

What the King thought

By George Stewart

When, I was in the United Kingdom, pursuing my Julian Chapman Scholarship into the 1937 Southern Rhodesia issue, I came across a file, in the National Archives Kew,¹ pertaining to the approval of the Coronation stamps of New Zealand.

After the abdication of Edward VIII, new Coronation stamps had to be produced in time for the enthronement of King George VI on 12 May 1937, the date originally set for Edward.

Waterlow and Sons produced the Southern Rhodesian stamps and Bradbury Wilkinson, the New Zealand ones, both using the same Bertram Park photographs 01953G for the Queen and 03259B for the King.² The New Zealand Government contacted the Dominions Office for approval of their design.

On the 16 January, J J S Garner of the Dominions office wrote to A F Lascelles Esq, CMG, MVO, MC the King's secretary, for His Majesty's approval

My Dear Lascelles

With reference to your letter of the 1st January to Stephenson about the new stamps for Southern Rhodesia, the enclosed design for the issue of Coronation stamps in New Zealand have been sent to us by the High Commissioner for New Zealand with a request that it may be submitted for the King's approval.

We understand that the portraits of Their Majesties appearing in this design are copied from those approved for the use in connection with the Colonial issue of Coronation stamps

It goes on to note that the stamps are to be on sale from the 12 May to 31 December 1937.

The reply came from Sir Eric Mieville an assistant private secretary, in Sandringham Palace, where the King spent the Christmas break, on 19 January to the Dominions Office.

My Dear Garner

Please refer to your letter of January 16th addressed to Lascelles, enclosing the design for the King's approval, of an issue of Coronation stamps for New Zealand.

Whilst His Majesty approved the design he does not like the portraits depicted therein, and prefers those which have already be approved for the new stamps for Southern Rhodesia should be used in the case of New Zealand also. (Fig 1)

The file goes into a flurry of hand written notes of telephone conversations and meetings with the printers, the High Commissioner and record that any change using a new portrait would preclude the stamps getting out to New Zealand in time. They ask if Sir Eric Mieville could resubmit the design to His Majesty and explain that the portrait was the same as that approved for the colonies and that the printed stamps would be better than the design submitted.

On 21 January Sir Eric wrote from Sandringham to J J S Garner of the Dominions office.

My Dear Garner

Further to my letter to you of January 19th, and with reference to our conversation on the telephone this morning, I am to say that, under the particular

circumstances which you have mentioned to me, His Majesty approves the design and portraits for an issue of Coronation stamps in New Zealand, enclosed with your letter to Lascelles of January 16th

I return herewith the design referred to above.

Here the files ended.

The New Zealand Coronation stamp is shown (Fig 2) and the King's preference, the Southern Rhodesian Coronation stamp is (Fig 3). Was the King right? Both issues used the same portraits by Bertram Park, but the Southern Rhodesian stamps' portraits were engraved by J A C Harrison Waterlows chief engraver and printed by them. I might be biased, as this engraving of the Kings head forms the basis of my main study and stamp exhibit, but is it not accepted that Waterlows were better printers and Harrison one of the great pre war engravers? You be the judge.

¹ National Archives Kew, United Kingdom. File DO 35/535/3 of the Dominions Office and Commonwealth Relations Office

² Livingstone, Brian *King George VI Coronation Stamps* The London Philatelist Vol 118 pp 165 June 2009 Brian drew my attention to this file.

List of illustrations

The JPEG reference is the figure number

JEPG File	Description
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Fig 1	The letter from Sandringham
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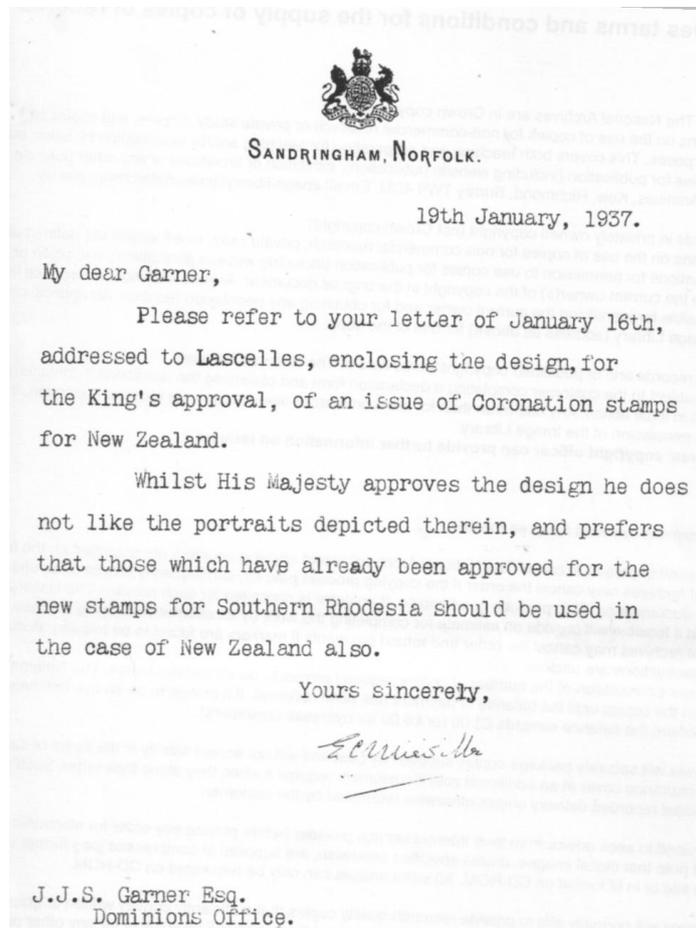


Fig 2 The questioned New Zealand Coronation stamps



Fig 3 The 1937 Southern Rhodesia Coronation stamp recommended by the King

