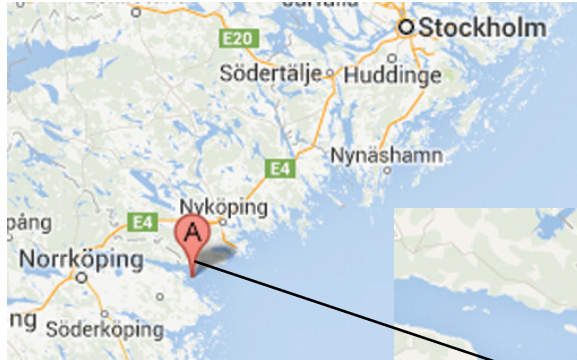


## *Cinderella Time:*

# Isö—the truth about a local post

By Christer Brunström

The stamps of Isö, a small Swedish island, continue to baffle worldwide collectors. Here is the background to these rather controversial stamps.



Isö is a tiny island located in the Baltic Sea some 45 kilometres from the City of Norrköping on the



East Coast of Sweden. It is very close to the Vikbolandet penin-

sula. At the time stamps were issued for Isö the nearest post office was at Vikbolandet half way between the island and Norrköping.

Thus there really is an island called Isö (or Ice Island in English). In summer the island has a population of some 20 people and I suppose it is uninhabited during the rest of the year.

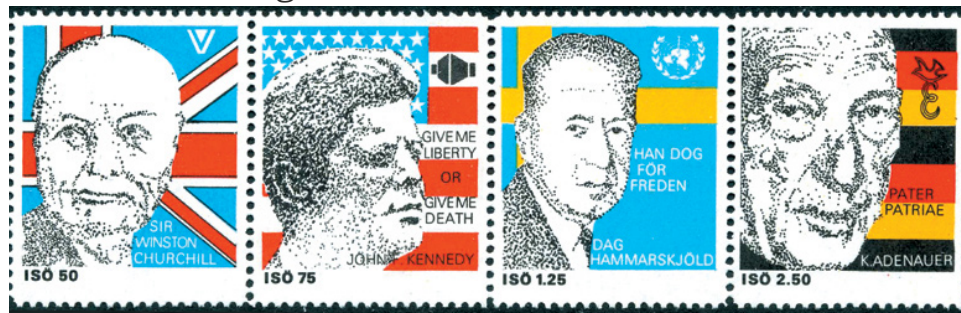
In the 1960s and '70s, the tenant of the island lived on the mainland. He ran a regular mail boat service to the island and mail to Isö was picked up at the Vikbolandet post office.

In 1968, the tenant had visited Guernsey in the Channel Islands and found out about the local carriage service between the island of Herm and Guernsey. The tenant of Herm operated a highly successful local mail service from 1949 until it was suppressed by Guernsey in 1969 at which time a Guernsey post office was opened on Herm. Herm of course released a number of highly collectable stamps.

Unlike Isö the island of Herm has a thriving tourist industry with thousands of visitors each year.

The tenant of Isö contacted the Swedish Postal Service about the feasibility of operating a similar mail service between Isö and Vikbolandet. It seems the postal officials had no real objections provided that the stamps did in no way look like Swedish postage stamps. Words like post or Sverige were not allowed. The local carriage stamp should be affixed to the lower left corner on postcards and on the back of covers. Swedish postage was of course needed for onward transmission.

In the summer of 1969, the first set of Isö stamps went on sale. The four stamps were printed in se-tenant format in sheets of 20. The stamps featured famous people: 50 öre Sir Winston Churchill, 75 öre John F. Kennedy, 1.25 Dag Hammarskjöld and 2.50 Konrad Adenauer. The stamps just carry the island's name and the denomination. In the lower margin we find the inscription Island of Isö Local Mail in Swedish and English.



The Isö locals aroused a lot of attention at the time. They were condemned as completely bogus by the philatelic press of the time despite the fact that a token service actually existed. The stamps probably sold better abroad than in Sweden.

The “Peace and Liberty” issue of 1969 remained in use for three years. In 1972, there was the famous “Girls of Sweden” set of four stamps. Once again a sheet of 20 stamps with the four denominations (1, 2, 3 and 4 kronor) printed in se-tenant format. The stamps showed photos of basically nude girls by Siwer Ohlsson. In the 1970s, Mr. Ohlsson made a living photographing nude girls for the more elegant men’s magazines of the day. Sales to foreign collectors were strong but it seems the tenant found it difficult to recover the cost of having this issue printed.

In order to increase sales, the “Girls of Sweden” stamps were overprinted to mark the 1972 Munich Olympics.

I don’t know who the tenant was but it seems reasonably clear that Swedish-German philatelist and dealer Jakob von Uexkull was deeply involved in the project. For years von Uexkull continued to market the early Isö issues from his home in the Isle of Man.



Jakob von Uexkull is quite a colourful character. He made a fortune with stamps and used part of the money to establish The Right Livelihood Award in 1980. The award includes a sum of two million crowns and is presented each year on December 9 in Stockholm. Jakob von Uexkull has represented the German Green Party in the European Parliament. He currently lives with his family in London.

In 1973, the tenant appointed an agent to handle all philatelic sales. There were several new issues until the agreement was terminated in 1975 but it did not prevent the agent from going on producing Isö stamps.

Shown here is a cover from 1984 with a souvenir sheet commemorating the Los Angeles Olympics.







Above, Isö Egyptology sheet; right, 1977 Birds FDC, also with “Sveridge” instead of “Sverige” cancellation spelling

The sheet carries the country name ISÖ / SVERIGE. Despite the fact that the sheet and the cachet include the correct Swedish spelling of Isö (an o with two little dots on top) the maker of the postmark did not seem to be familiar with the Swedish language.



The spelling Sveridge looks like an unsuccessful attempt by an English speaker to render the way Swedes normally spell the name of their country.

Obviously the producers of the post-1973 Isö issues paid very little attention to detail. In fact, the designs are generally of very poor quality as is the actual printing.

As far as I know no one has ever attempted to compile a listing of Isö stamps. Thus it is hard to know exactly how many stamps have been printed or if Isö stamps are still being produced.

Many later Isö issues were marketed by the late Clive Feigenbaum, a British dealer who was deeply involved in all kinds of bogus stamp issues. In all probability he also had the post 1973 Isö stamps printed. They are very similar to the “stamps” of Staffa, Nagaland, State of Oman and similar territories. They were usually printed in small sheets of eight and generally cancelled to order.



*Isö 1979 Apollo 11 overprint on 1976 Locomotives set*

Jakob von Uexkull has always maintained that all issues until 1975 were used for the Isö carriage service although I have never seen any genuine commercial covers. What is 100% sure is that all Isö stamps printed after 1975 are entirely bogus.

The Isö stamps and FDCs pop up in auction lots and on eBay fairly regularly. The tragic truth is that they are just pictorial labels having been printed for the sole purpose of selling them to gullible collectors. Apart from a few token mail deliveries of first day covers for the first 1969 and 1972 issues there never was an Isö local post. Although sometimes of topical interest the stamps belong to the wonderful world of Cinderella labels.