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Dental Themes on Stamps

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ALTHOUGH health and medical themes have been well publicised on numerous postage stamps from many countries, the world's postal authorities have so far shown a marked reluctance to produce issues exemplifying dental health and dental topics. Conspicuous by their absence in this field are the postage stamps of Great Britain.

One of the few countries to take advantage of the postal service was the Netherlands in 1977 when the centenary of the introduction of dental training was being celebrated. The postal authorities issued a set of stamps promoting dental health. The stamps carried a design symbolising various aspects of dental care; sound teeth, healthy gums and incorporated a mouth mirror and teeth.

The Netherlands was in fact the first country to produce a stamp pictorially promoting care of the teeth, and in 1954 a 'Child Welfare' set was issued illustrating children's activities, one of which showed a young girl brushing her teeth (fig 1).



Fig 1

The protection of teeth by the chemical treatment of public water supplies was promoted by Brazil in 1976 on the occasion of the 3rd International Congress of Odontology held in that country. The stamp highlighted the benefits of water fluoridation in reducing tooth decay, still a contentious issue in many areas of the United Kingdom, notwithstanding the British Dental Association's postal meter mark slogan – 'Fluoridation halves tooth decay.'

In 1977, the tiny island of Niue with a population of some 4,000 and situated some 1,500 miles north east of New Zealand, issued three stamps to show the progress in its health services. Niue is one of the islands formed by an outcrop of coral reefs in the South Pacific which make up the Cook Islands. One stamp, valued 15 cents, depicts a mobile school dental clinic plus a picture of a smiling dentist with his patient seated in the chair (fig 2).



Fig 2

As elsewhere, the introduction of 'Western' diets in which soft and sugary foods predominate, had inevitably adverse effects on the children's teeth.

New Zealand which administers the island, produced a long running annual series of 'Health' stamps including one in 1971 marking the Golden Jubilee of the country's school dental service, claimed to be

the first of its kind in the World. The stamp shows a dental nurse offering a tooth brush to a young boy – both of them displaying broad smiles (fig 3).



Fig 3

As well as stamps and postmarks embodying slogans with a dental theme, the contributions made by scientists to dentistry are also acknowledged and featured on postage stamps of many countries. Hyacinthe Vincent (1852-1950), a French physician and bacteriologist who studied oral disease, particularly the periodontal condition, now known as Acute Ulcerative Gingivitis, formerly ‘Vincent’s Disease’, has his portrait displayed on a 50 centimes postage stamp (fig 4).



Fig 4

The discovery of x-rays in 1895 by Wilhelm Conrad Roëntgen (1845-1923) revolutionised diagnostic practice in all branches of medicine and dentistry. His discovery is commemorated on a 150 peseta Spanish postage stamp issued to mark the VIIth European Congress of Radiology held in Barcelona in 1967 (fig 5).



Fig 5

Pierre Fauchard (c1678-1761) the ‘Father of Modern Dentistry’ is commemorated on a 50 centimes French postage stamp. His portrait, shows him holding what appears to be the title page of his monumental work *Le Chirurgien Dentiste*, a comprehensive text book which dealt with the causes and practical treatments of numerous dental conditions including an innovative approach to denture construction. He is credited with being one of the first to apply practical methods to the correction of dental irregularities – Orthodontics (fig 6).



Fig 6

Perhaps, one day the United Kingdom postal authorities will issue long overdue stamps in recognition of the achievements of the eminent British campaigners, medical and dental who contributed so much to the development of dentistry.

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