carefully researched, well conceived, and meticulously executed series of stamps •



Text © Richard West 2008 Drawings © Graham Turner

Readers write Coronation covers of 1937

Tony Buckingham writes: Tony Sidell's article (*May Bulletin*) about the 1937 Coronation cover designs and his question about 400 different ones, made me chuckle. I remember many Stampex exhibitions where Doctor Pell and many others would go through the Benham 1937 stock, and would always find new ones. I know there was a race to 500, but that included designs printed in different colours. Alas Doctor Pell is no longer with us, but I am sure Jeffrey Booth would have over 400 different. First Day Cover collecting in the 1930s was very strong and it's a fascinating area. If you want an expert's advice, look at the late George VI covers – there was little money after the war and a shortage of good paper. FDCs in good condition are never plentiful and there are a number of illustrations to collect •

