

# Coronation, 1953

COLONIAL STAMP PORTRAITS  
OF H.M. QUEEN ELIZABETH II

BY MAJED HALAWI





| O15924 CC |



| O15957 F |



| O15924 I |



| O15957 Y |



| O15924 O |



| O15957 E |

The portraits of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II by Dorothy Wilding used for the design of the colonial omnibus issue.<sup>1</sup>

(Royal Collection Trust/© Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2022)



1952.

Bradbury Wilkinson stage die proof in blue of the adopted portrait for the common design stamps based on Wilding portrait number O15924 I as engraved by Robert George Godbehear.

The investiture of Queen Elizabeth II on 2 June 1953, “by the Grace of God Queen of this Realm and of Her Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith,” occurred during times of uncertainty for Britain and the Empire. At one level, it ushered in an era marked by the monarch’s indefatigable devotion to country and Commonwealth. At another, they were times of great transition requiring new mechanisms to deal with a whole range of global challenges. This essay places the coronation in the historical context of the times and explores how this influenced the selection of the design for the Crown Colonies’ omnibus issue.



1952.

Bradbury Wilkinson stage proof 321.

# EMPIRE TO COMMONWEALTH



3 September 1952.

Master die proof in black and orange red of the vignette of the adopted design engraved by Bradbury Wilkinson, approved by the Crown Agents on this date, and sent to De La Rue for executing its part of the stamp printing contract.

The orange red colour was used for colonies including Barbados and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

(Courtesy of the British Library)



1952.

De La Rue die proof of the vignette of the adopted design prepared by Bradbury Wilkinson.

In 1953, Great Britain remained in the grip of a post-war malaise. The effects of the conflict were still part of daily reality: its scars were visible in every city, rationing of certain staple foodstuffs was still in effect, an elderly Winston Churchill was prime minister, and there was insufficient wealth to rebuild completely. India, the jewel in the Imperial Crown, had been granted independence six years earlier. Other colonies were clamouring for the same privilege. The Empire was slowly melting away. "The 1948 British Nationality Act had inaugurated modern, multicultural Britain. And with the British monarch no longer head of state in Ireland it was in vain that the romantic old colonialist Winston Churchill argued for the traditional coronation script." The proclamation, "the Imperial Crown of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the seas," would be no longer.<sup>2</sup>



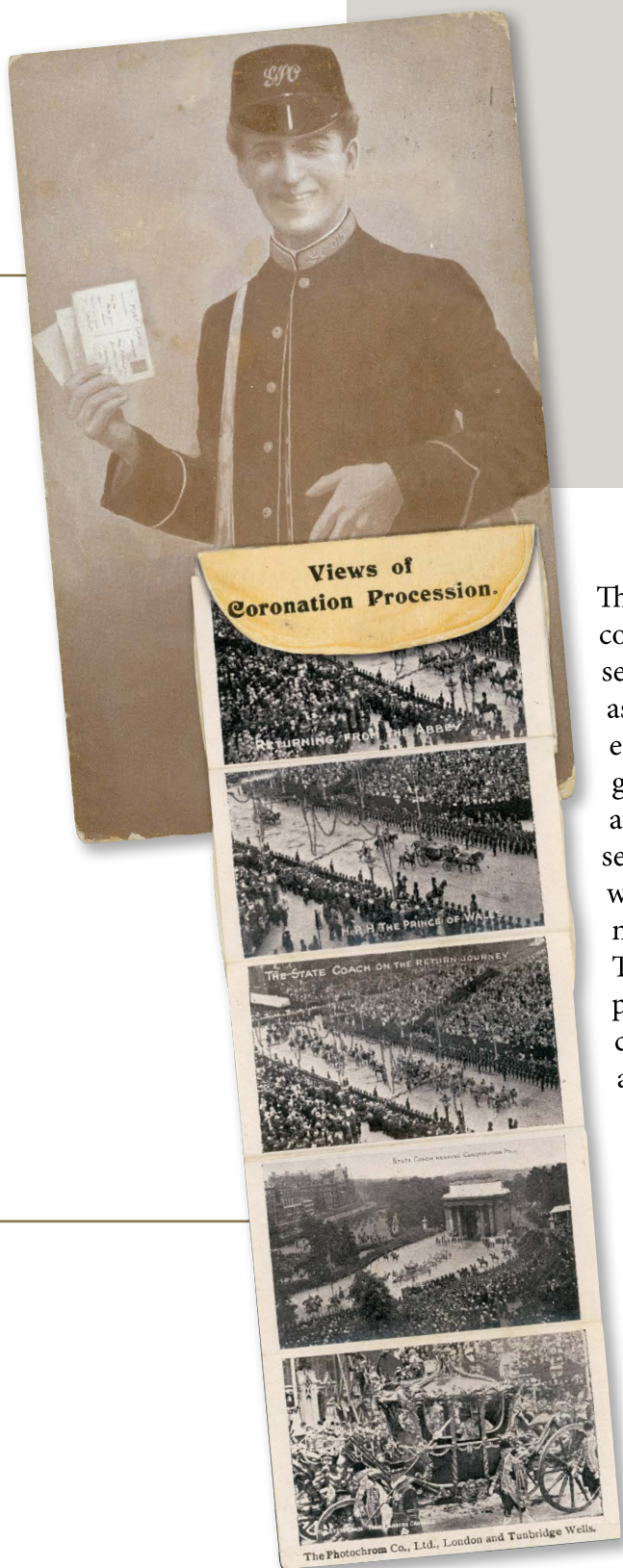
Amid this greyness, therefore, the investiture of Queen Elizabeth II had to be “not just a moment to anoint a monarch, but [also one] to rededicate a nation to its historic purpose,” to rejuvenate a war-weary imperial family of nations and provide it with the hope that “if a true and lasting peace can be achieved ... an immense and undreamed of prosperity, with culture and leisure even more widely spread can come ... to the masses of the people.” Certainly, no one could be better suited to project these hopes and aspirations than “a fair and youthful princess, wife and mother,” heir to all her subjects’ “united strength and loyalty.”<sup>3</sup>



6 September 1952.  
Four Bradbury Wilkinson proofs  
in the approved colours and  
denominations: 1½d in black and  
blue (Bermuda), black and emerald  
(Nigeria), and black and purple  
(Sierra Leone); and 2d in black and  
orange (Nyasaland).

(Courtesy of the British Library)

12 June 52



12 June 1952.  
Photographs of essays  
of proposed designs for  
Barbados from Bradbury  
Wilkinson's archives. The Colony  
ended up adopting the lower design  
in common with 63 other territories.

The live TV coverage of the pomp and pageantry of the coronation ceremony and, more than anything, the selection of a number of Dorothy Wilding's portraits as the design basis for the new commemoratives, emphasising the Queen's youth, elegance, and glamour, must be seen as an attempt to redirect the attention of the populace at home and "beyond the seas" towards the post-war future, that "everything was being raised from the ashes ... and [there was] nothing to stop anything getting better and better." The sanctification of the Commonwealth in the proclamation served to underline Queen Elizabeth's commitment to its historical mission and its status as the post-imperial club.<sup>4</sup>



# STAMP PRINTING

Of the three security printers, Bradbury Wilkinson was selected for the printing of the common design stamps. However, since the firm was not able to undertake the printing of the entire run of around 175 million stamps for 64 territories, it offered to print about 50 million stamps with the balance going to De La Rue. Bradbury Wilkinson engraved both the vignette portrait die and the border die with two corners left blank for the duties and sufficient space at the foot for the country name to be inserted. It also produced a pull from a completed design and supplied this together with duplicate dies of the vignette and border to De La Rue, thus ensuring that the names and duties were identical in style. The printing was in recess on paper watermarked Multiple Script CA, with the requisite 80% rag content in sheets of 60—10×6 for Bradbury Wilkinson compared with De La Rue's 6×10.<sup>5, 6</sup>



2 June 1953.

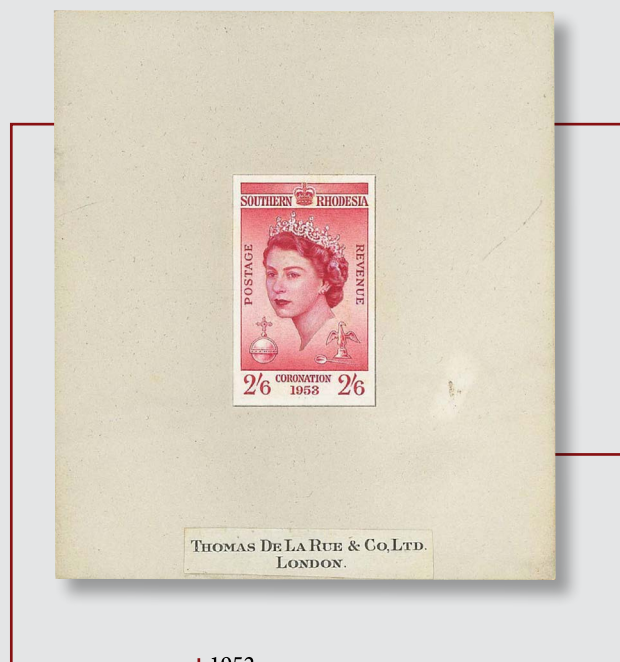
Block of eight coronation stamps issued by Sierra Leone showing plate combination 1–3 and Bradbury Wilkinson's imprint in the centre of the bottom margin under R10/3–4. For the various plate combinations used for this issue, the reader is referred to the website [www.1953coronation.com/cylinder-plate-scarcity](http://www.1953coronation.com/cylinder-plate-scarcity).



1952.

De La Rue crayon stamp-size sketch in pencil and carmine with small portions completed in Chinese white on cream card (95×109mm) inscribed “D.P. Carmine” and “Southern Rhodesia 43.5×27m/m”.

(Courtesy of Spink)



1952.

De La Rue imperforate proof of the unadopted design in the approved colours on card.

(Courtesy of Spink)



1952.

De La Rue imperforate proof of the adopted design in the approved colours on card inscribed “27/3” and showing the printer’s label. The design is based on Wilding portrait number O15924 O, while the engraving is attributed to Alan Dawson.

(Courtesy of Spink)



1 June 1953.

Block of eight coronation stamps issued by Southern Rhodesia showing De La Rue’s imprint in the centre of the bottom margin under R6/4-7.



30 January 1953.  
 Photograph of essay of a proposed design for Ceylon from Bradbury Wilkinson's archives. The Colony ended up adopting Wilding portrait O15957 Y for its stamp.



Bradbury Wilkinson also printed the stamp of Ceylon, while De La Rue printed two of New Zealand's five-stamp issue and that of Southern Rhodesia. Harrison, on the other hand, overprinted the sets of the Arabian Gulf and Tangier from its set for Great Britain, two of New Zealand's, and the stamps of Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau Islands, and Western Samoa.

2 June 1953.  
 Block of ten coronation stamps issued by Ceylon showing plate number 1a and Bradbury Wilkinson's imprint in the centre of the bottom margin under R10/5-6.

(Courtesy of Richard Monteiro at Zeboose)

Photograph of essay of South Africa's stamp based on Wilding portrait number O1597 E, which was also used by Australia. Measuring 29×47mm, the design is slightly larger than the issued stamp.



3 June 1953.  
 A marginal pair of South Africa's coronation stamp showing cylinder number 66. The stamps were printed by the government printer in Pretoria in sheets of 120 (10×6×2 panes separated by a vertical gutter).

(Courtesy of Richard Monteiro at Zeboose)



2 June 1953.  
 South West Africa selected Wilding portrait number O15924 CC. The stamps were printed by the South African government printer in Pretoria in sheets of 60 (6×10).





1953.  
Original drawing by artist James Berry proposed as the design basis for New Zealand's coronation stamp.



25 May 1953.  
Instead of James Berry's design, New Zealand chose Wilding portrait number O15957 F for the 3d value and portrait number O15924 O for the 2d and 4d values of its five-stamp set—the former was printed by Harrison in sheets of 120 (20×6), the latter by De La Rue. Note that portrait number O15957 F and the 3d stamp design were also used for the 2d value of Western Samoa's two-stamp set, the 3d value of Niue's and Cook Islands's two-stamp sets, and for Tokelau Islands.



## OTHER DESIGNS

For its part, Canada used the bas-relief sculpture by Emanuel Hahn as the basis for its stamp. For his model, Hahn used a photograph that Yousuf Karsh had taken in 1951 showing the Queen together with the Duke of Edinburgh.



1 June 1953.  
A marginal block of Canada's coronation stamp showing plate number 1. The stamps were printed by the Canadian Bank Note Company Ltd in Ottawa in sheets of 100 (10×10).



## NOTES

1. On 26 February and 15 April 1952, shortly after Queen Elizabeth II ascended to the throne, the photographer Dorothy Wilding was granted portrait sittings with the new monarch at Clarence House. The series of photographs taken of the Queen formed the basis of her image on postage stamps from 1953 until 1971, as well as providing the official portrait of Her Majesty which was sent to every British embassy throughout the world. During these sittings, the Queen wore two different crowns: a coronet—strictly speaking a diadem—dating from the 1820s, designed by and made for King George IV and worn by Queen Victoria for her portrait by Alfred Edward Chalon in 1837, its rim decorated with four *croix pattées*, roses, shamrocks, and thistles between the roses; and the “Girls of Great Britain and Ireland” tiara, one of the most identifiable of the Queen’s tiaras and believed by many to be her favourite. Originally purchased as a wedding gift for Queen Mary in 1893, who subsequently gifted it to the then Princess Elizabeth for her wedding in 1947, the tiara is a festoon-and-scroll design with diamonds and gold creating fleurs-de-lis and scroll patterns.
2. Tristram Hunt, “Dreams of a New Elizabethan Age Faded into the End of Empire,” *The Guardian*. Guardian Media Group, 31 May 2013. Web. 23 February 2017.
3. The late Sir Winston Churchill, as quoted in Hunt, *ibid.*
4. The late Princess Margaret, as quoted in Hunt, *ibid.*
5. P.O. Beale, *The Postal Service of Sierra Leone* (Royal Philatelic Society London, 1988), 199. The statement that the common design stamps were issued for 64 territories takes into consideration that the stamp for KUT was used by the three different territories of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika, at the time united in a joint postal association that began on 1 January 1933 and ended in 1976.
6. Cyril Parsons, *Stamp Portraits of the Queen* (Stanley Gibbons Ltd, London, 1959).

Majed Halawi is author of *Echoes of Empire: Sierra Leone Philatelic Legacy 1786–1980*, which was awarded a Large Gold Medal and the Reserve Grand Award at the Great American Stamp Show 2021 in Chicago, a Gold Medal at London 2022, and the Grand Prix–Literature at Capex 22 in Toronto. In addition to Sierra Leone, his collecting interests include British East Africa and Northern and Southern Rhodesia. Mr Halawi is a member of the Club de Monaco and the Royal Philatelic Society London.

