

LES ILES NORMANDES

COKER'S DRAWINGS FOR JETHOU'S 1960 FIRST DEFINITIVE ISSUE

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It is an interesting privilege for a philatelist to have access to a stamp designer's preliminary designs, from rough sketches to the final artwork. Normally this type of material will rest in a museum or will fetch sky-high prices at auction. Fortunately, with local stamps, this preliminary artwork is affordable, albeit scarce.

When Group Captain Hedley Cliff decided to issue stamps for the local post that he was setting up for Jethou in 1960, he turned to local, but reputed talent: Charles Coker, a Guernsey artist, was put in charge of designing the stamps. No doubt he had been recommended by Major Wood of Herm Island, for whom Coker had designed the first Map definitive issue in 1949. The Map issue proved to be a workhorse for the Herm Island postal service, with no less than 18 reprints (not counting the overprinted issues) according to Jon Aitchison. And the printing of the first issue of the Jethou stamps was entrusted to The Guernsey Press Co., responsible for the war-time issues of Guernsey.

Coker started with pencil sketches that he submitted to Captain Cliff. At this early stage, the final face values were not yet determined and even the final format of each value was still undecided. *Figure 1* shows an early pencil sketch for what was to become the 1½ d. value. The explanatory note below the drawing was probably written by either William Newport or Anders Backman. The sketch is purported to be Charles Coker's first idea for the three-half penny value. As can be seen from the illustration, the idea of a central coat of arms was already being

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considered but the format of the stamp was horizontal. The size of this drawing is 88 x 53 mm.



Figure 1 Charles Coker's first idea for the three halfpenny value

It was soon replaced by *Figure 2*, a vertical rectangle very similar to the final design. Someone, maybe Captain Cliff, crossed out the "2" in the top right corner. The size of this drawing is 70 x 88 mm.



*Figure 2
Artist's sketch for colour*

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Another drawing in black ink, closer to the final version, still shows the face value as "2" with a very faint pencilled notation by Captain Cliff to change it to 1½ d (*Figure 3*). It measures 70 x 88 mm. It is interesting to note one major difference when compared to the final issue: the leaves around the design are colourless whereas on the issued stamp they are hatched.

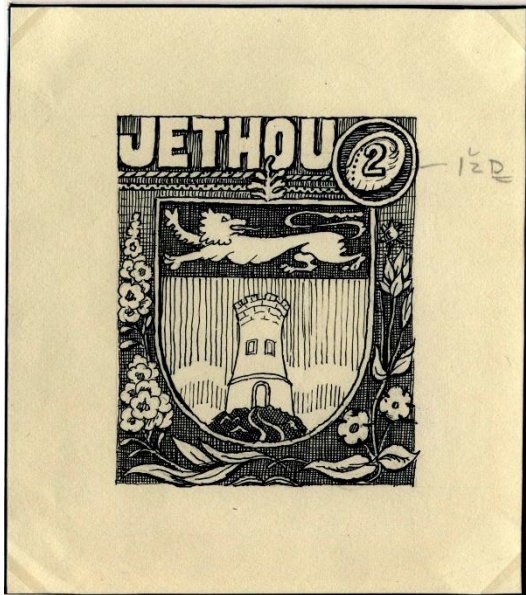


Figure 3

Coker's drawing for the two penny.

The value was changed to three half penny before issue.

Next come two different designs for the proposed 4d value showing the island map (*Figure 4 on next page*). Comparing the accepted and unaccepted drawings shows many important differences: the hatching of the island is vertical on the accepted design but diagonal on the rejected one. The flower on the left-hand side of the unaccepted design encroaches more on the

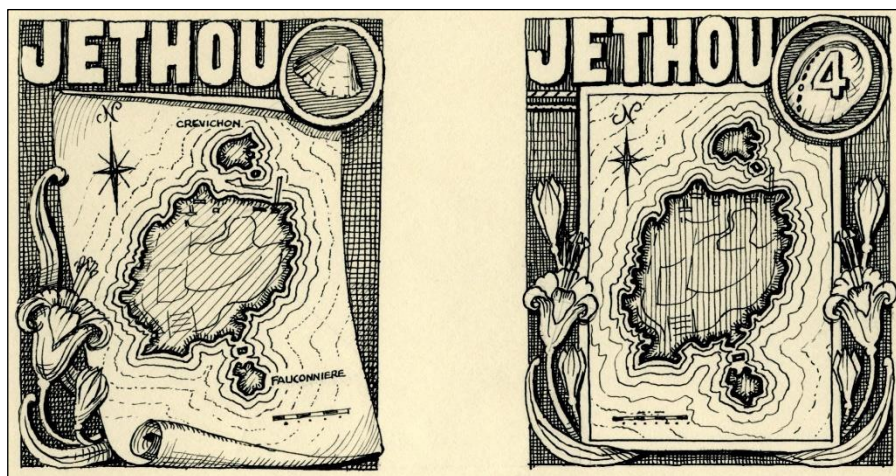


Figure 4
Unaccepted (on left) and accepted (on right) designs.

central vignette and there is no flower on the right-hand side. The accepted design is more balanced with flowers on both sides. The scale at the bottom was moved from right to left. The shape of the shell at top right is very different; there is no face value on the design at the left and no "d" beside the numeral 4 on the right-hand stamp. But the final, printed issue had a mix of both when it comes to the islets of Crevichon and Fauconnière, identified by their name on the printed stamp and on the rejected design, but unnamed on the accepted design! The size of each drawing is 70 x 88 mm.

The larger values are unusual in that the name appearing on the released 6d stamp reads Fauconnière and on the 9d stamp it reads Crevichon, as if these stamps had been issued by, or for, these two islands. It was Charles Coker's idea very early in the process as can be seen from the pencil drawing shown in *Figure 5*, measuring 88 x 50 mm.

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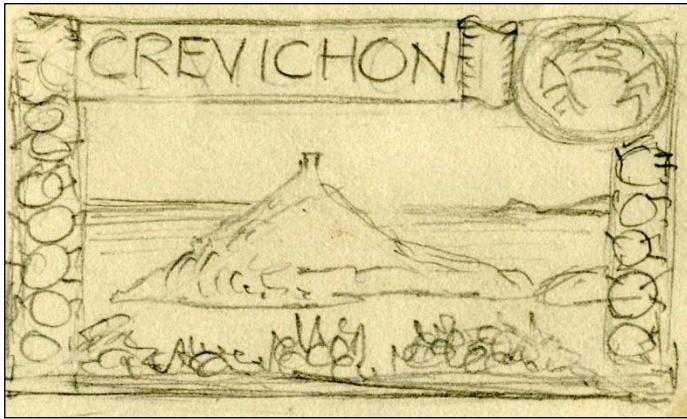


Figure 5 The artist's first idea for the nine-penny value

Admittedly it is a very rough, preliminary sketch with no face value, but the name CREVICHON shows prominently at top of the stamp.

When Coker submitted an ink design for the 6d value (*Figure 6 on next page*), the proposed face value was actually 15d. Why did Captain Cliff decide to change the face value to 6d? I don't know, but we do know that the 15d value went as far as the proof stage, so the change to 6d was a last-minute decision. The major difference between this drawing and the issued stamp is the bird, much paler on the issued stamp and closer to the face value. The size of this drawing is 150 x 87 mm.

After proposing the Crevichon stamp with the name at the top as seen in *Figure 5*, Coker realised the final version with the name at the bottom shown in *Figure 7*, with Captain Cliff's approval noted in the margin ("OK") with another faint pencil notation in the left margin reading "GSY LILY", no doubt for "Guernsey lily", the flower shown below the face value.

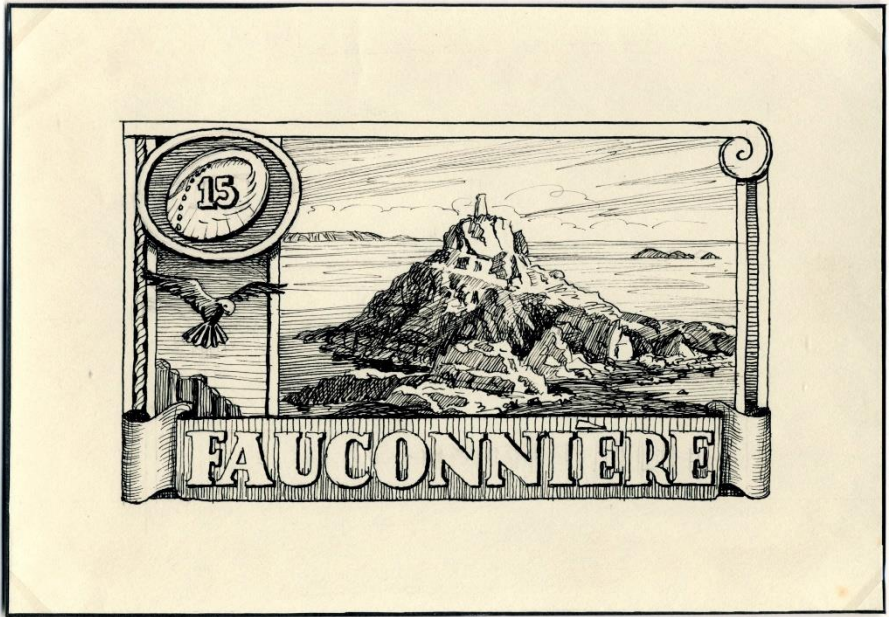


Figure 6

Coker's drawing for the fifteen pence.

The value was changed to nine pence before issue.

Again, certain differences can be seen when the so-called final design is compared with the printed stamp: the shape of the clouds is very different, the flower and leaves are hatched on the printed stamp but not on the artist's final design. The shell containing the face value is larger within the oval on the printed stamp, the lines within the shell are different and there is no letter "d" for the currency on the hand-drawn design. The size of this drawing is 151 x 88 mm.

The highest value of the set, 18d, can be seen in *Figure 8*. Again, there are minor differences between this artist's design and the printed stamp, most notably the shape of the shell at upper left,

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the absence of the letter "d" for the face value and the shape of the menhir. The size of this drawing is 151 x 87 mm.

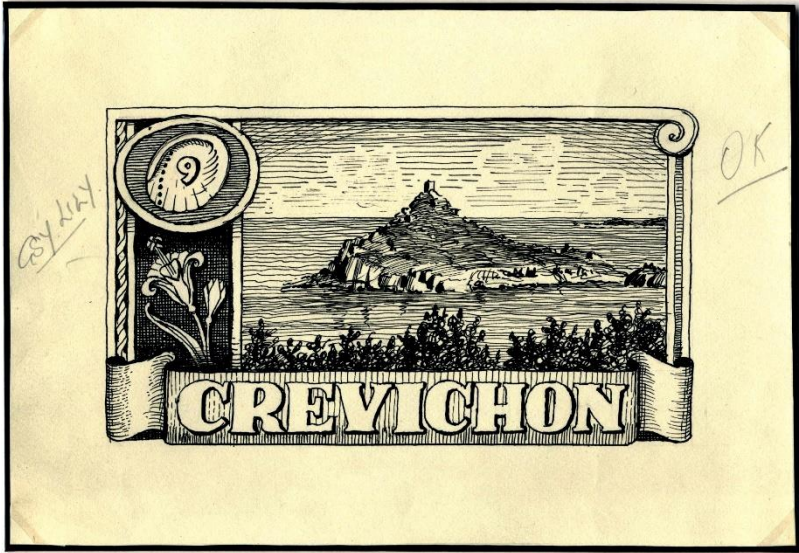


Figure 7

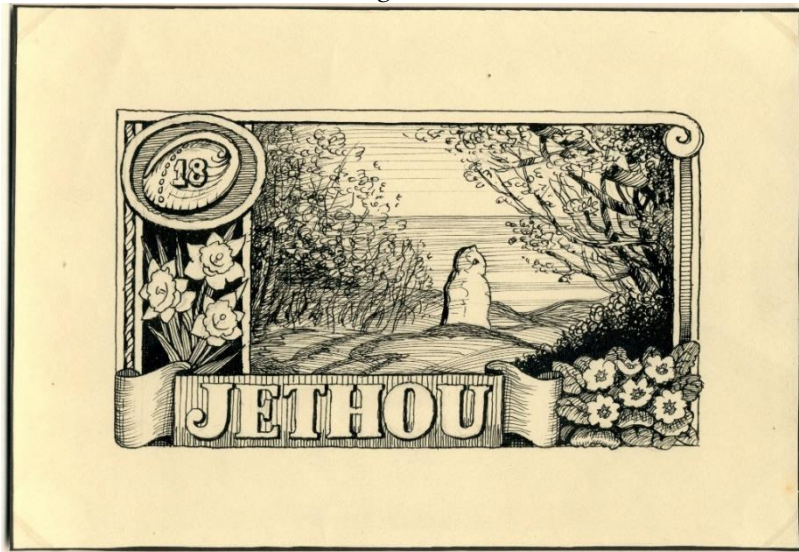


Figure 8

Artist's drawing for the 18 pence

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The most striking piece in this collection of original drawings by Charles Coker is the composite sheet with the three large-size higher values (*Figure 9*). The sheet measures 251 x 213 mm. It did not fit on my scanner, so I had to scan it in two parts and paste them together to make up *Figure 9*. The actual size of each stamp is 73 x 43 mm. The top row shows the Crevichon stamp in brilliant colours with a written note reading "probable value 6d". In the middle is the Fauconnière stamp, one in striking colours and two more just pencilled. My guess is that Charles Coker intended to colour them, but he never got around to doing it. It is interesting to read the handwritten note "Probable value 12d" which, as we know, turned out to be 6d. All this playing around with the face values shows how difficult it was for Captain Cliff to make up his mind, probably torn between realistic values that matched postal needs but also values high enough to bring in much needed collectors money! The bottom row shows the Jethou high value with a note reading "probable value 18d", which is in fact the adopted value for this design. Here again there are two more copies drawn by pencil that never got around to being coloured. Interestingly at his stage the lettering is totally different, less stylish than the final issued version and the face value is blank on all the stamps.

Once the final designs were approved, the printer printed various proofs in different colours for approval by Captain Cliff. These proofs are elusive, but they do come up on the market regularly. This collection however has several of the proofs approved in writing by Captain Cliff. Of course they are unique.

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The collection continues with similar rarities of the next issues that I am planning to cover in forthcoming articles.



Figure 8
Artist's sketch for three values