

FROM FIBRE TO HAUTE COUTURE ON WORLD POSTAGE STAMPS

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There are at present over 200 countries which issue postage stamps. Usually a definitive set of stamps runs for several years, supplemented by special commemorative issues which record historical events or are issued for political propaganda purposes; to advertise local products or exports, to encourage tourist trade or in order to publicize national achievements.

In the United Kingdom, which hitherto has tended to follow a rather conservative stamp issuing policy the general public is becoming increasingly aware of philatelic matters. Following the increase in the number of 'thematic' postage stamp collectors, it may be of general interest to review the incidence of textile subjects in world philately, particularly in view of Great Britain's early leadership in the development of the textile industry internationally.

The world's textile industry, with its modern high-speed production and competition for the mass markets owes much to John Kay's invention of the fly shuttle in 1733. This was followed by James Hargreave's 'Jenny' for spinning woollen yarn, Arkwright's first patent for the 'Water frame' in 1769, and Crompton's first spinning 'mule' in 1799.

Apart from these early textile machinery inventions, the widely developed man-made fibres industry has grown out of Cross, Bevan and Beadle's early patents of 1894 and those of 1898 of Topham and Stearn, who followed basic research on the commercial spinning of the viscose rayon fabrics, based on regenerated cellulose, in Great Britain.

One of the first fully synthetic fibres—the polyester 'Terylene'—a British invention announced in 1946, was only preceded by the previous development in the U.S.A. of the polyamide or nylon fabrics in 1938 and followed much later by the invention of the acrylic types of fibres, in America in the late 1940's.

The Stanley Gibbons 'Simplified' Postage Stamp Catalogue lists nearly 300 of the world stamps which have a direct link with the textile industry either relating to the textile raw materials, native crafts or modern high-speed textile production or which record international textile exhibitions or congresses.

¹Adapted from an article published in 1968 Bradford Textile Society Journal.

Raw materials.

On the textile raw materials side, cotton still accounts for about 59% of the world production of textile apparel fibres. It is therefore not surprising that over thirty different countries have featured the cotton plant, cotton plantations or cotton picking or processing on their postage stamps, for example, Bahawalpur, China, Mexico, Nyasaland, Peru, Sudan, etc.

The two foremost countries which have given prominence to the importance of cotton growing as a contribution to their economy are Egypt and Syria.

Egypt has issued many attractive postage stamps commemorating the International Cotton Congresses, while Syria has produced stamps for the annual Aleppo Cotton Festivals, showing cotton plants and also various allegorical symbols pertaining to the cotton industry.

Other textile raw materials of cellulosic origin are featured, such as jute fields and jute products on Pakistan stamps, flax plantations, etc. on St. Helena issues, whereas sisal is depicted by several countries such as Bahamas, Haiti, Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika, Malagasy Rep., Tanzania and Mozambique stamp issues.

Hemp drying is illustrated on the stamps of Basutoland and North Borneo.

Although world natural silk production as an apparel fibre has been reduced to only 1% of all the world's fibres during this decade and silk garments have now become luxury items, there are still countries which continue to have a flourishing sericulture industry. The countries which have shown the silk moth, the silk worm, etc. on postage stamps are Libya and Romania—perhaps the most attractive stamps in this context are North Korea's set of three stamps illustrating the '*bombyx mori*' moth and its cocoon, or those of Lebanon issued on the occasion of the 1965 World Silk Congress in Beirut.

During approximately the last forty years, in spite of increased production, the share of wool as an apparel fibre has dropped from 15% to 9% of the total world production of textile fibres. Yet the economies of the primary wool producing countries continue to flourish, owing to the world demand for this basic commodity. An increase in world population and higher living standards, have resulted in an increased usage of all fibres per capita of world population.

It is surprising that wool is not as widely illustrated in philately as say cotton; the main wool-producing countries, such as Australia, have been rather modest in showing the famous Merino sheep only on stamps of 1934, 1937 and 1946.

New Zealand postage stamps depicting wool production are more imaginative, such as the 1936 Chamber of Commerce issue showing sheep raising and the 1957 issue commemorating seventy-five years of the New Zealand lamb export trade (meat and wool production). Further, there is a fine example of a Maori sheep shearer in a 1958 issue and an interesting stamp of 1959 showing the shipping of wool in 1857.

South Africa, another of the main world producing areas, boasts only one stamp with a Merino ram, while Argentina has shown only the Tierra del Fuego sheep and a Patagonian ram on their stamps.

Perhaps one of the most interesting sets is the recent issue of Uruguay showing sheep breeding—stamps with the Corriedale, Ideal, Romney Marsh and Australiano sheep are featured.

Examples of other wool-producing countries which have included sheep on their stamps are Falkland Islands, Romania, Swaziland and Turkey, to name but a few.

The shepherd and/or sheep are included on postage stamps of Italy, Iraq, Mali Rep., Morocco, Papua and New Guinea and Romania, the latter showing a shepherd blowing the 'bucium', a form of the alpenhorn. A particularly attractive stamp was issued in 1958 by Monaco, featuring a flock of sheep with Saint Bernadette of Lourdes.

Apart from the illustration of sheep and wool products on the world's stamps, there are a number of other animal textile fibres represented. Mohair, the product of the Angora goat, native of Asia Minor, is one of the more important commercial hairs, known for its softness and lustre. It finds many applications in men's suitings, ladies' dress goods, velvets and imitation furs, etc. Postage stamps which illustrate the Angora or 'mohair goats' have been issued by Mongolia, Turkey and Basutoland—the most important mohair producing areas of the world.

Cashmere goats have been shown on Mongolian stamps; the central Asian highlands and north China being the source of the finest cashmere commercially, used in luxury knitwear in Europe and America, where it finds its way via Tientsin and Pekin in China.

South American llamas (akin to both the goat and the camel) are the source of the alpaca fibre, which combines the smoothness and brightness of mohair with the softness of wool and finds use in ladies' dress fabrics and high-class lining materials. Countries such as Argentina, Bolivia and Peru have illustrated llamas on their stamps, while Bolivia and Peru have shown the vicuna, now in the top luxury fibre class. These small animals live on the Peru-Chile border at a height of 8,000 to 10,000 feet but, as commercial fibre producers, are now of little importance owing to the limited quantities of fibre available—the fibre used in, for example, luxury overcoatings for men at up to £200 per garment!

The phenomenal increase in the world production of man-made fibres (438.41 million pounds of filament yarn and 516.68 million pounds of staple fibre produced in 1967 in the U.K. alone) as textile raw materials during the last forty years has been commemorated by the French issue of a stamp in 1955, honouring Count Hilaire de Chardonnet (1839-1924), the pioneer of the early nitrocellulose types of man-made fibres shown for the first time at the 1889 Paris Exhibition.

Modern man-made fibre factories, such as 'Stilon' manufacture on stamps of Poland or the Romanian Savinesti synthetic fibre plant, are illustrated, while North Korea has featured a 'Vinalon' factory on a set of eight postage stamps.

Cellulose derived from wood pulp, the main raw material for the manufacture of viscose rayon, is shown on Canadian stamps which depict forestry products (Canadian spruce, etc.) and the wood pulp industries.

Textile Manufacture.

The two basic textile processes, yarn spinning and cloth weaving, have captured the imagination of postage stamp designers of many industrial nations, particularly if the textile industry of a given country contributes considerably to its general domestic economy or if it endeavours to export the product of its textile output abroad.

In Great Britain, in spite of competition from today's mass-produced textiles, the 'cottage industries' of Harris Tweed, Highlands and Islands, Skye, Orkney, Wales or even Irish Donegal Tweed have survived in this industrial era. Many countries, and particularly those which are underdeveloped industrially, try to maintain and encourage their domestic 'cottage industries' and so provide employment for large numbers of highly skilled craftsmen.

One of the simplest forms of hand spinning, the 'distaff spinning' method, is admirably illustrated on Albanian, Romanian and Yugoslav stamps which show peasant girls hand spinning, while the more advanced spinning wheel method of yarn spinning is shown on stamps of Canada, Germany, India, Norway, Portugal and Tristan da Cunha.

Modern power yarn spinning, as we know it today, is featured on Belgian stamps (woollen 'mules'), while cotton spinning frames are depicted on stamps of China, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Ivory Coast, Japan and Romania.

The most primitive form and perhaps the predecessor of the weaver's craft, basket making, is often featured on stamps, an admirable example being a recent colourful 2s Zambian stamp.

The 'native handloom weaving' motif is very frequently used by postage

stamp designers—there are about twenty examples, from India, Italy, Lebanon, Malaya, Romania and Sudan, which show various types of hand-operated looms.

Switzerland commemorated its silk weaving industry by an interesting stamp in 1945 which illustrated the contents of a silk handloom weaving shed.

The modern power-weaving loom can be found on relatively recent postage stamps of China, India, Iraq and North Korea, while a 1955 Czechoslovak stamp depicts the ultra modern shuttleless 'Kovo jet loom', which transmits the weft across the warp by a jet of air or water instead of the conventional shuttle method.

Among textile end-products, colourful native mats and rugs are included in stamp issues, good examples being a Samoa i Sisifo stamp with a native girl displaying a Samoan fine mat, the Niger Republic mat stamp, and the interesting set of four stamps featuring the Dahomey rug weaving industry.

The Ryukyu Islands, a group of semi-autonomous islands (under U.S. administration) between Japan and Formosa, have reproduced textile designs on some of their New Year Stamps, depicting multi-coloured native textile motifs.

J.M. Jacquard, who developed the jacquard looms for fancy figured designing in Lyons, is portrayed on a 1934 stamp.

Carpet manufacture, a major native industry in French Morocco, has been prominently recorded in 1950 by a set of five attractive postage stamps; other countries which have displayed the carpet weaver are Tannu Tuva, Tchad and Tunisia.

Famous tapestries, such as the well-publicized Bayeux tapestry, have received philatelic recognition on a 1958 French stamp and also, of course, on the 1966 set issued by Great Britain. In addition, a French postage stamp in 1962 commemorates 300 years of the famous Gobelin tapestry production, and an impressive and attractive 1966 French stamp shows the Jean Lurçat tapestry.

Belgium has issued two tapestry stamps—'Caesar crossing the Rubicon', detail from Tournai tapestry c.1465-70, and 'Emperor Maximilian killing the boar', from Brussels tapestry c.1525-40, both stamps being in multi-colour photogravure.

Embroidery, as a native craft, has been shown on issues of Italy, Somalia and Tunisia.

Lace making is illustrated on St. Helena, Italian and Belgian stamps, although undoubtedly the finest examples in this context are sixteen artistic postage stamps issued by Hungary to publicize the Halasi lace and its most superb and intricate animal and geometric motifs.

A fine example of textile fabric printing is included on a Western Samoan stamp—'Making Siapo', while the native dyer's craft is admirably depicted by a set of three Spanish Moroccan stamps and one issued by Guinea Republic.

A review of textile manufacture would not be complete without stamps honouring the textile mill girl operative, who has been featured on stamps of Costa Rica, Hungary, Japan, Poland and Romania.

Whole textile factories have been publicized through the medium of the postage stamp, such as the North Vietnam issue relating to the opening of the Nam-Dinh cotton spinning mill or the Yemen issue on account of the Bagel spinning and weaving mill, which includes an illustration of the factory, a bale of cloth, a shuttle and a yarn 'cone'.

Entire textile industries of some countries have been commemorated by special stamps such as the Canadian, Costa Rican, the French 'Industrie Textile' in 1951, or the 1950 Italian stamp, portraying Morzotto and Rossi (pioneers of Italian textiles). The 150 years of the Norwegian textile industry has received philatelic recognition in 1963 by a set of three stamps with a 'herring-bone' weave pattern.

The Belgian linen industry has also recently been featured in a special issue with the attractive blue flax flower and a shuttle.

Important textile exhibitions are a common subject for special issues. Among the most attractive are the Belgian 1965 'Textirama' Ghent stamp, the 1955 Belgian 2nd International Exhibition in Brussels, the Czechoslovak stamp showing fabrics at the 1958 World Fair (incidentally, this was the award winning pavilion) and the Italian stamp for the 10th International Textile and Fashion Exhibition in 1951.

Fashion, or the French 'Haute Couture', is beautifully represented on a 1953 stamp honouring 'the mannequin' with the Place Vendôme, centre of the Paris fashion trade, in the background.

Finally, the sewing machine is illustrated on a 1955 French stamp honouring Thimonnier, a nineteenth-century inventor of a prototype of the modern high-speed sewing machine, without which the garment industries could not have made such progress in supplying the apparel markets of the world.

