

1957 World Scout Jubilee Jamboree Imprimaturs

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The postal arrangements at the 1957 World Scout Jamboree at Sutton Coldfield are well described, as are the stamps in sheets and the rolls or coils which were used for affixing stamps to first day covers. Little has however been published in the Scout philatelic press concerning the imperforate Jamboree stamps – these are imprimaturs or a kind of proofs.

Any printing firm, be it a stamp printer or other, will usually prepare one or more sheets prior to or during the main run for approval and/or for archival purposes. Approval and archival sheets are also known as imprimatur sheets. Imprimatur is Latin for “let it be printed”. Imprimatur sheets were taken from the Penny Black onwards, and continued to be taken from new plates. They were stored with Somerset House in London, which controlled the printing of stamps at that time. The National Postal Museum (NPM) eventually became the depository for imprimatur sheets. The NPM is today known as Heritage Royal Mail. New issues in the form of imprimatur sheets continue to be archived at the Royal Mail archive and collections held by the Postal Heritage Trust.

In early 1955, the Boy Scout Association sent a request for a stamp issue in connection with the Jamboree, and it was rejected in July 1955. A second request was approved in spring 1956, and on 13 June 1956 it was announced in the House of Commons that three stamps would be issued. Invitations were sent to nominated artists and printing firms to submit stamp designs, and 26 designs were received in October 1956. Royal approval was received for the final designs on 30 March 1957. The stamps were printed by Harrison & Sons, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, and they were put on sale from 1 August 1957.

Heritage Royal Mail has kindly supplied information regarding their holdings of 1957 Scout Jamboree imprimaturs, or registration sheets as they are also called. This shows that one sheet of 120 imperforated stamps are kept for each of the three stamps for their records.

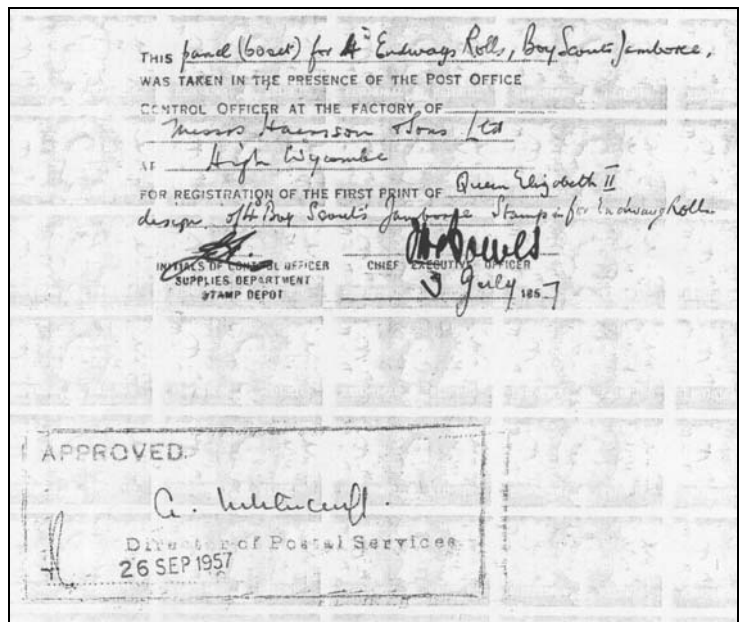
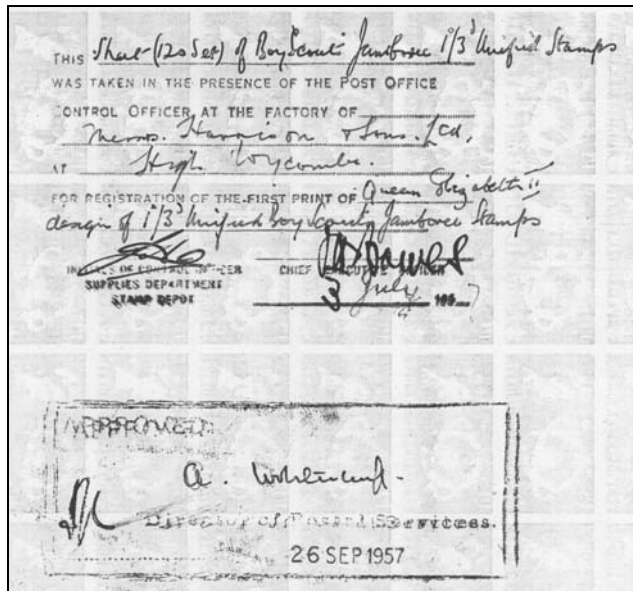
The sheets are complete with selvedge, as I had the opportunity to witness when I visited the archives at Freeling House, Mount Pleasant Complex, Phoenix Place in London in 2001. Interestingly, they also have imprimaturs for the rolls, and of these they have 60 imperforated stamps for each value, and a note to the computer printout says “endways rolls”. The printing of these was performed on continuous reels of paper, and the roll imprimaturs are taken from somewhere in the middle of the run so that there is no selvedge at the top or at the bottom. The registration date was 3 July 1957 for both sheets and rolls, nearly a month before the stamps were issued.



Lower part of the imperforate registration sheet (120 stamps) for the 1s 3d value (courtesy Heritage Royal Mail). The sheet is mounted by use of cellotape on to a larger sheet of paper, on which the notes at the bottom are written.



Lower part of the registration pane (60 stamps) for the 4d value in rolls, with handwritten notes on the backing paper (courtesy Heritage Royal Mail).



The inscription and approval handstamp on the reverse of the registration sheet (left) and for the pane of 60 stamps for the rolls (right). (Both illustrations courtesy Heritage Royal Mail.) Note that the stamps were taken on 3 July, while the approval date is 26 September, nearly two months after the date of issue!

In 1984 and 1985 the NPM officially released surplus material in the forms of singles and small multiples from its archives by way of three auctions. The sales included material from the reigns of King Edward VII through QEII. In most instances the quantities were very small. It is important to note that all officially released imprimaturs from the NPM are handstamped on the reverse.

The first batch of material from the archives was sold by Robson Lowe Auctions on 26 April 1984. There were no commemoratives sold in this auction.

The Christie's Robson Lowe sale "National Postal Museum Archives" on 19 February 1985 offered two lots with 1957 Scout Jamboree imprimaturs: One set of blocks of four had a valuation of £450 and sold for £298 including commission and VAT. A set of marginal singles was valued at £125 and sold for £81. The auction catalogue indicated that there were between 21 to 35 similar lots to be sold over the next ten years.



Enlarged handstamp from reverse of imprimaturs (courtesy the owner).



*Set of marginal singles of the imperforate imprimatur.
Note the sheet number on the 2½d value (courtesy the owner)*



Blocks of four imperforate imprimatur (courtesy the owner).



The Phillips sale “Postage stamps of Great Britain” on 5 September 1985 had a set of blocks of four with an estimate of £120/150 and which sold for £230 including commission and VAT. This auction catalogue indicated that 78 more stamps were available for later sales.

Plans for further sale of imprimatur were abandoned in 1986 after irregularities had been discovered at the NPM. It is possible that one set of singles of the Scout Jamboree imprimatur were sold

through unofficial channels during this incident. Since the above mentioned auctions and the tightening of security in the mid 1980s no further imprimatur have been released.

It is understood that the NPM originally had two sheets of imprimatur of each of the 1957 Scout Jamboree issue, and that the plan was to keep one complete set of sheets for the records. Furthermore, they planned to remove the part of the duplicate sheets which had writing on the reverse (probably the duplicate sheets had the same inscription and approval handstamp as shown above) and to sell off the stamps with a clean reverse. I did not get to see the remainder of the second set of sheets during my visit. However, I was presented with a computer printout showing the holdings of these duplicate sheets. The duplicate sheets also originally contained 120 stamps. In the “notes” column for the 2½d stamp and for the 1s 3d stamp, which reads “10 stamps Missing”. The note for the 4d stamp is “14 stamps Missing + 4 Loose stamps which says “Imprimatur” on the back”. There are no such notes for each of the duplicate sheet for the three roll stamps, so these are obviously still intact with a holding of 60 stamps of each. Based on these notes, it seems reasonable to assume that 10 stamps of each value have been disposed of.

The 2005 Catalogue of Great Britain Errors & Varieties includes imprimatur (pre-view is available at <http://www.errors.info>). According to this catalogue, the price for a single stamp is £950, and £4,000 for a block of four. The valuations for the Jamboree imprimatur are in line with valuations for other QEII pre-decimal imprimatur. Note that these are prices for each stamp and block, so multiply by three for the set. The catalogue says that two sets of singles and two sets of blocks of four are on the market.

The two sets of blocks of four (both sets are without selvedge) and one set of marginal singles, all with N/P/IMPRIMATUR handstamp on reverse, are today residing in Scout collections. The whereabouts of the other set of singles is not known.

Thank you to John Ineson who has supplied background information for this article.