

# Barry Robinson: A Career in Design: Part 2

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**Lead Times** – generally it takes three years from conception to launch, although this has obviously been beaten in the recent past with the untimely death of Diana, Princess of Wales. This was the quickest production turnaround so far, albeit that problems from the Spencer family resulted in a long delay before they actually appeared in Post Offices.

**Market Research** - this has its place, but can kill off good design ideas.

Nobel – this stamp issue was primarily aimed at philatelists, with its six different techniques employed, namely silk screen, micro-text, holography, embossing, intaglio and thermography.

**Office** - there is a tendency to blame those who have left the office that they held! In the 25 years with Royal Mail, Barry had 17 different masters.

**Pleasing all the people all the time** – impossible, although everyone tries. The research undertaken includes telephone interviews, and focus groups with all manner of people – in / out of work, young / old, collectors / non-collectors.

**The Queen** – there is a misconception that Her Majesty does not really see the stamp design proposals for approval. This is not the case and she has more than once made her views known, resulting in design amendments, or she has even totally rejected a stamp design. This impacts severely on the lead times, but has to be accommodated, which can result in a design compromise.

**Royal Issues** – Royal Mail plays on its Royal connections in its business name and it was deemed inappropriate therefore to reject the Duke of York's request to design a set of stamps. The Castles high values set was the result and despite being based on his photographs and printed by intaglio, they worked well. Prince Charles subsequently painted watercolour scenes from around Britain and these were similarly well received. In both cases trips were made to Northern Ireland at the height of the troubles to ensure that all parts of Britain were equally represented.

**Students** – There has always been a policy to support up and coming students, through the RSA Student Design Awards and by giving lectures at colleges. Stamp design is not the lucrative business that people usually assume that it is, but the exposure given is second to none and can be a great springboard for other commissions.

**Technology** – this has increasingly played its part in the design and production stages of stamps and the use of computers has become an essential tool.

**Ultra Violet** – UV inks have been used as a security feature on stamps such as the £10 definitive issue. The inclusion of phosphors (that emit UV light) has become essential in the operational sorting of mail. They can, however, impact on the design when applied as bars.

**Warm Overcoat** – the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) has been referred to as the warm overcoat against harsh criticism. This unpaid group (who only receive an annual Christmas lunch by way of thanks) comprise captains of industry, philatelists, designers and the like.

**Xmas** – whether to have secular or religious stamps is an argument that has recently come to the fore, as secular has been the preferred route of late, much to the annoyance of Christian religious leaders. As far back as 1968 there were problems when Rosalind Dease depicted children playing with their Victorian toys. Apparently, the Post Office had to employ a pool of typists to reply to all the letters of complaint over that particular issue.

**Y (“Why?”)** – a stamp need only bear the Queen’s head and a face value, so why add any design at all? It is an argument that few would support, as stamps can be the only means of access to art that people encounter. The special stamps programme therefore adds greatly to the culture of our nation.

**Zillions** – the quantity of stamps printed in any one year is colossal with around 5,500 million entering circulation.

Barry had spoken for close on two hours and it is clear that he could have gone on for many more had time permitted. He explained that it had been a great 25 years and the enthusiasm that he showed was infectious. I shall certainly look at Royal Mail stamp design in a fresh way from now on.

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