

JEFFERY MATTHEWS MBE
Stamp Designer to Royal Mail
Glenn H Morgan FRPSL

This month celebrates the 40th anniversary of Jeffery Mathews' first accepted stamp design, which was produced to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Organisation (UNO).

The Early Days Jeffery started his career back in the late 1940s and he continues to be a major influence in his chosen areas of graphic design to this day. For all but about the first decade of this time there has been an unbroken association with the General Post Office (GPO), the Post Office Corporation and now Royal Mail.

Jeffery had gone into partnership with a friend in 1952 both as freelance designers, but this friend was sadly to die in a drowning accident within a couple of years and Chris, by then Jeffery's wife, was there to step into the professional void that had been created.

The register of designers held by the Council of Industrial Design (now the Design Council) resulted in his first stamp commission for the GPO, when in 1959 he was invited to submit designs for the forthcoming Tercentenary of the General Letter Office (GLO) commemorative set. It was to be some six years though before they accepted an artwork for production (the GLO stamps were essayed), having previously – and since – been asked to submit designs for different subjects that never resulted in acceptance, as is normal for all artists. This process can be likened to an actor who auditions regularly for parts, but is only accepted every so often. It is not a poor reflection on the actor's work, but simply the desire of the commissioning agent to get a certain type of output.

Artworks had been submitted for the 1961 Post Office Savings Bank, 1962 National Productivity Year, 1963 Paris Postal Conference and the Lifeboat Conference issues prior to the UNO set. Subsequent unaccepted commissions have included the 1968 and 1969 Anniversaries sets, 1973 Princess Anne's wedding and the 1975 Charity issue.

Style of working This designer still works in the traditional way, hand drawing or painting all the designs he creates, but in 1986, for the Queen's 60th birthday stamps, he broke the mould and, for the first time, used computer technology.

This set utilised six images of The Queen (one from each decade) and Jeffery was able to arrange for a computer-literate friend to slowly build the stamps on screen before his eyes, making design tweaks as he went. He was then able to run off copies of the artwork at life-size and four times up for the benefit of the Stamp Advisory Committee. Despite his total satisfaction with the final designs, he chose not to adopt this method of artwork creation on any later issues.

Machin Definitives Jeffery has done much work down the years to maintain and improve the definitive range of stamps, including the National, Country (previously – and often still – referred to as ‘Regionals’), the so-called ‘Double Heads’ (issued to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the first postage stamp), 1970 ‘To Pay’ labels and the initial self-adhesive stamp (sold in booklets in a horizontal format for the period of the trial only). This work has included hand-drawing fonts and values, obtaining the best position for the Queen’s head and face value within the design and considering alternatives to the timeless Machin head.

So important has Jeffery’s work on stamps been that even the palette of 33 colours that Royal Mail has at its disposal bears his name (a label on the Matthews definitive sheetlet issued for The Stamp Show 2000 depicted this palette and included the intertwined initials JM). The colour palette was started back in 1984 in order to return to the original Arnold Machin concept of a light tone for The Queen’s head on a solid background because over the years there had been a steady, perhaps unconscious, move away from this ideal.

Special Issues It is Jeffery’s heraldic and royal subjects that he is perhaps most known for, having produced some of the best designs of the current reign in this regard.

His most recent addition to our albums was this July when a miniature sheet for the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War was issued, to an exacting brief. This design was to incorporate five gold definitives in the shape of a letter V (for victory) and the 25p (revalued 1st class) stamp depicting St Paul’s Cathedral, the design of which also included the ‘V’, but this time in the form of searchlights in a night sky. A background black and white photograph taken at the time, together with olive branches down both sides of the sheet completes this dignified design.

When asked in an article for *Stamp Magazine* (March 2004) what his favourite stamp design was, he chose the 1980 Christmas Decorations issue on which: “the only thing that wasn’t from my hand was the silhouette of The Queen’s head. Also The Queen’s Beasts because it was all my design and drawing and harks back to my early interest in heraldry”. He was also satisfied and pleased with the definitive / commemorative ‘Double Head’ stamps of 1990 because of how he was able to act as a conduit to bring together two other artists’ work (the Penny Black and Machin head designers) from two different eras, creating a classic design.

Miscellaneous Commissions Various First Day Cover envelopes and presentation pack designs, stamp book covers (1978 and 1992) and the Post Office Corporate Crest (or coat of arms) can all be credited to Jeffery, as can the logo for the London 1980 stamp exhibition and the logo of the Machin Collectors Club. The first four exhibition sheets for the Thematica stamp exhibitions were not only his artwork, but they also depicted his Post Office commissions and some included unaccepted designs, focusing in turn on Machin definitives, Royal events, Heraldry and this year his 40 years of stamp design¹.

Jeffery has not exclusively worked for the Post Office, of course, and he can be credited with well-recognised non-Post Office work as well, such as the masthead design for *The Sunday Times*. He was also responsible for the corporate logos of the Central Office of Information (COI), The Inland Revenue via Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) and Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), among others.

His entry in *Who's Who* shows how he has also produced coin and medal designs for the Royal Mint (including a 60th anniversary of the end of the war medallion this year - one of the few instances where a 'stamp and medal' commemorative cover is appropriate or justified). He has worked with *Reader's Digest*, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and produced the cover design and lettering for the official 1981 Royal Wedding programme. With recreational interests shown as furniture restoration, playing the guitar, DIY and gardening, it is amazing that he finds the time for work.

'It's a Family Thing' The Matthews are clearly a very talented family, with not only Jeffery's late wife, but son and daughter all having an involvement in some aspect of the creative process. Coming from a long line of craftsmen, it was perhaps inevitable, or even pre-ordained, that Jeffery would follow suit.

This short celebration of his skills would not be complete without mention of these family members.

- **Chris Matthews** For many years, Jeffery had worked with his wife, who had used the pseudonym of Charity Boxall (her maternal grandmother's maiden name) when producing a range of philatelically inspired products for the Post Office, including text for presentation and collector packs.

The first collaboration between this husband and wife partnership was the *British Bridges* issue. From here on in it became increasingly difficult for Chris to work on her own commissions, turning down work to increasingly support Jeffery. (See the *Bulletin* for December 1994 for her obituary by Richard West, which includes an extensive record of the major contribution that she had made to special stamp products of the period.)

- **Rory Matthews** Rory, a draftsman by profession, came to the attention of philatelists following the once-secret work that he undertook with his father on the Machin head in the 1980s. This work has only relatively recently been brought to light and relates to his redrawing the Machin portrait head in pencil. All viewers had assumed until the revelation that this drawing was in fact a photograph, such was the quality of his imagery.
- **Sarah Jane Matthews** Sarah is not involved with stamp design, but like her father, brother and generations of their family before her is a Goldsmith and Freeman of the City of London. The Goldsmiths' Company is one of the twelve Great Livery Companies of the City of London.

Recognition It is not surprising that Jeffery's talents have been acknowledged down the years, with Fellowships from within his industry, awards from the Post Office and an honour from the Queen.

This March saw Jeffery and Sarah attend the Rowland Hill Awards lunch, where unbeknown to them both, he was about to be presented with two prestigious awards. The first was the Phillips Gold Medal, named after the great philatelist Reginald M Phillips whose collection forms the basis of the museum element of the British Postal Museum and Archive (BPMA). He also instructed that every five years a gold medal should be awarded to the person who has made the greatest contribution to stamp design. The second award was in recognition of forty years service to the Post Office and took the form of the Outstanding Contribution Award (so much nicer than a lifetime achievement award, which tends to imply that there is nothing further to come!).

It is the letter that landed on the mat from Downing Street in late 2003 that has to be the greatest acknowledgement of his talents yet. It contained an invitation for him to become a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 2004 New Years Honours List, citing specifically his 'services to graphic design, particularly postage stamps'.

Jeffery is well respected and a friend to the hobby of stamp collecting, so on behalf of all *Bulletin* readers, your writer sends him congratulations, wishes him a happy '40th anniversary' and hopes that there will be many more of his excellent stamp designs in the coming years.

¹ Visitors to Thematica this November will be able to obtain a free copy of the 2005 sheet, subject to stock. See details in *Stamp Scene* nearer the time.

SPECIAL STAMPS LISTING

Jeffery has designed, or been heavily involved with, the creation of the following special stamp sets:

- 1965 20th Anniversary of the United Nations Organisation
- 1968 British Bridges (4d and 1s9d values only)
- 1972 Royal Silver Wedding Anniversary
- 1978 25th Anniversary of the Coronation
- 1978 British Architecture MS (selvedge design work only)
- 1979 Rowland Hill MS (selvedge design work only)
- 1980 London 1980 Stamp Exhibition 50p (counter sheet and MS versions)
- 1980 80th Birthday of HM The Queen Mother
- 1980 Christmas Decorations
- 1981 Royal Wedding, Charles and Diana
- 1984 College of Arms Quincentenary
- 1984 Royal Wedding, Andrew and Sarah
- 1986 60th Birthday of HM The Queen
- 1987 Flower Photography (creation of finished artwork only – not the photos)

1987 Tercentenary of the Revival of the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle

1988 650th Anniversary of the Order of the Garter (The Queen's Beasts)

1990 Stamp World £1 MS ('Double Head' stamp design – not the selvedge)

2000 The 'Matthews Palette' definitives MS for TSS2000

2005 60th Anniversary of the End of World War Two MS

(1923 words)