

CHARITY OR WELFARE STAMPS

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President

It is unfortunately not known who was the first person to come out with the idea to use stamps not only for the franking of letters and other postal articles but also, at the same time, to afford a measure of social help.

It is indeed a pity that the name of this person has remained unknown. The inventor of this splendid idea would have certainly deserved a monument to his memory, although he himself would have surely had no notion of the immense usefulness his charitably-motivated idea would have later been to social help, especially after it had gathered momentum and become so widely diffused throughout the world as we see it to-day.

With the issue of its first ever charity stamp of $4\frac{1}{2}$ p + $1\frac{1}{2}$ p, on the 22nd January of this year, Great Britain is the last but one country to have joined the band-waggon of countries in Europe which have issued such stamps, the other being the Republic of Eire.

The first ever charity stamps were not issued in Europe but in the Australian States of Victoria and New South Wales in the 1897, when these states still issued their own stamps. In both states a set of 2 stamps of the denominations 1d and $2\frac{1}{2}$ d were sold at 1/- and 2/6 respectively. The surcharge in the case of Victoria was passed on to a Hospital Fund whereas in New South Wales it was used to raise funds to build a Consumptives Home. We further find that in the year 1900 the State of Victoria issued its second Charity set of 2 stamps of the denominations of 1d and 2d which were sold at 1/- and 2/- respectively, the surcharge going in aid of the Boer War Patriotic Fund. A set of 2 stamps of the same denominations and sold for the same scope was issued by Queensland in the same year.

Thus, these have definitely been the forerunners of a class of stamps which throughout the years were destined to be of immense value in helping different charities and of which the majority of countries have made good use in raising funds for the Red Cross, in national calamities such as hurricanes and earthquakes. Later on such stamps have also been issued to raise funds for the holding of Philatelic Exhibitions, for the participation of national teams at the Olympic Games, erection of monuments and to help raise money for Sinking Funds.

After a seven year interval, the West Indian island of Barbados issued in 1907 the "Kingston Relief Fund" 1d on 2d stamp. This stamp which was sold at 2d had a franking validity of 1d, the other penny went to the fund in aid of the victims of the Jamaican earthquake.

In 1923 Jamaica issued a set of three stamps of the denominations $\frac{1}{2}$ d, 1d and $2\frac{1}{2}$ d each with a surcharge of $\frac{1}{2}$ d in aid of the Children's Welfare Fund. These stamps were on sale for one month at the beginning of each subsequent year up to 1927.

The idea of these Charity stamps gained favour with other Commonwealth countries and we find that in 1929 New Zealand issued its first stamp with a surcharge, the 1d + 1d inscribed "Help stamp our Tuberculosis" and a year later the same stamp was reissued with the inscription altered to "Help promote Health". Ever since New Zealand has yearly issued these health sets which are rather popular with collectors.

The then colony of British Honduras (now Belize), in 1932 had the lowest five denominations of the current King George V set overprinted with a premium equivalent to the face value of the respective stamp and the wording "Belize Relief Fund" in aid of the victims of the hurricane.

In 1933 South Africa too issued a set of four stamps with a surcharge in aid of the Vortrekker Memorial Fund. In 1935 these same stamps were overprinted S.W.A. and used in the territory of South West Africa.

The above are the earliest Charity stamps to be issued in the British Commonwealth and naturally enough there have later on been several other such issues from different colonies and territories.

Amongst the European nations Roumania and Russia were the first two countries to issue Charity stamps. In 1905 Russia issued a set of 4 stamps each of which was sold with a premium of 3 Kopecks in aid of the orphans of the russo-japanese war, whereas between 1905/06 Roumania issued no fewer than four sets of 4 stamps each with a surcharge in aid of charities. These stamps had only internal postal validity and thus could not be used for franking letters destined for abroad.

The next European country to have Charity stamps was Holland which in 1906 issued a set of three stamps of low denominations each with an equivalent premium in aid of the Anti-tuberculosis Campaign. Since 1923 up to the present Holland has yearly issued one or two such sets in aid Children's Charities.

In 1910 BELGIUM issued 2 sets of 4 stamps each, depicting St. Martin on horseback after a painting by Van Dyck. These stamps were sold with a premium equivalent to their face value except in the case of the 10c on which the premium was 5c, for the Exhibition of Belgian Art of the XVIIth Century. In 1911 these same two sets were re-issued overprinted "1911" and later again "Charleroi 1911".

In the same year, too, Italy issued its first ever set with a surtax to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the occupation of Sicily by Garibaldi. Two pairs of the same denominations were issued, each in a different design.

But, perhaps the most attractive and widely-collected series of Charity stamps are the popular Pro-Juventute stamps of Switzerland, which since 1913 to date have been uninterruptedly issued every year with a small surcharge in favour of youth charities. During the 61 years these stamps have been issued, we find that a variety of subjects have been selected for the stamps including coats of arms of the various cantons, national costumes, landscapes and mountain scenes of Switzerland, prominent nationals, flowers, sports, butterflies, birds etc.

During the 1914-18 War many European countries issued their first Charity stamps in aid of the Red Cross, war orphans and the war effort and these included Austria, France, Greece etc. Many other countries, which had already issued Charity stamps before, again issued such stamps in aid of these deserving causes.

After the First World War we find that other European countries such as Germany, Poland, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg and others started issuing sets of stamps with a surcharge in favour of some charitable cause and though some of them have discarded the idea or resorted to it very occasionally others have issued them yearly or still more often.

The purchase and use of these stamps is, in the great majority of cases, voluntary and during the period of their sale, definitive stamps of the equivalent denominations are kept currently on sale on the counters, yet in a few instances charity stamps had to be used additionally to the stamps franking a letter.

As a general rule, in the various countries issuing these stamps, the proceeds recovered from the surcharge went to local charities, whereas in a few instances, such as in the case of Denmark, stamps were issued with a surcharge in aid of foreign charities, such as the 1953 stamp NL + 10 ore in aid of the flood victims of the Netherlands and in 1957, the 30 + 5 ore in aid of the Hungarian refugees.

Apart from the ½d and 3d War Tax stamps, Malta was one of the last countries in Europe to issue a charity set proper i.e. with a surcharge and and it was only in 1969 that for the first time the Christmas set of that year was issued with a small surcharge of 5d on the whole set, in aid of local charities. This policy of a surcharge on the Christmas stamps has been kept ever since. Additionally the 1971, 1972 and 1973 sets were also issued in Miniature sheet form, which idea was discontinued in 1974.

All in all, it is felt, that the idea of such stamp issue is commendable, as it gives the charity-minded members of the public an opportunity to contribute voluntarily to a deserving cause, so long as the surcharge is reasonable and is not grossly overdone as has been the case in some unfortunate issues where the charity premium was fixed at several times the face value of the stamps undesirable and objectionable and smacking of high-handed speculation.