

Reaction to Regionals Richard West looks at differing opinions on the 1958 issues

IN THE MID 1950s there was some debate as to whether Britain should have pictorial definitives, the argument in favour led by Lord Elibank. However, the Post Office was being cautious, a fact that upset the British Travel and Holiday Association, as it expressed in a letter to the Postmaster-General (PMG) in May 1956. As there had not been a special issue since that to celebrate the Coronation in 1953, one can imagine the reaction to a clearly 'planted' question in the House and the response by the PMG on 18 July 1956 that there would be new stamps for Guernsey, Isle of Man and Jersey (2½d for each), and for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales (2½d, 4d and 1s3d for each). The announcement added that The Queen's portrait would be the dominant feature, with appropriate symbols or designs in the borders. Would the stamps in some way meet the wish for pictorial designs?

What is certain is that the news was greeted with a great deal of comment, even though no designs had at that stage been conceived, the idea being to appoint local committees to advise on such matters. *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* for September 1956 declared that these 'Regional Stamps' were 'An astounding innovation', but wondered why such stamps were needed, adding that 'the great majority of collectors who have written or contacted us since the announcement are against such issues'. It expressed concerns that other stamp-issuing authorities might feel a similar need to split themselves into smaller units in order to justify separate stamp issues. Would the stamps be seen as an attempt to balance the Post Office budget, or an indication that the United Kingdom was splitting apart? As a strong advocate, Gibbons reiterated its view that 'one ordinary series of attractive pictorial stamps for all values... is much to be preferred'.

The magazine returned to the argument two months later, suggesting that the Regionals be withdrawn after a year, to be replaced by 'pictorials depicting places in all parts of the United Kingdom'. It felt concern that there would be no distinctive stamps for England, adding that news of the stamps had generally not been met favourably, although quoting the *Yorkshire Post* that they could 'introduce a welcome variety in British stamps'.

The omission of England was a point raised by *Stamp Collecting*, which, published weekly, was able to bring the news to its readers in its issue dated 27 July 1956, stating that it felt sorry for 'The patient, uncomplaining people of England, whose interests seem to have been forgotten in this flash of magnanimity towards nationalistic tendencies in the far-flung parts of the Kingdom.' The magazine quoted Lord Elibank: 'The Postmaster-General's proposals completely fail to meet our case.' However, Ken Chapman, the Editor, did agree that 'they will add a little variety to British collecting', adding that he hoped 'the stamps are well designed and each bears an inscription to show from which part of Britain it comes' (citing the fact that the two stamps marking the anniversary of the Liberation of the Channel Islands had left many baffled).

Reproduced from the official GPO publicity photograph of the 1958 regional stamps.



WALES & MONMOUTHSHIRE



SCOTLAND

Not all comment was negative. *The Southern Daily Echo* said 'The outstanding dullness of British philatelic designs seems at last to have been recognised by the Postmaster-General. We believe that the majority of people would be glad to see, in time, pictorial stamps showing something of the famous places and buildings in the United Kingdom. We hope that the infinitesimal changes announced by the Postmaster-General mean that time is gradually approaching.' *The Yorkshire Observer* said 'Dr Charles Hill has ensured that his name will be remembered as the Postmaster-General who made an historic change in British stamp policy.' It added, however, 'one of the reasons behind the move is the desire, shared by Monaco and other small States who turn stamp issues into a paying business, to make a little money'.

The Scotsman felt that 'we are inclined too much to hide our light under a bushel. A large part of the world... is ignorant of the fact that the jet engine was invented here. That is an example of the kind of information that might on an appropriate occasion be publicised on a postage stamp.'

Charles Jewell, in *The Daily Telegraph* on 15 September 1956, mistakenly described the stamps as 'locals', adding 'Fines would be the smallest inconvenience of using them for mail and airmail to Dominions and foreign countries.' Incensed members of the Leatherhead and District Stamp Club wrote to the PMG on 17 September, 'urging the adoption by the Post Office of pictorial stamps for the low values', and 'deploring the proposal to issue special stamps for Scotland, Ireland etc, drawing attention to *The Daily Telegraph* of 15 September that these local stamps cannot be used for overseas mail, or if that is wrong, clearly there is confusion in the public mind.' Frank Langfield replied for the Post Office on 27 September: 'We have come to the conclusion that, as Lord Chesham said in the House of Lords on the 24th July it would be wrong that in stamps for everyday use we should depart from the honoured and accepted tradition that the Queen's head should be the dominant feature.' He added that any suggestion that the Regionals could not be used on overseas mail was 'entirely unfounded'.



NORTHERN IRELAND



GUERNSEY

JERSEY

ISLE OF MAN

Welcomed on release It seems the concerns were largely dismissed once the designs were revealed, and it was only Reginald W Davies of Romsey, writing in *Stamp Collecting*, who expressed a negative view: 'Surely such a ramshackle conglomeration of bits and pieces has never before been gathered together on any stamps? The "symbolists" have certainly gone to town, and produced what must be an all-time low in the standard of stamp design.' Another reader, C E Britton of Salisbury, countered these remarks: 'Mr Davies could hardly be more jaundiced if he himself had submitted designs which the Committee had summarily rejected.' In the issue dated 29 August 1958, the Editor commented 'on the whole people like the new stamps, and we have yet to meet anyone who agrees with the comments [of Mr Davies]'. The magazine carried no further letters on the subject, either criticizing or praising the new designs. The only further correspondence focused on the direction of the Legs of Man, whether the Red Hand of Ulster should be the left or right hand, and whether the daffodil or leek should represent Wales.

It was left to certain Editors of the philatelic press to be more scathing. Tom Morgan, of the *Philatelic Magazine*, felt that 'Broadly speaking, the designs are far too fussy, too much is crammed into too little. Best design of them all is that for the Isle of Man – bold and simple with an attractive border.' The magazine added 'Unless a collector abroad is familiar with the symbols and various districts of the British Isles, he will never know the sources of the Regional stamps. The British Post Office persists in its smug attitude of not putting the name of the issuing country on our stamps, and apart from symbols, the Regionals bear no sign of recognition.'

C P Rang in *Gibbons Stamp Monthly* commented, 'The designs appear to us to be something of a hotchpotch, with some better than others. Some break various unwritten laws of design, eg, that appalling vertical lettering on the Welsh 3d [an increase in postage rates meant that the intended 2½d stamps became 3d, and the 4d became 6d], while on others such as the

Jersey 3d and the Scottish 1s3d the Queen's head is too closely hemmed in by the border emblems. In fact, the whole series suffers from a complete lack of consistency in style, purpose and presentation.' The Editor continued with a detailed criticism of every design, reiterating the wish for stamps that 'would be attractive to look at, easy to recognise and understand, and interesting to collect. To describe these designs as "obscure symbolism" is no exaggeration, for, we ask, is the world at large, or even the majority of residents of the United Kingdom outside the particular region concerned, likely to identify the stamps correctly?'

In contrast, Robson Lowe, as Editor of *The Philatelist*, took a more positive view. 'The excellent definitive stamps of the United Kingdom have provided a new standard of philatelic art in this country for the designs are simple and easily understood, the Royal Portrait is charming, the colours are pleasing and do not clash, and the whole issue produced by Harrison's provide a perfect example of a utilitarian issue which is of artistic merit.' He shared the view held by many as to which was the preferred design: 'The stamps for Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man enjoy the advantage of losing "REVENUE". The last of the three is outstandingly good and Mr John Nicholson, the designer, earns our congratulations for producing the best of the twelve stamps.'

The 1958 designs were reissued as 1st class stamps in a miniature sheet and prestige book on 29 September. It will be interesting to see what today's collectors think of the designs. ED •

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Commemorative covers New this month

ANNOUNCEMENTS about commemorative covers are, from this month, being included as part of the *Bulletin*, rather than as a separate supplement as formerly. This will enable us to save a substantial amount on production costs and so help keep the *Bulletin* viable •



Bluebell Railway A 25p railway letter stamp featuring loco 21C123 *Blackmoor Vale*, issued 19 May. **Prices** In sheets of eight £2; imperf sheet £6 or £8 signed; FDC with railway letter stamp cancelled Sheffield Park and Royal Mail 1st class cancelled East Grinstead £3.50; first day maximum card £2. Postage 50p or send 9.5 X 7in stamped envelope. Remittances to P A Forrester Smith. Minimum order £1 •



Nene Valley Railway Three 25p railway letter stamps, issued 28 June for Special Events, featuring locos *Mayflower* and *Green Arrow*, passengers in 1940s dress, and Aveling Porter road roller. **Prices** Stamps in sheets of nine £2.25; FDC with three stamps and Thomas the Tank Engine stamp tied with NVR cachet and 1st class Royal Mail definitive cancelled by NVR TPO datestamp £3. Postage 50p •