

POST OFFICE TOWER ANNIVERSARY

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For those readers of a 'certain age', it may come as a surprise to realise that it is some forty years this month since the Post Office Tower (POT) opened for use as a major telecommunications centre and became the tallest building in Britain. Public observation galleries and a revolving restaurant 520 feet above the ground ensured that the Tower (originally to be known as the Museum Tower) would become one of London's leading public attractions.

Stamp Issue Proposed At a meeting of the Post Office Board on 25 November 1964 a stamp issue commemorating the opening of the Post Office Tower was included in the stamp programme for 1965. It had first been suggested back in 1963 that it would be a suitable event to be commemorated by stamps, but uncertainty as to the opening date caused by construction delays meant that it was touch and go whether the stamps project would go ahead or be abandoned.

Eventually on 23 March 1965, confirmation that the Prime Minister would officially open the Post Office Tower for operational purposes only on 8 October that year was received and that date was proposed as the issue date for the new stamps.

Commissioning Designs Four individuals (Clive Abbott, Denis Bailey, Derek Birdsall and Andrew Restall) and two stamp printing firms (Harrison and Sons and Bradbury Wilkinson & Company) were invited to submit two designs of *3d* and *1s3d* face values for this issue by 14 July. The lower value was to show the Tower 'full length' and the higher value was perhaps to show a panoramic view of London with the Tower dominant. These instructions implied that a vertical and a horizontal design were required, as proved to be the final treatment.

Designer and printer names were to appear as credits at the foot of each design for the first time on British stamps. Reference photographs and construction drawings were supplied by the GPO to assist with the design process.

New Philatelic Counter? Vending stamps at the Tower was proving to be a big success with sales set to continue indefinitely, but from July 1968 only phosphor stamps were to be made available from the self-service machines.

Amazingly by today's standards, the sale of packs was not possible in the shop (only by machine) due to objections by the Union of Postal

Workers (UPW), as the staff at the Tower were of the wrong grade to sell stamps!

If a full-scale Philatelic Counter were to be installed then there would be no objections because it would ease congestion at King Edward Street, be a service to the one million visitors to the Tower every year and presumably have the appropriately graded staff. In the end, space constraints and the 1971 closing of the Tower to members of the public meant that the plans were abandoned, but not before searching for close-by accommodation to house the counter.

Sales Figures This was an unusual issue in so far as the sales period is concerned because the stamps were available at the Tower long after they had been withdrawn from Post Offices and the Philatelic Bureau, then in London. This naturally resulted in far higher sales figures than was normal, as they made excellent souvenir purchases by visitors to the Tower – especially the vended presentation packs.

Gibbons catalogues state the following sales figures:

	Ordinary	Phosphor	Ordinary	Phosphor
<i>3d</i>	51,291,120	4,274,880	<i>1/3d</i>	5,722,320
<i>Packs</i>	25,060 (contain ordinary and phosphor stamps)			

It is believed that stocks sold at the Tower are excluded from the total sales figures and BPMA records indicate that total quantities issued from the self service machines at the Tower were: *3d* 3,039,480; *1/3d* 630,720 and that all of the presentation packs (150,000) were sold.

These figures are slightly questionable, although believed to be fairly accurate, due to faulty reporting of volumes for a period and lack of knowledge as to the split between ordinary and phosphor versions sold at the Tower.

This was an interesting building project and stamp issue that both captured the public's imagination and did much to dispel the image of an old-fashioned Britain still recovering from the ravages of war.

Bibliography

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- British Postal Museum and Archive File Post 60/72 MKD/AN/590.
- Press and Broadcast Notice, (PB 185) 7 September 1965.
- Stanley Gibbons Specialised Stamp Catalogue: Great Britain, Queen Elizabeth II Pre-decimal Issues
- Post Office Tower, Philatelic Bulletin September and October 1965.
- Unaccepted Stamp Designs: POT issue. Philatelic Bulletin. February 1966.

(775 Words)

Commissioning Designs

Despite instructions from the Postmaster General to the contrary, the briefs stated that the designs must include the Queen's head "as a dominant feature". The 3d value design was to include a full length illustration of the Tower which implied that the design should be a vertical one. On the other hand, it was suggested that the 1/3d design might show a panoramic view of London with the Tower as a dominant feature. For the first time ever the names of the designer and the printers would be shown on the gutter of each stamp, although at this stage the artists were not required to include these in their artwork as they would appear outside the design area of the stamp. Finished artwork was to be delivered to D. H. Beaumont by 14 July which allowed less than one month for the work to be completed. This was unfortunate but necessary due to the lack of time before the official opening on 8 October. Various photographs of the Tower in construction and a drawing of the completed Tower were supplied for the artist's reference.

All of the artists invited to submit designs did so on 14 July in time for the Stamp Advisory Committee to view them at their meeting of 21 July.

Designs received, July 1965

Artist	No.	Value	Description
A. Restall	1	3d	vertical - purple, grey, brown
	2	1/3d	horizontal - grey
C. Abbott	3	3d	vertical - dark blue
	4	3d	vertical - light blue
	5	1/3d	horizontal - green
	6	1/3d	horizontal - orange

Bradbury & Wilkinson

W. S. Matthews

7 3d vertical - purple, black

J. M. Stibbe 8 1/3d vertical - red, grey, EIIR background.

D. Birdsall 9 3d horizontal - photograph with trees
9a 3d design 9 with pink tint

	10	1/3d	horizontal - photograph of sections of Tower
	10a	1/3d	design 10 with green tint
D. Bailey	11	3d	vertical - black and white rough
	11a	3d	final version of 11 - green, grey, black
	12	1/3d	horizontal - black and white rough
	12a	1/3d	final version of 12 - orange, red Harrison and Sons
T. Brown	13	3d	vertical - blue, black, grey, white
	14	1/3d	horizontal - Not found in NPM Album
David Collins	15	3d	vertical - orange and brown
	16	1/3d	horizontal - orange and brown

The Stamp Advisory Committee viewed all of the above designs, considering those of Clive Abbott to be especially good and selected three of them for essaying: designs numbered 3, 4 and 5. Only one change was required, the value figure on design No. 4 was to be shown as a lighter tone of the background colour rather than in yellow. The photographic designs submitted by Derek Birdsall were also favoured, although the committee wanted to have his 3d design (No.s 9 and 9a) redone with streets in the foreground or alternatively as a night shot. Unfortunately, it was decided that the tight production timetable did not allow sufficient time for this to be carried out and the set was abandoned. F. H. K. Henrion, the Post Office's design advisor, suggested that David Gillespie, who had produced the artist's impression of the Tower from the blueprints, be asked to produce some designs as quickly as possible from his original drawing. These were to be essayed and shown to the Committee at a meeting on 11 August.

David Gillespie, together with his wife Ann, submitted five designs on 9 August by which time it was too late to have them essayed for the Stamp Advisory Committee meeting of the 11th. The designs, two 3d value and three 1/3d, showed silhouettes of the Tower overlaid against each other and the city background, in a variety of colours and were accompanied by three specimen silhouettes:

Designs

3d	blue, purple, white and brown
3d	brown, purple, white and black
1/3d	orange, yellow, black and white
1/3d	pink, red, black and white
1/3d	red, white, black and purple

Silhouettes

1. microwave dishes for telephone and television
2. Tower and city
3. small version of Tower only

The following day Harrison and Sons submitted essays of Clive Abbott's selected designs:

Design No. 5	1/3d	1473	1236	1475
	1/3d	907	959	910
Design No. 3	3d	454	456	457
	3d	804	759	808
Design No. 4	3d	1331	1333	1334
	3d	1955	1957	1983

The Stamp Advisory Committee was informed by Harrison and Sons that they had not considered it worthwhile at this stage to print Clive Abbott's 3d design in its three colours as had been done for the 1/3d design. The 3d had instead been printed in two colours only, omitting the additional blue shade. The Committee confirmed their approval of the designs, recommending they be submitted to the Queen as the first choice set. Mr. York of Harrison and Sons further made it clear that due to problems with the designs by David Gillespie which would require extensive alteration, it would not be possible to produce essays of them in time for submission to the Palace. Final stamps could however be printed if the Committee selected them. Consequently the Committee agreed to submit two of Gillespie's designs to the Palace in artwork form as an alternative to the first choice set. These were Gillespie's 3d design with the red ground and the vertical design in brown. Although this arrangement was not entirely satisfactory, the Committee had been under a great deal of pressure to submit alternatives to the Palace for Royal approval.

Mr. York telephoned D. H. Beaumont on 12 August requesting permission from Harrison and Sons to begin cylinder preparation prior to approval by the Queen due to the shortness of time. Beaumont agreed that in the circumstances this would be possible and informed York that the following essays of Clive Abbott's designs had been selected by the Stamp Advisory Committee:

Design No. 4	3d	1955	1957	1983
Design No. 5	1/3d	1236	1473	1475

Submission to the Queen

Traditionally it was for the Postmaster General, as a Minister of the Crown, to submit designs to the Palace for Royal approval, however Wedgwood Benn was at this juncture on holiday in France. At W. A. Wolverson's suggestion, it was decided that Sir Ronald German, the Director General, should submit the designs to the Queen in accordance with the Stamp Advisory Committee's recommendations. The essays of Clive Abbott's designs No. 4 and 5 listed above were submitted as the first choice set (A1, A2), together with artwork and bromides of the two designs by David Gillespie selected by the Committee (B1, B2). The following brief accompanied the designs:

Details of Stamp Designs

A1 The Post Office Tower springing from a symbolic foreground of Georgian type buildings which are a feature of the immediate vicinity of the Tower.

A2 The Tower overshadows the broad sweep of the Nash Georgian terrace.

In each case we have the direct comparison of old and new architecture.

B1 the Tower is superimposed against a miscellany of London buildings old and new.

B2 the Tower silhouette shown in conjunction with its telecommunications element.

The designs were submitted to the Queen on 17 August at Balmoral where she approved Set A, the Clive Abbott designs, for issue on 8 October. The Postmaster General was informed of the Queen's approval of the designs following his return to London in early September.

Stamp Production

Copies of the approved essays (3d - No. 1955, 1/3d - No. 1475) were forwarded to Harrison and Sons and to the Supply Department (3d - No. 1983, 1/3d - No. 1473) on 25 August. Harrison and Sons returned photographic negatives of each of the approved designs on 27 August to Postal Services for publicity purposes and a press showing of the stamps and designs was held on 7 September. The original artwork together with specially printed blocks of four of each of the stamps (sheet No.s: 3d - 1508, 1/3d - 360) were displayed in special exhibition frames for the perusal of the press and guests.

Clive Abbott meanwhile had been preparing designs for a First Day Cover envelope and presentation pack in accordance with instructions sent to him by D. H. Beaumont in mid-August. The artwork for the commemorative cover was sent to HMSO and an order for 200,000 envelopes placed on 18 August. Proofs of the cover envelope were approved on 26 August and delivery was requested by 20 September. The presentation pack design was forwarded to Harrison and Sons on 3 September together with the script which had been adapted from an existing Post Office Tower leaflet. A total of 150,000 packs was ordered at this stage.

Issuing the Stamps

The Post Office Tower stamps went on sale on 8 October, 1965 on the day that the Prime Minister, Harold Wilson MP, officially opened the Tower. In accordance with tradition, gift cards bearing mint stamps were sent to various people from the Postmaster General. The recipients included:

HM the Queen
HM the Princess Margaret

The Prime Minister
The Speaker of the House of Commons
Former Postmasters General and Assistant PMGs
Postmasters General of the Commonwealth Members of the
Stamp Advisory Committee
The Artist

The Post Office Tower stamps remained in general circulation until 30 June, 1966 when they were withdrawn from general sale.

Sale of Stamps at the Post Office Tower

As early as April, 1965 a inter-departmental committee had been established to discuss postal facilities for the public at the Tower. At a meeting of 7 April, they decided that the commemorative stamps would be available from self-service machines only due to difficulties with the staff side over the grading of Post Office personnel working in the shop at the Tower. The committee also decided to have all mail posted at the Tower date stamped with a special die saying 'Posted at the Post Office Tower'. A sub-committee composed of representatives from the Public Relations Department, Postal Services Department and the London Postal Region were given the task of making the arrangements for these facilities. Specifically they were to arrange for a permanent supply of the commemorative stamps in roll form to be available for the dispensing machines. Unfortunately neither papers relating to this sub-committee's activities nor their report to the larger committee are found in the Post Office Archives files, however subsequent correspondence seems to suggest the proposal was pursued. A minute of 10 June from V.C. Lucas to A.A. Mead both of Postal Services reminded the latter that the department was attempting to move away from the sale of individual stamps and toward the provision of stamp booklets. Mead was asked to keep this in mind when the final decision was made regarding the manner in which Post Office Tower stamps would be available at the Tower.

Although the idea of selling the stamps at the Tower had by all accounts already been taken by the inter-departmental committee as previously mentioned, Kenneth Hind of Postal Services argued vociferously against the idea in a minute to the Deputy Director General, W. A. Wolverson, on 7 July. Hind regarded the project as cumbersome, expensive and not at all worthwhile as it would lead to pressure to provide similar facilities for other commemorative issues. F. B. Savage of Public Relations however countered with the argument that the opportunity of commemorative

stamp sales to the estimated 750,000 people who would visit the Tower annually was too good an opportunity to miss. In the event it was agreed that the Post Office Tower stamps would remain on sale at the Tower until such time as supplies were exhausted. The printing cylinders were not to be destroyed until the first months sales figures were known at which time it would be decided whether a reprint of the stamps would be worthwhile.

This decision satisfied the Public Relations Department, but created another problem as Savage pointed out to Lucas. As the Tower stamps had been printed in sheets of 120 it would not be possible to sell them in the special sized self-service machines which were to be installed at the Tower. These required rolls of stamps which would now be impossible to produce, or else ordinary machines for the 3d and 4d definitives would have to be used. Nevertheless, a minute from Postal Services signed by A. Mead to the Supply Department on 22 February, 1966 indicated that when the Tower was opened the commemorative stamps would be available in the following formats:

1. Envelopes containing 4 x 3d and 2 x 1/3d Tower stamps sold by machine.
2. Presentation packs containing one of each stamp sold by machine.
3. 'J' stamp rolls (480 x 6d) reeled lengthwise, lower end first, to be sold from Post Office vending machines which are to be adapted to accept these rolls.
4. Commemorative envelopes, Tower issue unstamped sold in the Post Office shop.

Despite this minute, there is no evidence to suggest that the Post Office Tower stamps were ever produced or sold in roll formats. It must be assumed that the idea was abandoned at a later date. When the Tower opened to the public on 19 May, 1966 the stamps were available in the first two formats outlined above only. The envelopes containing four 3d stamps and those with two 1/3d stamps were sold at face value, viz. 1/- and 2/6d respectively, while the presentation packs were sold at the value of the stamps plus a shilling as was usual at philatelic counters.

Continued Sales at the Post Office Tower

Although it had been agreed that the practice of providing stamps for sale at the Tower would be reviewed towards the end of 1966, it was not until

March, 1969 that the matter appears to have been raised formally. A minute from the Supply Department to Postal Services in March sought permission to destroy the printing cylinders if a reprint was not required. They were informed that sufficient stocks were still to hand and the cylinders could be destroyed. In reply, the Supply Department requested a reprint of the presentation pack if sales were to continue.

This request triggered an extensive discussion in which the matter of continued sales of the stamps was reviewed. It was discovered that although overall stocks of the stamps were still quite high, the bulk of the supply consisted of plain stamps while only phosphor stamps were being sold at the Tower. Supplies of the phosphor stamps would be exhausted within about nine months. Additionally, the existing presentation pack was still that issued when the stamps were first released and as such was now considered out of date; it still referred to the forthcoming opening of the public sections of the Tower. The plates for the pack had been destroyed by Harrison and Sons in any event, so a new design would have to be sought. In the end it was decided to continue to sell the existing pack until supplies were exhausted and then to issue the stamps only thereafter. The last presentation packs were sold in November, 1969.

This decision raised the problem of a reprint of the stamps all over again in June, 1969 as the supply of phosphor stamps was dwindling. A minute from Miss N. Page to Langdon, both of Operations and Overseas Department, outlined the possibilities: The Tower stamps cylinders had been destroyed and therefore a reprint was not possible. On the other hand, because all Tower post was hand processed anyway, sale of plain stamps would not create too many operational difficulties for the sorting offices and was therefore feasible. On a different matter, the half Crown coin was being withdrawn at the end of the year and the self service stamp vending machines would have to be converted to accept 2/-. Langdon concurred and it was decided to sell phosphor stamps until such time as the supplies were exhausted after which the plain stamps would be reintroduced. Once the half crown was withdrawn, the 2/6 packs could be replaced with packs containing 1 x 1/3d and 3 x 3d stamps.

In the meantime Langdon asked Miss Page to find out whether it would be possible to have decimal stamps for the Post Office Tower issued in time for the switch to decimal currency in 1971. Beaumont suggested in reply to the request that a decimal stamp would constitute a completely new issue which was not possible at the time due to the already large workload incurred by decimalisation. He suggested that the £sd stamps be withdrawn completely on D day - 1 (decimalisation day - 12 February,

1971). In the end it was decided that as £sd stamps would remain valid for a full 18 months after D day, the Post Office Tower stamps would remain on sale until the end of this period.

On 6 August, 1971 a minute from Operations and Overseas Department to the Supply Department states that at this date the supply of phosphor 3d Post Office Tower stamps was exhausted and that the envelopes on sale at the Tower now contained plain stamps. Given this information, the remaining supply of phosphor 1/3d stamps should be destroyed. Precisely when plain stamps were reintroduced is not known, but sales figures for the period from May, 1969 to August, 1970 indicate that 647,160 3d and 141,120 1/3d plain stamps were dispensed from the Post Office Tower machines during this period.