

The Gibraltar 1977 Definitive 'Nature' Issue

The Butterfly Designs

Designer: AG (Freddy) Ryman

Date of Issue: 1st April 1977

Printers: The House of Questa Limited, Camberwell, London

Printing Process: Lithography

Watermark: Multiple Crown CA Diagonal

This is Part 1 of 4 articles highlighting the review process undertaken in the production of the Nature Definitive Issue. This instalment presents an overview of the complete issue, then focusses on the designs for the four Butterfly stamps, showing:

- **Colour essays of the subject matter for each design, painted on thick card 172mm x 258mm, with Preview Proof attached**
- **Preliminary colour roughs of each design, produced on thin card 230mm x 200mm, signed by Mr. Ryman with the issued stamp cancelled on the first day of issue and the draft wording for the caption on the obverse of the stamp**
- **The colour butterfly design for the first day cover cachet with the four butterfly stamps adhered.**

The essays and colour roughs also show notes by the Designer.



Figure 1. 1977 'Nature' Definitives – The Butterflies.

Overview of the 1977 Nature Definitive Issue Design Process

The 'Nature' set was commissioned in 1976 and intended to be issued that same year but was delayed until 1st April 1977, mainly due to the review process taking longer than expected. The original set of 'Nature' definitives comprised 16 stamps, four each covering four different classes of flora and fauna native to Gibraltar.

There was a reasonably stringent review process used in the production of these definitives. In Freddy's own words, taken from the notes he made at the time:

"The sixteen stamps in the 1976 Definitive Issue depict nature on the Rock and is composed of four of each fish, plants, butterflies and birds which either reside or migrate in Gibraltar - These specimens were selected by the Stamp Advisory Committee with the help of the Gibraltar Ornithologists Association and the Curator of the Gibraltar Museum:

- *Fish (Levy Cazes)*
 1. *John Dory*
 2. *Red Mullet*
 3. *Wrasse (Bodion)*
 4. *Swordfish.*
- *Butterflies (J. L. Rodriguez)*
 1. *Swallow-tail*
 2. *Red Admiral*
 3. *Pale Clouded Yellow (Orange tipped)*
 4. *Large Blue.*
- *Flowers (Joe (Pepe) Cortes)*
 1. *Scilla peruviana*
 2. *Allium roseum*
 3. *Coronilla valentina glauca*
 4. *Red Poker Aloe.*
- *Birds [believed to have been proposed by Clive Finlayson?]*
 1. *Sardinian Warbler*
 2. *Black Kite*
 3. *Audouin's Gull*
 4. *Hoopoe.*"¹

There were further reviews of the selected specimens including from other people, resulting in some of the above suggestions not making it into the final set for a variety of reasons, where known explained with the detailed overviews of the specific stamps below.

Whilst the new set was heralded as a significant success for Freddy, there was some dissension over the way the release was publicised. John Gonzalez commented on the new stamps in his "Postmark" feature in the Gibraltar Chronicle on the 1st April 1977 *"Another change in the new stamps is the £2 value. On this subject I will not comment for the time being, but leave it to you the stamp collector to come to your own conclusion"*².

The implication was that the issue of the new £2 value was intended to maximise revenues from the Philatelist market. This view is compounded by the actions of the Gibraltar Minister for Postal Services, Mr. Abecasis, at whose behest an article on the stamps appeared in the April 1977 issue of the UK "Stamp Magazine" – with a complete set of the stamps given away free with every copy purchased. John Gonzalez goes on to comment – *"The Minister for Postal Services, conscious of the potentials in advertising our stamps, has gone out of his way in making it the success it merits – April's Stamp Magazine will contain special features on Gibraltar and a free packet of the new definitives will be given with every issue"*².

The Editor of this same Stamp Magazine, Mr. Richard West, was one of the few critics of the new issue, stating later in the "Stamp Corner" feature of the Calpe News published on 21st April 1978 that *"the heavy frames detract attention from the subject"*³. When asked in the same article if he thought Gibraltar was going too far in producing "gimmicks" to enhance sales, especially with the American market, Mr. West comments *"It cannot escape notice that the number of gimmicks has increased sharply since the visit to New York in March 1975 by Mr. Abecasis and Mr. J.L. Hoare, the then Postmaster"*³.

The stamps were first shown to the public at the Gibraltar Philatelic Society's "Silver Jubilee Celebration" Stamp Exhibition held in John Mackintosh Hall on the 7th February 1977, over 7 weeks prior to them being issued. However, the postal rates had changed on the 1st January 1977, eliminating all ½p values from the rates so it was clearly known that the ½p and 2½p stamp values were redundant long before the stamps were issued. The Gibraltar Chronicle commented *"The set however includes a ½p and 2½p value, which under the new charges will be of little use, there being no odd ½p rates now in existence"*⁴. One of the "gimmicks", maybe? Certainly the ½p is one of the most common Gibraltar stamps - it was even reprinted yet again in 1982 on chalk-surfaced paper, over 5 years after the ½p rates were removed!

The Butterflies

Not all of the original suggestions outlined above made it on to the final stamps. During the review process prior to the publication of the stamps, the Stamp Advisory Committee specifically asked for the butterflies to be reviewed by Mr. Joaquin Bensusan¹, Curator of the Gibraltar Museum and an authority on entomology in Gibraltar.

Figure 2 shows the original essay for what became the 2p value, of The Large Blue (Maculinea arion), showing the colour study of the butterfly, male and female abdomen and an antenna.

In his review of this essay Mr. Bensusan suggested the need for great care with the detail of the Large Blue “as there are over 17 different Blues so similar that specialists have to open them to identify them”¹. Mr. Bensusan provided the required detail.

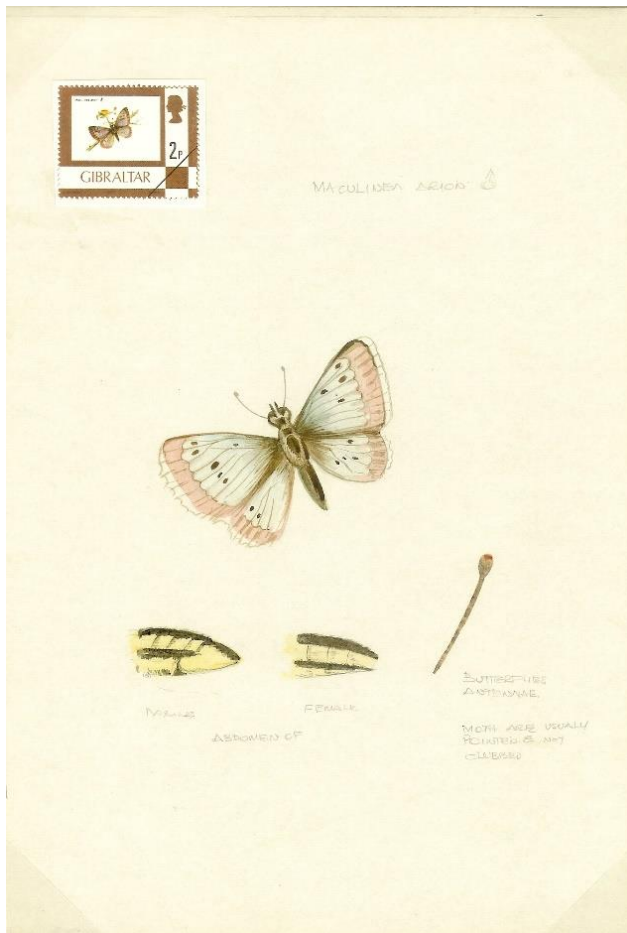


Figure 2. The Large Blue Butterfly Essay (2p).

identified this essay as being the male (♂) and the comment below the butterfly antenna about moths' antennae usually being pointed rather than “clubbed” or rounded at the tip.

Figure 3 shows the original colour rough for the 2p value depicting The Large Blue.

The exact match between the colour design in this rough, the printer's draft on the essay and the final stamp issued is clear to see. The design obviously changed little if at all between these initial drafts and the final issue, due in large part to the detailed feedback from Mr. Bensusan.

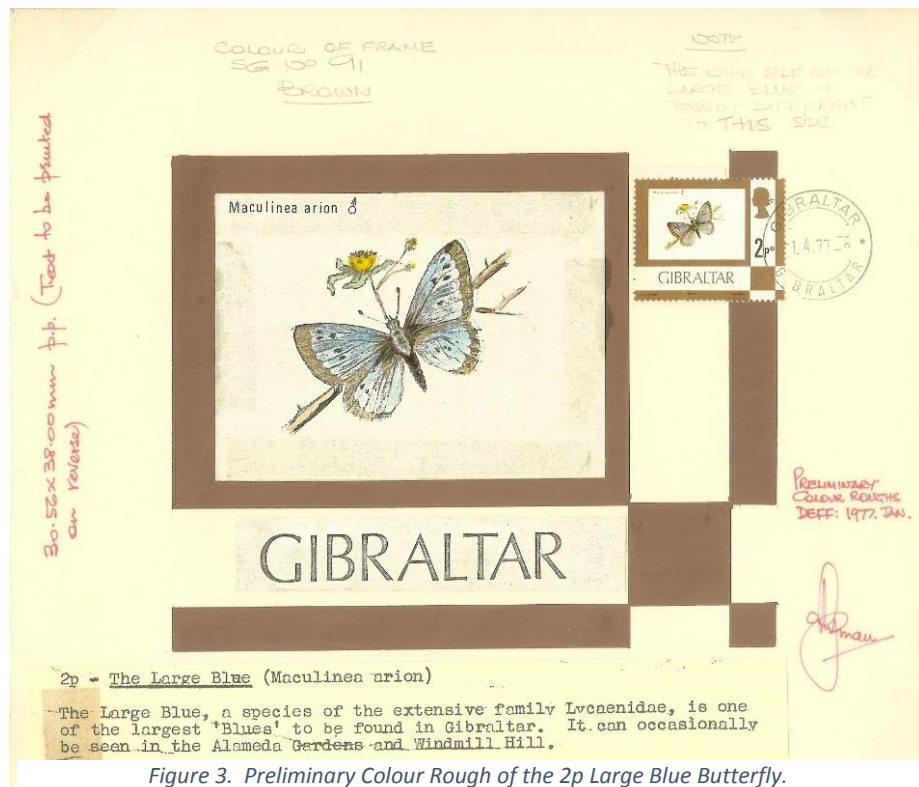


Figure 3. Preliminary Colour Rough of the 2p Large Blue Butterfly.

The designer's notes state the “Colour of frame SG No. 91 Brown” and “The other side of the Large Blue is totally different to this side”.

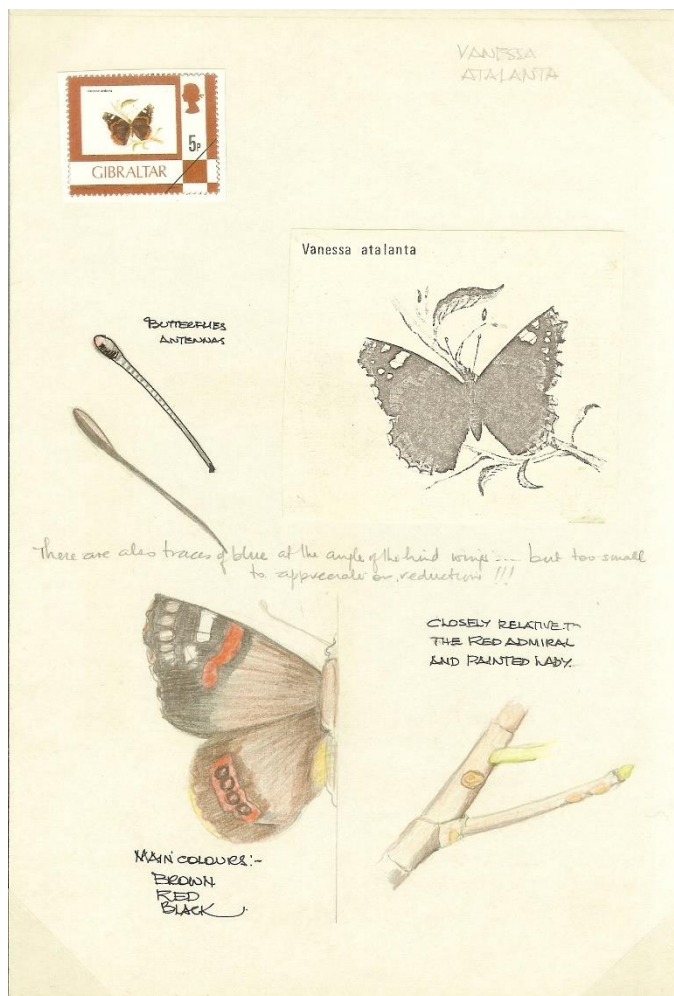


Figure 4. The Red Admiral Butterfly Essay (5p value).

Figure 4 shows the original essay of the Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*), showing a colour study of antennae and the butterfly along with a bromide showing the butterfly on a branch as used for the final stamp image. The designer comments about traces of blue in the angle of the hind wing being too small to appreciate or even see when reduced to size required for the stamp.

Mr. Bensusan approved the suggested Red Admiral design without comment¹. Note the detail in the bromide even though it is only black & white and how accurately it is replicated in the printer's draft.

Figure 5 shows the original colour rough for the 5p value showing the Red Admiral. Note the close match between the colour design in this rough, the bromide on the essay and the final stamp issued. The design obviously changed little if at all between these initial drafts and the final issue.

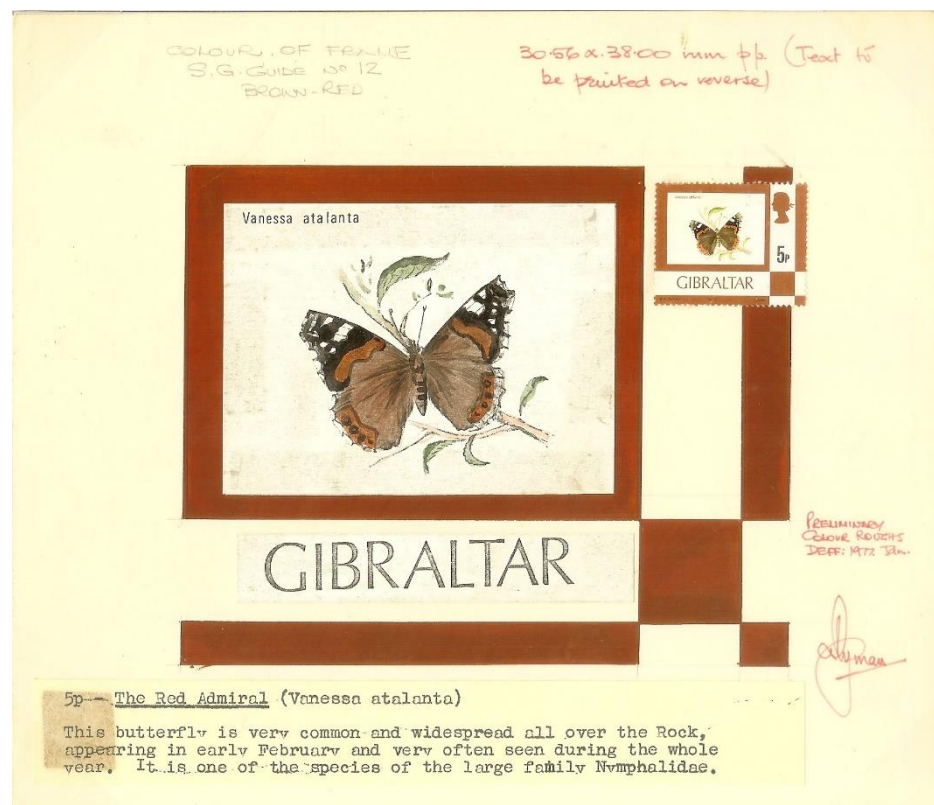


Figure 5. Preliminary Colour Rough of the Red Admiral 5p Stamp



Figure 6. The Clouded Yellow Butterfly Essay (12p).

The butterfly originally proposed for the 12p was the *Colias hyale* (the Pale Clouded Yellow). However, when reviewing the original proposal from Jose Luis Rodriguez for the specimens to be used Mr. Bensusan commented that “*the Pale Clouded Yellow (Colias hyale) has not been seen in Gibraltar for over 10 years, the Colias crocea (Clouded Yellow), which is a yellow/orange colour butterfly is suggested – it is very common in Gibraltar*”¹. This was accepted. Figure 6 shows the essay of the specimen recommended by Mr. Bensusan, the Clouded Yellow (*Colias crocea*), showing the main essay and the head of a butterfly.

This artwork shows the very fine and detailed work the Artist was capable of. The faint pencilled writing points out the main features of the head of a butterfly – from the top, *Antenna, Palp, Eye, Proboscis, Degenerali – Foreleg*.

Figure 7 shows the original colour rough for the 12p, of the Clouded Yellow. Note the designer’s concern over the black frame of the design, which was later changed to yellow for release. Compare this to the comments he made regarding the yellow frame originally intended for the £1, shown below!

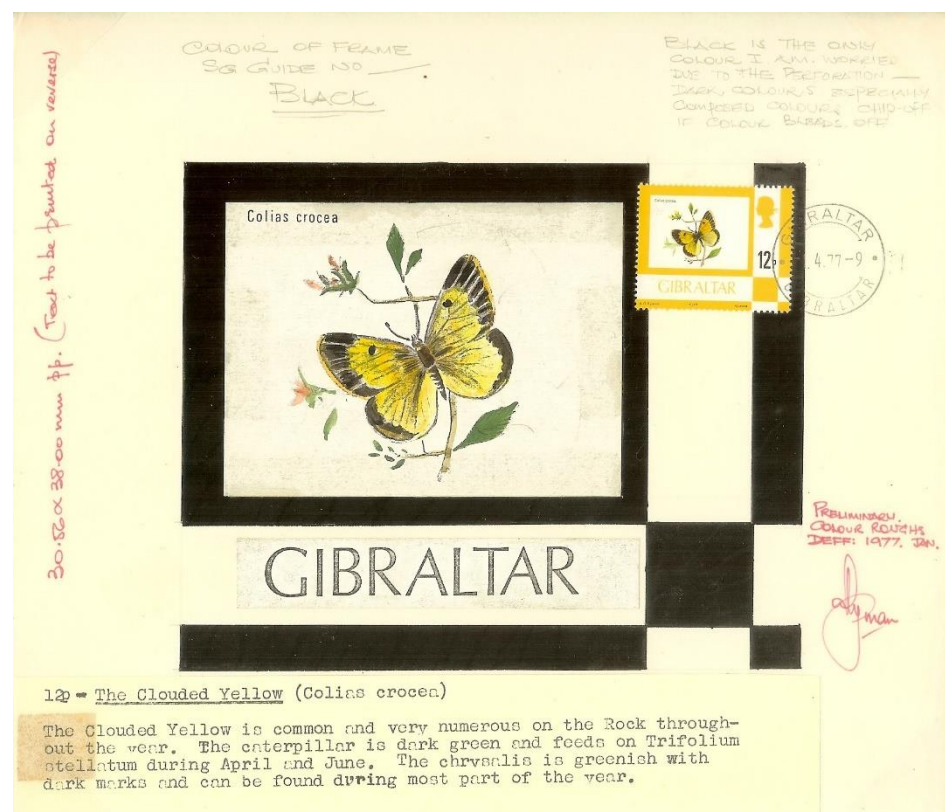


Figure 7. Preliminary Colour Rough of the Clouded Yellow 12p Stamp.

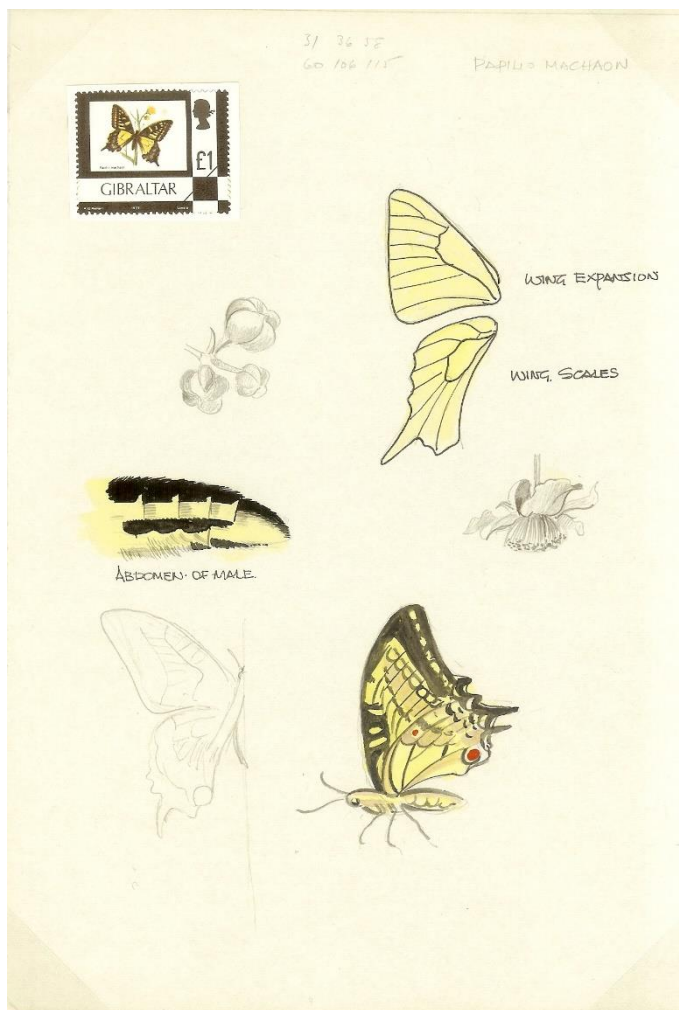


Figure 8. The Swallowtail Butterfly Essay.

Figure 8 shows the original essay for the £1, of the Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*), showing a colour study of the wing, the flowers, male abdomen and butterfly.

This is the only one of the Butterfly essays that shows drawings of the flowers used in the final drawings. Note the numbers in pencil at the top of the drawing, these are the reference numbers of the colours used in the drawings:

- 31 = Lemon
- 36 = Bistre
- 58 = Grey-Green
- 60 = Deep blue-green
- 106 = Red
- 115 = Black.

Figure 9 shows the original colour rough for the £1, of the Swallowtail. Note in the top right, the designer expresses his disquiet about the use of the lemon colour for the frame. He raised similar concerns over the black frame in the rough of the 12p – and ended up swapping the colours of these two stamps!



Figure 9. Preliminary Colour Rough of the Swallowtail Butterfly (£1).



Figure 10. The Butterfly First Day Cover Cachet Design Artwork.

Figure 10 shows the original essay of the proposed design for the Butterfly first day cover.

Although the blue butterfly is similar, none of the butterflies shown in this artwork are the same as those depicted on the stamps. Also, there are only three butterflies depicted in the design, when there were four stamps with butterflies in the set.

Note the stylised “*draftsman*” type signature just above “Official” in the design – so familiar to philatelists from his FDC designs, but very different from the normal hand-written signatures on the colour roughs and other works he signs by hand.

Designs were done for all four categories of stamps in the set, as highlighted in the Chronicle – “*Freddy has also designed the set of four First Day Covers which will be on sale today, bearing four of the stamps on each cover*”².

However, no covers with these designs appear to have actually been used for the first day of issue. There were three covers actually used, clearly labelled “Low Values” for holding the lowest eight values (½p to 6p), “Medium Values” for displaying the four values 9p to 20p and “High Values” for showing the 25p to £1 stamps, each cover cachet showing one of each flora & fauna type as shown in figures 11, 12 & 13.



Figure 11. Low Values First Day Cover



Figure 13. Medium Values First Day Cover

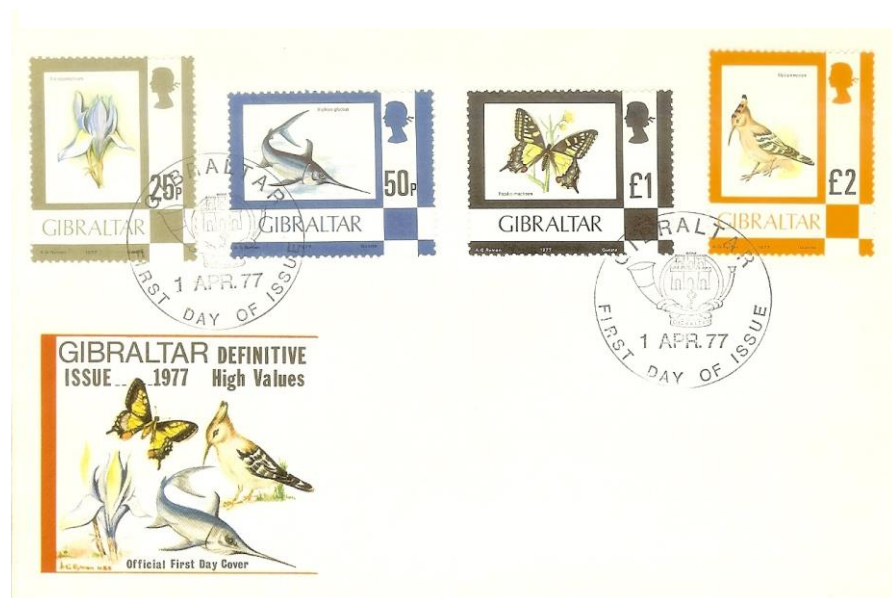


Figure 12. Medium Values First Day Cover

In terms of “gimmicks”, given the potential for thematic collecting of the individual fish, flower, bird and butterfly FDCs, this was probably a mistake!

The next instalment will cover the design of the four Bird designs of the Nature Definitives.

References:

- [1] – The artist’s personal notes from 1976/7 held as part of the collection of the author.
- [2] – “Postmark” feature, by John Gonzalez, Gibraltar Chronicle, 1st April 1977.
- [3] – “Stamp Corner” feature, by “Phil” - Page 8, Calpe News, 21st April 1978.
- [4] – Gibraltar Chronicle, 8th February 1977.