

INTRODUCTION - JENNIFER TOOMBS



Jennifer Toombs was a Suffolk artist who has designed postage stamps for countries around the world. She was working for a firm of industrial designers, Eric Marshall Associates (EMA), for about a year and one of their clients was De la Rue. They were a multi-faceted company that produced items from central heating boilers, playing cards, currency and postage stamps. Their stamp production studios in London was overwhelmed with work and they asked EMA if they could do some of this work. This launched her career as a stamp designer aged 22 years old. Her first work included Lebanon (IV Mediterranean Games), Three “re-drawings” for Saudi Arabia and Nicaragua, full-coloured illustrations of Pre-Columbian Art.

Her main problem was adjusting to the scale of the postage stamps and the time frame from design to stamp production was in the region of 4 to 7 months..

On the night Sir Winston Churchill died, Jennifer Toombs heard on the radio that the US Post Office was planning to release a stamp issue to honour him. Her inspiration came from a “vision” of a famous photo taken during the war of St. Paul’s Cathedral standing intact, in the middle of billowing smoke and flames, like Mount Doom in “Lord of the Rings” with the great Cross illuminated from the light of the fire.

She felt this was a wonderful symbol of Churchill’s defiance in the face of all odds, of how he rallied our people to stand against the evils of Nazism, especially during the Blitz.

Her design was submitted by the security printers, Harrison & Sons, to the Crown Agents, who adopted it, for the Crown Colonies Omnibus issue.

After her second successful Crown Agents Omnibus issue, the 27 country UNESCO issue, she left EMA to become a free-lance designer. She began working for Crown Agents directly, as well as Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation (IGPC) and various postal administrations throughout the world.

THE HEART OF CHRISTMAS

In an article published in the Stamp Magazine December 1969 issue she writes that:

“Of the vast range and variety of subjects for stamp issues presented to a designer, few are more challenging than the perennial Christmas theme. There are more variations in this subject alone than in any other: not only variations on the original Theme—the Nativity—but a host of secular topics, which increase in number with each year. For it is in the design of a Christmas stamp that the biggest headaches usually occur: The challenge of meeting with the demands of two basic schools of thought, the religious and the secular, and at the same time, conforming to one's own particular standard of design. However enjoyable may be the task of designing a Christmas issue, especially when one is given a free choice of ideas (and plenty of imagination to boot) it is, paradoxically, when one does have a free hand that the biggest challenges occur. It is somewhat gratifying at times, then, if a client can be slightly more specific in stipulating subject-matter, provided there is still plenty of scope for the designer's imagination.

Normally the client (the Territory concerned, represented by the Crown Agents) specifies the category—secular or religious, and I have nearly always been commissioned to produce designs of a latter nature. Even so, the choice of material for a sacred subject alone is enormous, not to mention, methods of presentation and variety of technique.

First and foremost, a Christmas stamp of this nature should have universal appeal, and that is why the Nativity—the heart of Christmas—has been shown on stamps more than any other Yuletide subject. The most popular method of presentation has been the use of reproductions of paintings of the Nativity by the Old Masters. This technique has been employed by New Zealand over a number of years, but several other British Territories (and of course, the United Kingdom in 1967) have followed suit, and I have had a hand in preparing Christmas designs for Malawi and St Lucia, in 1968, in this fashion.

The subject matter for this theme is so vast that the designer would usually expect some direction from the authorities.”

MALAWI CHRISTMAS STAMP ISSUES

The 1967 Malawi Christmas stamps was the beginning of a number of Jennifer Toombs designs that would be used.

The exhibit illustrates the progressive artwork for the 1967 and 1969 Christmas issues. She was also involved with the 1968 Christmas issue stamps and miniature sheet.

The exhibit will illustrate that designs suggested for other countries, in this case Gibraltar, can be adapted to meet other countries requirements.

REFERENCES

Southern and Central Commonwealth Stamp Catalogue, Stanley Gibbons., Stamp Magazine 1969, Great Britain’s Collectors Club “The Chronicle” In the Spotlight, January, 2002. ,Malawi Posts Corporation, and Personal Research

SCOPE OF EXHIBIT

This exhibit aims to illustrate the development of an idea, to the design of a stamp using the progression of the artwork in the 1967 and 1969 Malawi Christmas issues

EXHIBIT OUTLINE::

Pages 1 gives a brief introduction to Jennifer Toombs work ; **Pages 2 and 3** shows the initial ideas that were presented to Gibraltar; **Pages 4 and 5** illustrate the stages of Artwork in the 1967 Malawi Christmas Artwork; **Pages 6,7 and 8** depict the progression of artwork in the 1969 Malawi Christmas Artwork.

1967 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - GIBRALTAR

“ Early In 1967, Jennifer Toombs was asked to submit two designs on a religious theme to Gibraltar. This was her first attempt at a Christmas stamp design and she decided to work on two entirely different techniques;

The first design would be an adaption of the beautiful Byzantine mosaic portrait at Ravenna of the Virgin and Child, and for the second, a straightforward presentation of a nativity scene.



The Byzantine mosaic design was presented in two forms, the first showing the Holy Mother and Child in Majesty in a sumptuous setting, the use of gold ink emphasising the rich mosaic-like quality without the use of the actual ‘tiles’ which would have been lost in the ultimate size of the stamp. The design was enclosed in the normal white guttering and the Queen’s head – from the Whiteley silhouette - was in white. The lettering was authentic, similar to that seen on works of art of the Byzantine period and the whole stamp was asymmetrical.



The alternative was very similar to the first, using a symmetrical format. The figures’ this time without the chair used in the first design, which is in the original mosaic portrait, were framed in the ‘Mandorla’, in blue, taken up by the Virgin’s robes, and the overall effect resembled an early illustrated manuscript rather than the mosaic.

1967 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - GIBRALTAR

The second presentation was an original idea showing the Holy family in silhouette with a 'glow' emanating from the manger fading into a colour which then faded into the same shade as the figures, ensuring the maximum 'glow' effect possible.

The figures of Mary and Joseph are depicted either side of the manger, Mary bareheaded and in a simple robe and Joseph younger than usually portrayed. The lettering is, in this instance, after the style of that in the Book of Kells, a type of Gaelic script. The letter 'G', although somewhat unusual, is authentic.



These designs were rejected by Gibraltar but were passed on to the Malawi Postal Authorities for their consideration together with 2 other designs.

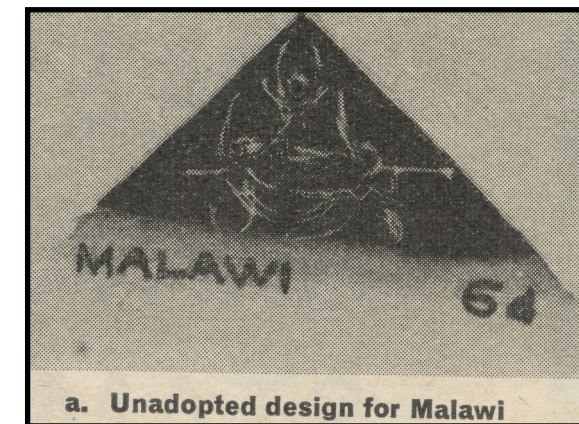
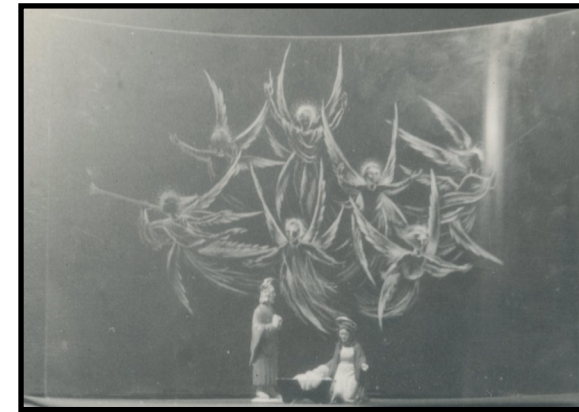
The first two were not considered and the 'Gibraltar' issue was accepted by the Malawi Postal Authorities for their 1967 Christmas issue.



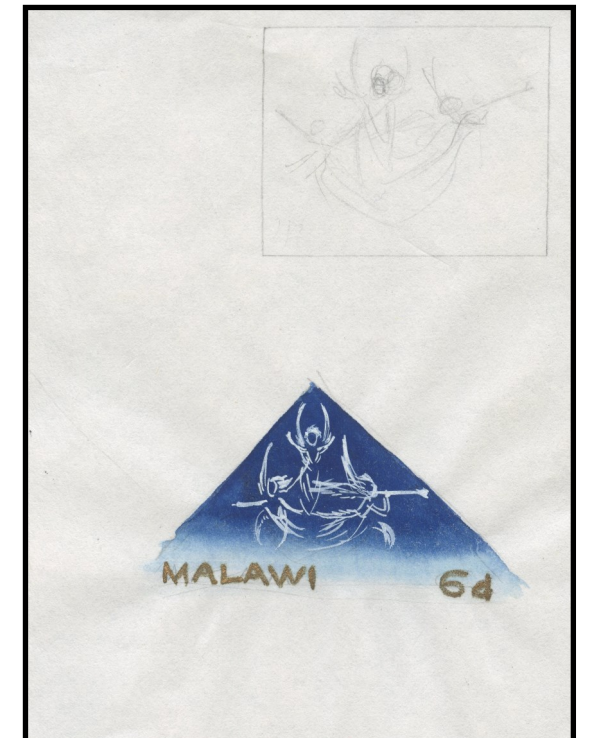
1967 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - MALAWI

In developing possible themes the artist will produce different drawings for the postal authorities to consider. Some are not submitted whilst others are unadopted.

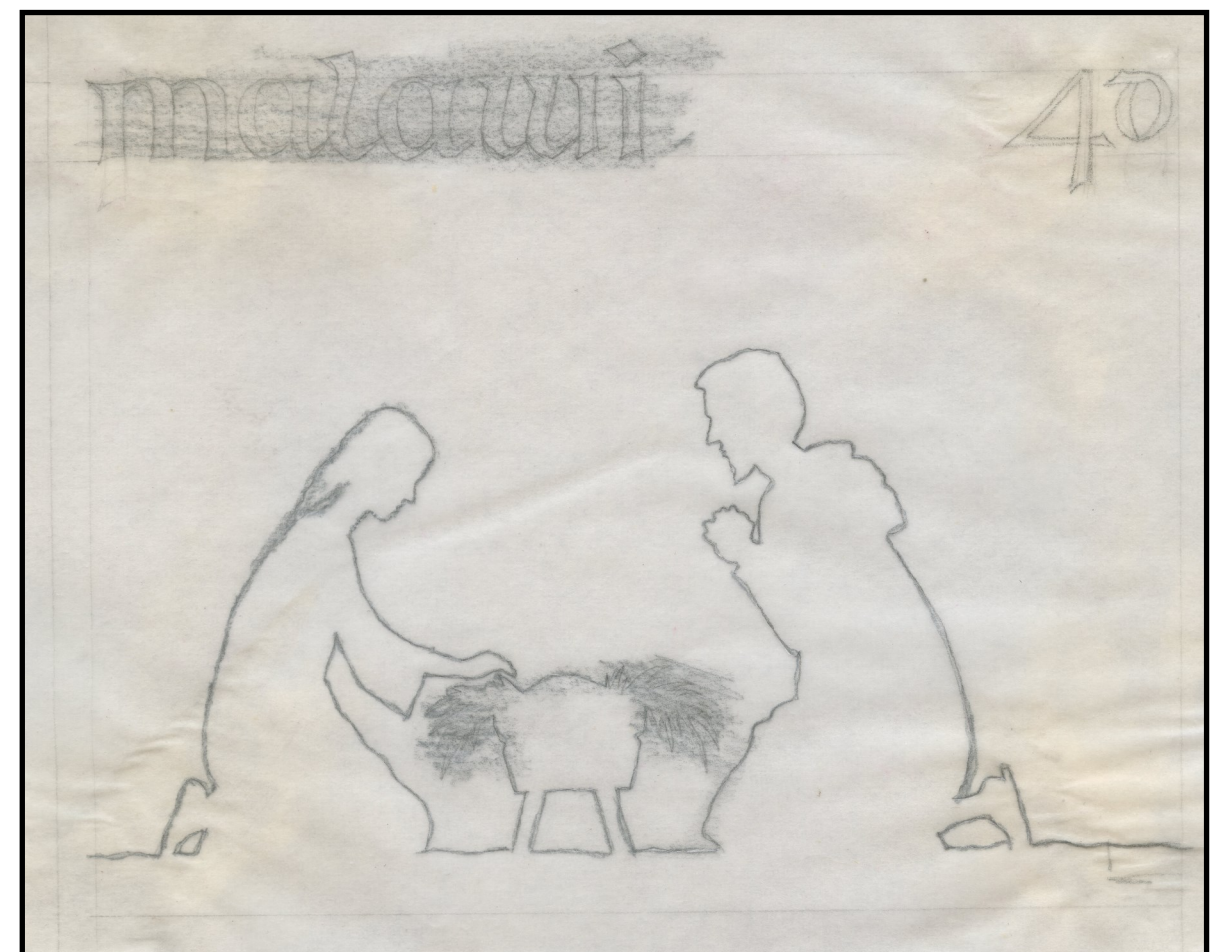
Below is an idea that was not submitted.



a. Unadopted design for Malawi



This unadopted idea was based on the design etched in plastic that is shown in the photograph.



The design that follows was one of the two designs submitted to Gibraltar but not used.

As Malawi were considering a four-stamp Christmas issue this design was submitted to them. It is a straight-forward presentation of the Holy Family, Mary and Joseph either side of the manger where a light emanates. The light emphasises the holiness and beauty of the scene and the glow is made more effective by showing the top of the design in the same colour as the figures. Both Mary and Joseph are portrayed as young people ; Mary, in a simple gown, tends to the Christ Child whilst Joseph looks on, his hands clasped in adoration.

The second background colour had to change with each value so three different colours were submitted, each suggestive of a certain Spiritual quality; rose-red for Love; golden-yellow for Joy and blue for Peace.

The final colours chosen by Malawi were close to the originals proposed and the luminosity was retained.

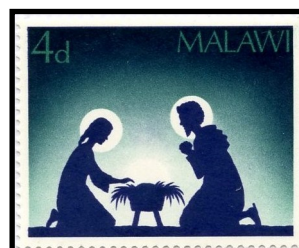
1967 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - MALAWI

Malawi chose the nativity scene, but requested that the lettering be changed to a simpler style. Since this would be a four stamp issue, and they asked that three additional colours be submitted to comply with the change in value. The colour of the figures though would be common to all values.



The four individual stamps from standard large sheets are perforated 14x14 1/2. The miniature sheet was perforation 14x 13 1/2.

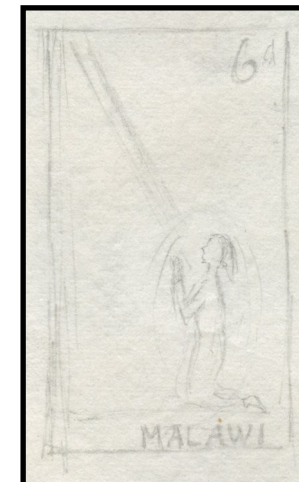
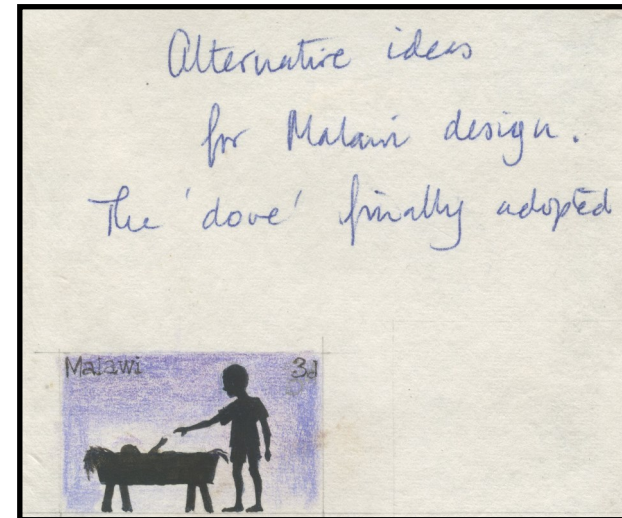
They were issued on 21st November 1967.



1969 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - MALAWI

Four designs on a religious theme were prepared , two embodying the Christmas Story and the next two linking the Nativity with the world today.

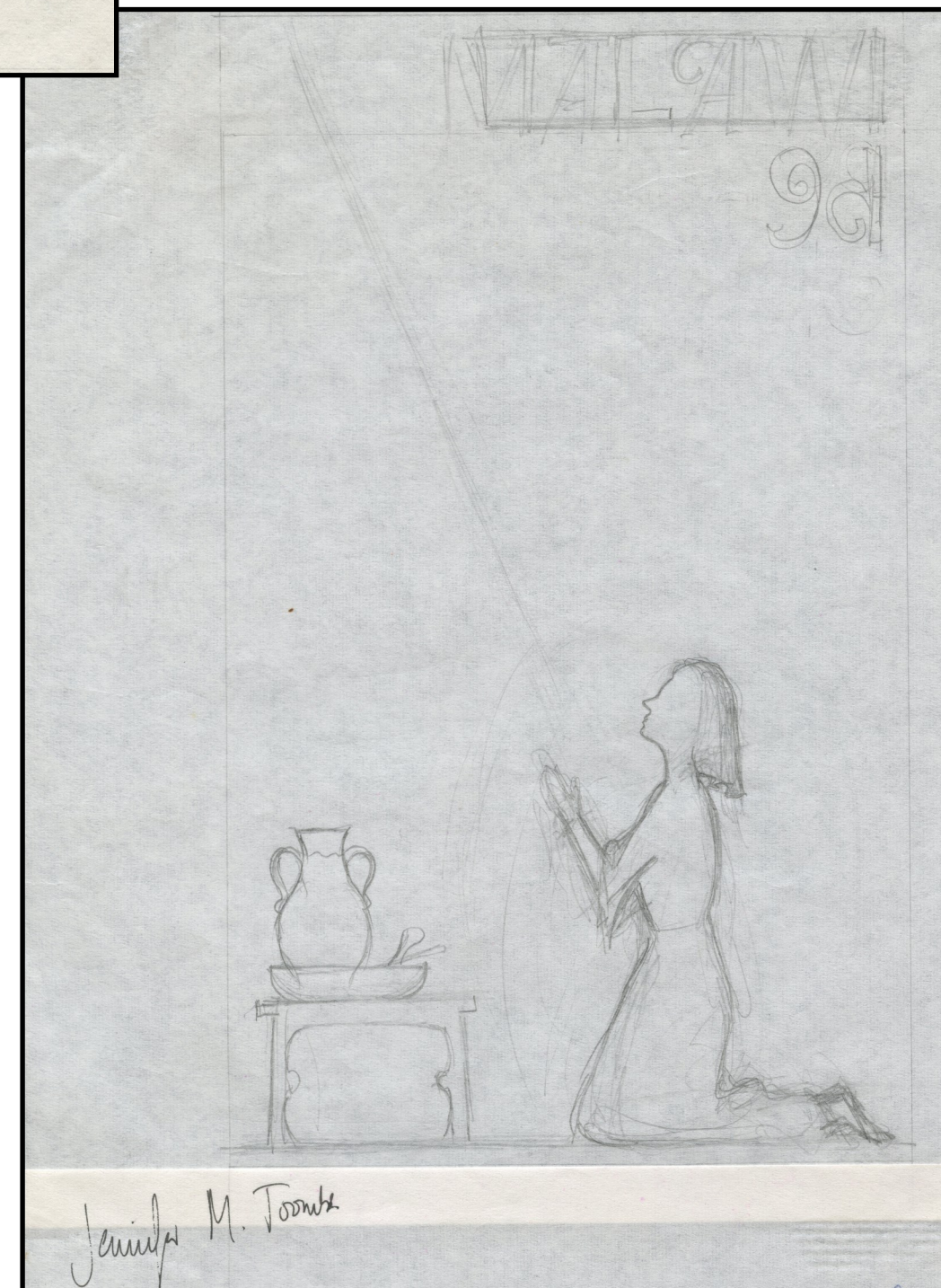
One idea shows a little African boy beside the manger and reaching out to hold hands with the Christ Child. The message of hope and joy is available to all, regardless of the colour or creed. The little boy here is intended to symbolise the simplicity of the child's faith.



The second idea, shown to the right as a faint pencil sketch, was to depict not an angel but a shaft of light from heaven before which Mary knelt, rapt in prayer, and with a glow around her. As with the Christmas 1967 issue, the basic colour (this time purple-black) is repeated above to emphasize the glow around the Blessed Virgin Mary during the Annunciation and the name and value are reversed out of the heavier colour so as to show the 'value' colour.

Simple household implements, such as a pestle a mortar, and an ewer, were shown on a table beside the kneeling figure in the final rough submitted.

This was eventually adopted for the cover design for the Convention of the Guild of St. Gabriel held in the Church of Notre Dame, London on 2nd October, 1971.



1969 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - MALAWI

The technique for a **third design** could well have called for a style based on brass rubbings, indicative of the sumptuous effect and grandeur of the three kings and their gifts. Gold throughout was suggested for the figures and main heading with the change in background and white value. The Three Kings were said to have come from different countries:

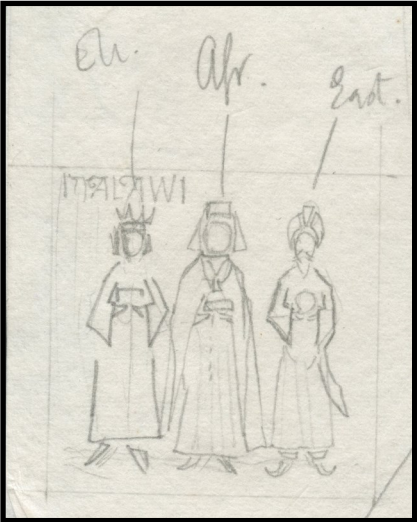
Melchoir, the bringer of gold is based here on a Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Byzantine finery and forked beard; **Caspar**, the Ethiopian, holds a flagon of frankincense and appears in the robes of a tribal king whilst **Balthazar** might well have come from Persia and his finery is based on that worn by a figure in a Persian miniature.

The lettering was to be of mediaeval character.

The **fourth idea** was to show a dove , representing Peace , flying over a silhouette of a typical city. Just above the skyline hovers a star, the Star of Bethlehem.

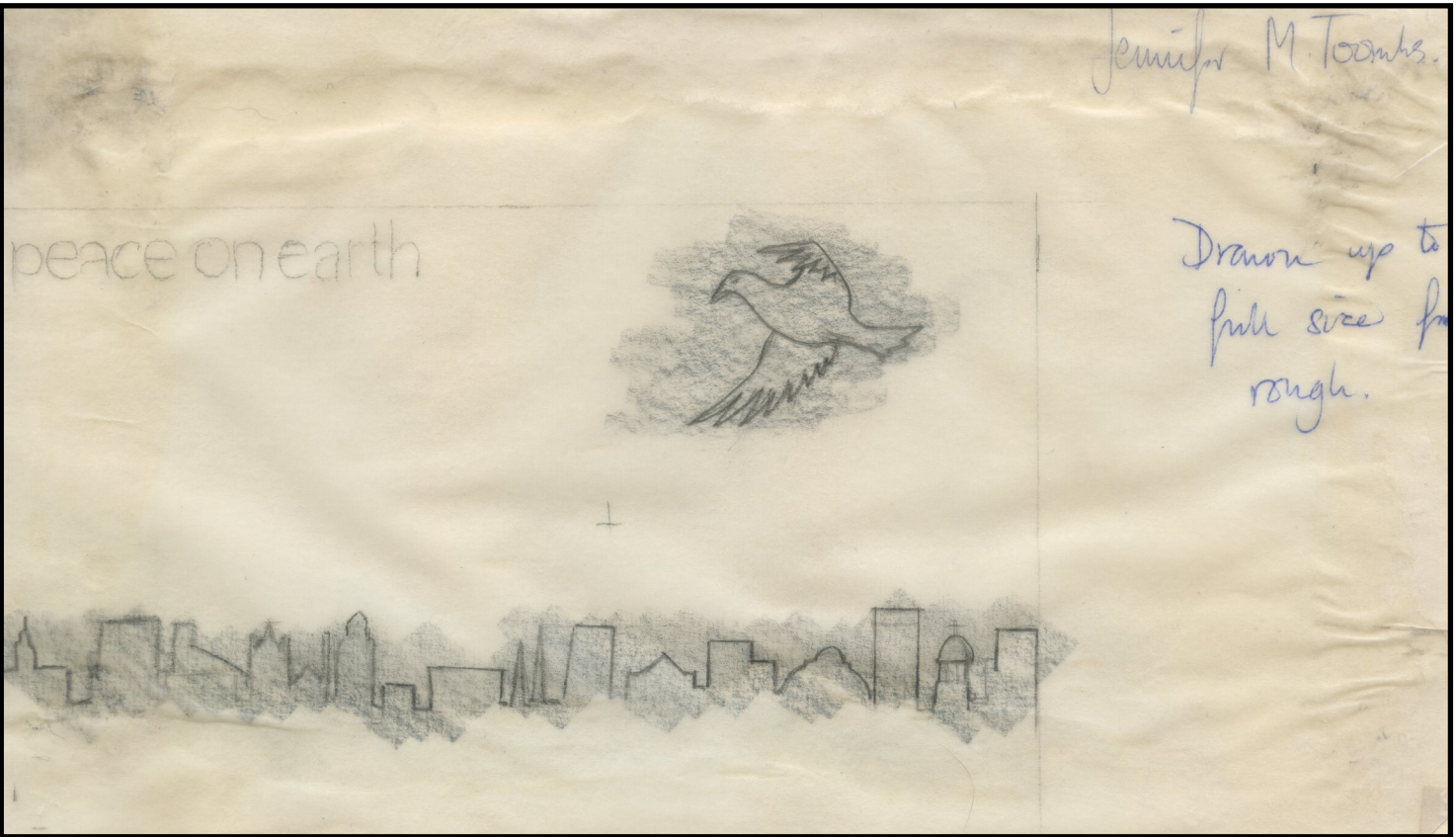
The artist felt this theme could symbolise peace in a hectic and disturbed civilisation. This was the one chosen by the Postal Authorities in Malawi.

Two stages of the idea and a trace of the dove for the final artwork are shown here.



Drawn up to full size in rough

A general layout is shown for presentation on the right in rough 4 times the size of the stamp



1969 CHRISTMAS ISSUE - MALAWI

A rough sketch for a Miniature Sheet and a rough coloured design showing the positioning of the stamps.

The sheet comprises the set of five different value stamps and a label showing the Earth as seen from Apollo 11 next to the famous “Praying Hands” of Albrecht Durer.

This is intended to symbolise universal prayers for peace throughout the world, peace among individuals, creeds and nations, all ‘riders of this earth’ together.

The colour of the sky changes with each value, but that of the city skyline is common to all values, and with both dove and star white throughout.

The five values of stamps and the miniature sheet were issued on 5th November, 1969.

**Epilogue**

Jennifer Toombs was a highly prolific British graphic artist and stamp designer, widely regarded as one of the most significant figures in the world of philately.

She was so influential that collectors coined the term "**Toombsiana**" to describe the body of work produced by those who specifically collect her designs rather than stamps from a particular country.

Apart from her Malawi designs, she was involved with several hundred sets of stamps for over 70 different countries and territories.

She had a lifelong passion for Pitcairn Island. Following a research visit in 1966, she became a central figure in the island's philatelic history and served as the President of the Pitcairn and Norfolk Islands Society for over 30 years.

She passed away on April 2, 2018 in Saxmundham, Suffolk.