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Bohumil Heinz: Stamp Engraver (1894–1940)

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Many artists break into the rarefied world of stamp engraving because they have been tutored by the best of the previous generation. Very few manage to force their way to the attention of postal authorities and security printers as unknown quantities. An exception to the rule, however, was Bohumil Heinz (Fig.1), who engraved issues for his native Czechoslovakia after demonstrating his talents on stamps of the British Empire.

Heinz (1894-1940) was born in Rakovník, west of Prague, in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire and is now the Czech Republic, on 9 May 1894. Having shown an artistic talent from a young age, he attended the School of Ceramics in Bechyne, but had to cut his studies short to fight on both the Russian and Italian fronts during World War I. After the war, he attended the School of Applied Arts in Prague. He started off with figurative painting, but later moved on to engraving, being taught by Professor Eduard Karel.

In 1924, he left school as he had to provide for his family, and could not afford

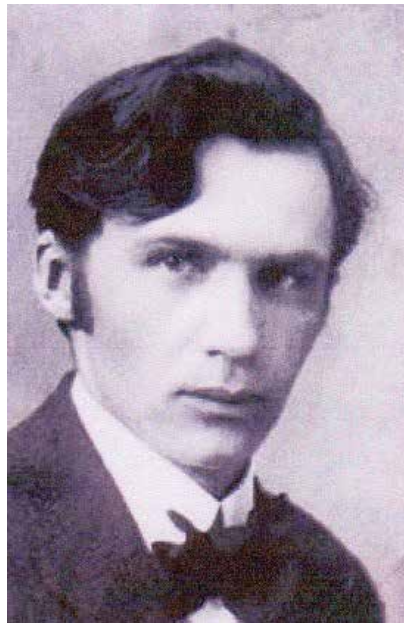


Fig.1. Bohumil Heinz (1894-1940)

to dabble in engraving. Heinz eked out a living as a designer of advertisements and posters. He dreamed of becoming a professional engraver, but he could not afford the training. All he could do was hone his skills by engraving portraits (Fig.2) in his spare time. He applied for a job as a banknote engraver at the Czechoslovakian National Bank, but was rejected because he was a complete unknown.

His work did get noticed by some of the elite engravers of the day, and Ferdinand Schirnböck invited him to work with him in Vienna, but unfortunately Schirnböck died before this came to anything. Heinz's luck

finally changed in 1932, when the London printer De La Rue gave him the opportunity to complete a test engraving, a portrait of King Pradjadhipok of Siam. As a result he was offered a permanent position, but he did not want to move away from home so he accepted work as a freelancer.

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Fig.2. Early engraved portrait.

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Over the following years Heinz produced some 30 engravings for the British company. Attributing work to specific engravers at De La Rue is usually hard, but in the case of Heinz it has been possible to compile an authoritative list. Heinz sometimes hid his initials in the engravings he made, and these sometimes went undetected. But even better: after Heinz had passed away, various dies were found in his estate of engravings done for De La Rue. 'Proofs' were pulled from these dies and these were backstamped 'zkusmy tisk' (trial printing) and with a signature which looks like Heinz's but isn't.

The list starts with a portrait of Ch'en Ying-shih (Fig.3) for three values in China's Martyrs of the Revolution series, introduced in 1933, and continued with a profile head of King George V which was used on definitives for Ceylon (Fig.4), Nigeria and St Lucia. Heinz also engraved a profile head of the king's successor, King Edward VIII (Fig.5), but that was never used on a stamp because of the king's reign being rather short.

Heinz was also responsible for the vignettes of two of the designs in Sudan's 1935 issue marking the 50th anniversary of the death of General Charles Gordon (Fig.6): a portrait for the low values and an illustration of the memorial service in Khartoum for the higher values (where he surreptitiously inscribed his name on the trunk of a tree).



Fig.3. China 1934. Ch'en Ying-shih. [Sc313]



Fig.4. Ceylon 1935. King George V. [Sc270]



Fig.5. 1936. King Edward VIII.



Fig.6. Sudan 1935. Gordon Memorial Service, Khartoum. [Sc59]

Research by Brian Livingstone, published in *Geosix*, the journal of the King George VI Collectors' Society, has shown that Heinz also engraved one of the profile heads of that king used by De La Rue for various definitive issues.

The proofs of this particular head are in a rectangular stamp-size format, which probably has led to them usually being attributed as unadopted stamp essays. These proofs show the H for Heinz hidden in the king's ear. Comparison with the De La Rue profiles used has shown that this head was used for the 1938 definitive set issued in Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika.

It appears on all values except the 15c and 2s. The head was only used for one other stamp, the 1s definitive issued in St Lucia, also in 1938. The proof with H in the king's ear is another posthumous proof. The actual De La Rue proofs made at the time of stamp production appear to show that the H was discovered and first partly removed, while on the eventual stamps, the H has disappeared completely. His final work for De La Rue was a portrait of King Charles I (1625-1649), which appeared in the 1939 Barbados set commemorating the Tercentenary of the General Assembly.

In his home country, Heinz's breakthrough came in 1934. He had been submitting essays before then, but they had always been rejected in favor of other engravers. Most famously, in 1934 Heinz decided to engrave a postage stamp essay for the upcoming commemoration of the fiftieth death anniversary of the composer Bedrich Smetana (Fig.7), only to be told when submitting it that the job had been given to the engraver Karl Seizinger just the week before.

Heinz's version of the Smetana stamp was thought to be of such good quality, though, that he finally got the offer to engrave an issue commemorating another Czechoslovakian composer, Antonin Dvorak (Fig.8). For someone with a passion for



Fig.7. Czechoslovakia 1949. Heinz's 1934 essay was finally used as the basis for two 1949 stamps honoring composer Bedrich Smetana. [Sc387]



Fig.8. Czechoslovakia 1934. Czechoslovakia, and especially Antonín Dvořák. [Sc199]. lamented the printing with rotary presses, believing that the process of flat printing was more suited for retaining the nuances of the original engraving.

Heinz's breakthrough at home meant he could move to a larger place. Since 1928, he and his wife had lived in a tiny apartment in Prague, where there was so little room that Heinz had to engrave in the kitchen. But in 1934, the family could move to a larger place where



Fig.9. Bohemia and Moravia. Top, 1939, Brno Cathedral. [Sc32]. Middle, 1940, Neuhaus. [Sc40]. Bottom, 1939, Iron Works at Moravska Ostrava. [Sc36]

classical music, this was an ideal commission.

The stamp received great praise, and Heinz had finally made his name in his homeland. Heinz himself was more critical of his first work for

Heinz would have his own room. After Czechoslovakia was invaded by Germany in 1939, Heinz found himself obliged to work for the occupying forces, creating a number of stamps (Figs.9 & 10) for the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia.

Patriotically, and rather bravely, he hid the letters 'D', 'r' and 'B' in his engravings of the 50h, 1k and 1k20h values in the 1939 definitive series, noting his allegiance to Dr. Benes,

Czechoslovakia's president in exile. Furthermore, if you arrange the 40h, 50h, 60h and 1k values in a certain way, the combination of the images is said to show an outline of pre-war Czechoslovakia!

Ever more fanciful, and maybe even a bit doubtful, is the alleged



Fig.10. Bohemia and Moravia 1939. Detail. Brno Cathedral. [Sc32].

inclusion of caricature portraits of Tomas Masaryk, Edvard Benes and General Stefanik, who are considered the founding fathers of Czechoslovakia, on the 50h stamp. That same stamp is supposed to have included a profile of Benes in the clouds to the left of the tower.

Finally, the clouds on the 1k value are supposed to include the outline of Czechoslovakia's patron saint Wenceslas. All these patriotic messages were of course not reported until after the Second World War. Heinz didn't live to see his country's liberation, as he died in May 1940 from cardiac arrest.

As a belated tribute, his Smetana essay of 1934 was used for two stamps issued in 1949 (Fig.7). Heinz's work would appear on stamps even later than that. In 1953, his design of the Charles Bridge in Prague stamp [Sc619] was finally issued. Heinz had engraved it as well, but that was at a time when copper was still used to engrave on. In 1953, the transfer rollers in use would most probably destroy a copper engraving. Jaroslav Goldschmied was therefore asked to create a new engraving, in steel, but Heinz's name was still included in the bottom margin of the stamp.

Editor's note: A shorter version of this article appeared in *Stamp Magazine* of May 2018.