

The Many Faces of St George and the Dragon

Stamp designer, Anselmo Torres, explained the background to his Gibraltar St George's stamps during an exclusive interview with Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS. Some of the stamp concepts and original artwork for the issue are published here for the first time

Peter Jennings: *How did you come to get the commission to design the St George stamps and miniature sheet?*

Anselmo Torres: The stamps were commissioned by the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau early in 2002 for issue later that year. The original commission was for one stamp depicting the coat of arms of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St George, to celebrate the 1700th anniversary of the martyrdom of St George. However, the stamp issue was postponed until 2003 and the project expanded.

While preparing rough drawings of the Cross of the Order, the Bureau asked me to expand the theme of St George's connection with the Constantinian Order to three stamps and a souvenir sheet.

My brief was to establish a local connection with St George and England. Help was at hand from the Constantinian Order's website. Monsignor Coronato Grima, parish priest of St Joseph's Catholic church in Gibraltar, and local lawyer Tony Lombard, both members of the Constantinian Order, provided me with invaluable help throughout every stage of the project.

How did you research the project?

Monsignor Grima, a personal friend, lent me historical books on the myth of St George. He also provided me with extensive information about the Constantinian Order and the religious aspects of St George. Tony Lombard lent me his medal Cross of the Order, which I incorporated into my designs.

Meanwhile, Chris Riddell, Managing Director of the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau, became personally involved.

He provided me with a sketch that linked the three elements: St George, Gibraltar, and England. From the artwork I submitted, he selected the Cross of the Constantinian Order, the flag of England, the standard of St George, and the stained glass window situated in St Joseph's church.

Too aggressive

The Bureau commissioned, Christian Hook, a local artist, to design the souvenir sheet. In the final artwork, I was asked to change the face of St George because the original looked too aggressive and not saintly enough.

Please take me through your designs step by step, explaining why certain designs were either accepted or rejected.

Chris Riddell wanted the stamps to look medieval, as if they were suspended on a banner with poles along the top and bottom, similar to the ones seen in knightly tournaments. My inspiration came from King's Chapel, the oldest chapel in Gibraltar. Many military battle colours are suspended from the sides of the church, so I prepared sketches of the pole ends that held the flags.

A floral sketch was chosen and used as a template. I designed the final version on my computer, adding a dragon symbol to one end of the pole head and the shield of St George to the other. This was done using a metal embossing

technique to make it look as if the emblems were embossed on the metal caps.

Chris Riddell planned to extend the banner theme to the sheetlets and asked me to produce a set of proofs to see if it would work. It was a challenge for the printers, as registration had to be accurate. The House of Questa pre-press team did an excellent job.

Finally, I should like to thank the Gibraltar Philatelic Bureau's hard working team, especially Bureau Manager, Glendon Martinez, for their input and helpful comments on this and other stamp issues they have commissioned me to design.

Alternative designs for two of the stamps



Design elements (below) and a new face for St George (below left)

