



Left: An engraver at work on one of the original steel dies for the 1940 Centennial series

The result was a serious overcrowding of the central idea.

"A stamp should be an ambassador of the country that issues it," he went on. "It should depict some scenic or other activity characteristic of the country—sport if you like. Portraits are not nearly so popular as views. For one thing, they date. A man or a woman changes appearances in 10 or 20 years. The portrait of the young Queen Victoria on the early New Zealand stamps? Ah—that was a work of art, a classic stamp." This expert added that some of the best of present-day stamps were issued by Central European countries, and a lot of these were printed in Switzerland.

#### First in a Plebiscite

Now for our standing abroad. *Stanley Gibbons' Stamp Monthly* invited readers to vote on what they considered the 12 most beautiful stamps produced in the British Empire since the Second World War. The most popular stamp of all in this plebiscite was the New Zealand ninepenny, showing the view of the Franz Josef Glacier through the church altar-window. The sixth place in the competition was filled by the New Zealand halfpenny, with the view of Lake Matheson and the peaks of Cook and Tasman reflected in the lake. The seventh place was filled by the stamp showing the "V" with St. Paul's in the background. The Peter Pan Health Stamp of 1945 was ninth, and the Carillon Tower shilling, twelfth. All of these, except the Peter Pan, belonged to the Peace issue.

Members of the Christchurch Philatelic Society have given a good deal of thought to stamp design, and the following is a summary of their prepared views:

The production of stamps is a specialised art which has its own problems. These may not necessarily be ap-

## ART ON EVERY ENVELOPE

THE New Zealand Government has just announced the result of a competition for four postage stamps to commemorate the Royal Visit. We shall see the designs later. Meanwhile "The Listener" has been making some enquiries into the principles of stamp-design and into its history in this country. It has obtained opinions from experts and "laymen." What constitutes a good stamp? Where does New Zealand stand in the world of stamp-designing and printing? The interest in the subject is world-wide. As one expert put it, a stamp is an ambassador for its country. One thing "The Listener" found was that New Zealand has a high reputation abroad for its stamps. It has produced some bad ones, but also many good ones—some that are ranked very good. The Post Office has a thick file of compliments on its Peace issue.

FIRST of all, here is the opinion of a distinguished New Zealander who is not a stamp-collector. We asked him what he looked for in a stamp. He said: "I find myself interested always in the design and colour of postage stamps. The colours, no doubt, are selected so that stamps may be clearly seen and identified quickly, but apart from this obvious value it seems to me that the brilliant printers' inks often used are of value in themselves. Anyway, I like bright colours in articles of everyday use and prefer the present-day trends in stamp colours to the pale mauve, rose, or grey of some early Victorian issues."

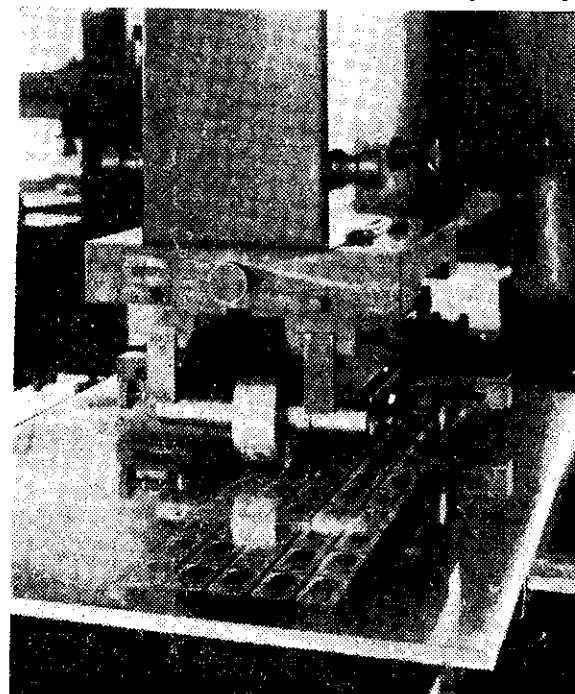
"There is so much scope for distinctiveness in design that I am always disappointed if I do not find it in new issues of various countries. There ought to be, and usually is, some reflection of national outlook and temperament in stamp designs and it is a pleasant, and no doubt harmless, exercise to look for it in the objects or personages depicted on stamps and in the design of their presentation."

Then we asked an artist what he thought about stamps as examples of official art.

"Stamps are primarily for use, but everything that is useful should be well designed, and this applies very strongly to such things as stamps," he said. "I think the family portrait style is bad, and the reproduction of realistic scenery is just dodging design. A skilful design makes for dignity, which I think is most important where the State is in any way concerned. I am always fearful that, in a gale on a dark night outside the post-office, I may inadvertently cause His Majesty to stand on his head or lie flat on his face. When I receive an interesting stamp from abroad it is usually postmarked beyond recognition. The despoiling of stamps is a sad, if necessary, thing."

After that we passed on to the collectors. One said he liked to know at a glance where stamps came from. "You remember the old stamps of Liberia? They had elephants and rhinoceroses and such things, and you knew where you were. Australia has a kangaroo. You see the kangaroo, and you know the stamp is Australian."

A man who has been a collector of stamps and a student of stamp design all his life, explained that stamp-designing was quite different from other artistic work in that so much had to be crowded into a small space. You have got to get in the name of the country, the words "Postage and Revenue," and the value of the stamp for a start. The central figure should not be overcrowded. The central part of a stamp design is like a picture within a frame. The frame must not overweight the picture. Hence heavy borders are not good design. There was a New Zealand Health Stamp in which a soldier was depicted helping a girl over a stile. In the background were gun emplacements and various other details.



ENGRAVED work being transferred from a hardened steel roll to a soft-steel plate—a preliminary stage in stamp printing