BRITISH PHILATELIC

Bulletin

The magazine for collectors of UK stamps

VOLUME 51 NUMBER 3 | NOVEMBER 2013 £1.50

Christmas stamp sets • Win 2013 Yearbook • Fadi Mikhail



Issues and withdrawals



Cover: Theotokos, Mother of God is the specially commissioned painting by Fadi Mikhail on the £1.88 value Christmas 2013 stamp, one of seven Madonna and Child stamps issued on 5 November.

Read about Fadi Mikhail on page 76 and see more UK Christmas stamps on page 80. For philatelic specifications of Christmas 2013 Madonna and Child stamps, see the Preview on page 41 of this volume, October edition.

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5 November	**Issue** Children's Christmas: Stamps (1 x 1st Class and 1 x 2nd Class), Presentation Pack.
5 November	**Issue** Christmas Madonna and Child 2013: Stamps (1 x 1st Class, 1 x 1st Class Large, 1 x 2nd Class, 1 x 2nd Class Large, 1 x 88p, 1 x £1.28p, 1 x £1.88p), Miniature Sheet, Presentation Pack, Generic Sheet, 1st and 2nd Class Stamp Books, Stamp Cards.
5 November	**Issue** Christmas 2013 Smilers® sheets for personalisation: Madonna and Child; re-issues of 1st Class Father Christmas and 2nd Class Robin sheets.
5 November	**Re-issue** Christmas Post & Go: Robin design of 2010, only in Post Office Limited Post & Go machines.
5 November	**Issue** 2013 Annual Collections: Year Pack, Year Book, Year of Miniature Sheets, Year of Presentation Packs.
6 November	**Withdrawal** Christmas 2012: Stamps, Miniature sheet, Presentation Pack, Generic Sheet, 3 x Smilers® Sheets, 12 x 1st Class Stamp Book, 12 x 2nd Class Stamp Book, Stamp Cards
22 November	**Issue** Benjamin Britten Coin Cover.
23 November	**Issue** Doctor Who Souvenir Cover.
10 December	**Issue** Lunar New Year – Year of the Horse: Generic Sheet of 20 x 1st Class, Silver Proof Coin Cover.

To order philatelic items, including those listed above, contact Royal Mail Tallents House at the address above left. Minimum handling charge UK £1.45, Europe £1.55, rest of world (airmail) £2.15.

Many products can be ordered on the Royal Mail website: www.royalmail.com/stamps. Selected items are available at Post Office branches and philatelic outlets at main post offices in: Bristol, Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Croydon, Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Grimsby, Harrogate, London (Eastcheap and Trafalgar Square), Norwich, Nottingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Southend on Sea, Stevenage, Stroud, Trowbridge, Truro, York and Newport, Isle of Wight.

Corrections The dates listed above for the issue of 2013 Annual Collections and the Doctor Who Souvenir Cover are correct; wrong issue dates were printed on pages 34 and 38 respectively of the October edition of *British Philatelic Bulletin*.

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The ***British Philatelic Bulletin*** is published monthly by Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB ● Editor: William Doherty ● Price £1.50 from Post Office Ltd philatelic outlets (see facing page) ● **Annual subscription** £12.95 UK & Europe, £17.95 elsewhere. Send subscriptions to Royal Mail Tallents House (address above) ● **Binders** (to hold 24 issues) £8.50, storage boxes (about 30 copies) £9.95 available by post from Royal Mail Tallents House ● Royal Mail also publishes the fortnightly *British Postmark Bulletin*, giving details of forthcoming special handstamps – available on annual subscription from Royal Mail Tallents House: £12.25 UK and Europe, £24.95 rest of the world
● ©Royal Mail. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or parts is prohibited without prior permission of the Editor
● **Printed** in Great Britain by Zenith Print & Packaging Ltd ● **ISSN** 0953 8119 ● Royal Mail is a trading name of Royal Mail Group Ltd. Registered in England and Wales, number 4138203. Registered office: 100 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0HQ

Photography: Conor Masterson / UK stamp images © Royal Mail Group



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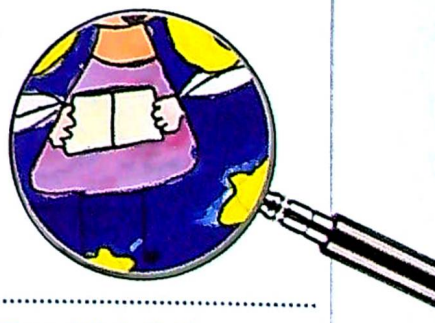
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Correspondence

Date wait

As a subscriber to *Bulletin* for many years, I have much praise for the content but you seem to have made a right mess of the 50th anniversary cover. Why did you not stick to the definition as of September 2012 to January 2013? The only way to find out when, for example, Volume 50 No 6 was issued (or if you are looking for a particular month), is to open each issue and look at the page heading.

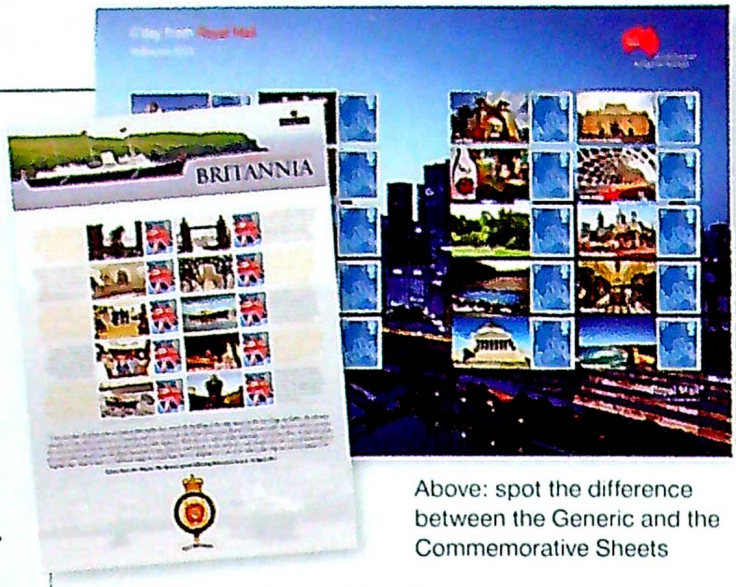
A second issue, which I have raised before, is why you do not use your code numbers in articles. The Royal Mail Australia Exhibition Sheet on page 342 of the July edition is, I think, AT076 Generic Sheet – which is what I would use to order it. Incidentally, what determines a Generic Sheet as against a Commemorative Sheet? Your comments please.

P J Longhurst, Leicestershire

You will be please to note that the month of publication is back on the front page of *Bulletin*, by popular demand. Our editorial pages do not carry order numbers because they are not always defined when product previews are written and because we do not see *Bulletin* as a catalogue. However, we are reviewing this editorial policy.

As to your question about the differences between stamp sheet types, there are two main ones. Royal Mail Generic Sheets have, by definition, a non-specific background design and fulfil the philatelic requirements when issuing a new stamp design with a label attached for use in the Smilers® range. Commemorative sheets are designed for a specific subject or anniversary, for example the sheet issued in October commemorating the anniversary of the i.e Royal Yacht Britannia is classified as a Commemorative Sheet. These are also sold wrapped and packaged with an information backing card, similar to that of a Presentation Pack.

Martyn Fry, Head of Production, Royal Mail Stamps and Collectibles



Above: spot the difference between the Generic and the Commemorative Sheets

Greetings from India

I am a senior citizen, aged 64, from India and have been a philatelist for the past four decades. I love stamp collecting, the 'king' of hobbies, more than anything in my life.

I have only recently found out about your Royal Mail service, since I have dedicated my life to government service here in India. I am very interested in reading your most coveted *British Philatelic Bulletin* and learning about postal history and the views of your readers.

Now that I am retired, I am ready to undertake any venture in the service of philately. And I will even send you covers, brochures, and miniature sheets from time to time! But for now, I send greetings to your readers and wish all at Royal Mail a prosperous and healthy future. Long may they continue their dedicated service.

T Karunaikkannan, Tamil Nadu, India

Thank you very much for your delightful letter (and for the stamps sheets you kinldy enclosed). It is good to know that *Bulletin* has plenty of fans abroad with a passion for philately as strong as yours. There may well be a UK reader who would like to be your stamp-swap penpal. We hope you continue to enjoy *Bulletin* for years to come.

Write to... The Editor, *British Philatelic Bulletin*, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. Or email bulletin.enquiries@royalmail.com.

All readers' letters chosen for publication will receive a thank-you gift and the sender of the 'First-Class Letter' will receive the *Bulletin* binder.

What's new

Winning Children's Christmas Stamp Designs • 2013 Annual Collections



Above: First Day Cover bearing stamps showing the winning entries from the 2013 Children's Christmas Stamp Design Competition

Two new Christmas stamps are issued on 5 November, showing the winners of the 2013 Children's Christmas Stamp Design Competition. The first class stamp features seven-year-old Molly Robson's design of a jolly Father Christmas with a pile of colourfully wrapped gifts; the second class stamp has a trio of cute singing angels drawn by ten-year-old Rosie Hargreaves.

Molly's artwork was shortlisted from entries submitted by schoolchildren of the South East, and Rosie's from those in the South West. The 140 entries shortlisted from UK-wide regions were displayed at Autumn Stampex, where they attracted much interest.

The volume and quality of children's artwork submitted in this Competition has delighted the judges at all stages, as well as the organisers – Royal Mail. Just over 240,000 entries were received from across the nation! All the children's work related to the competition theme of 'What Christmas Means to Me', in a broad range of styles and media.

This amazing response presented an inspiring but difficult task for the Finalists Judging Panel, led by HRH Prince Charles and including Royal Mail CEO Moya Greene, Royal Mail's Head of Design and Editorial Management Marcus James, children's writer Lauren Child and 1966 competition winner Tasveer Shemza. They picked two winners, one from each age group, who each received first prize of a £1,000 voucher in addition to a further £1,000 voucher for their schools.



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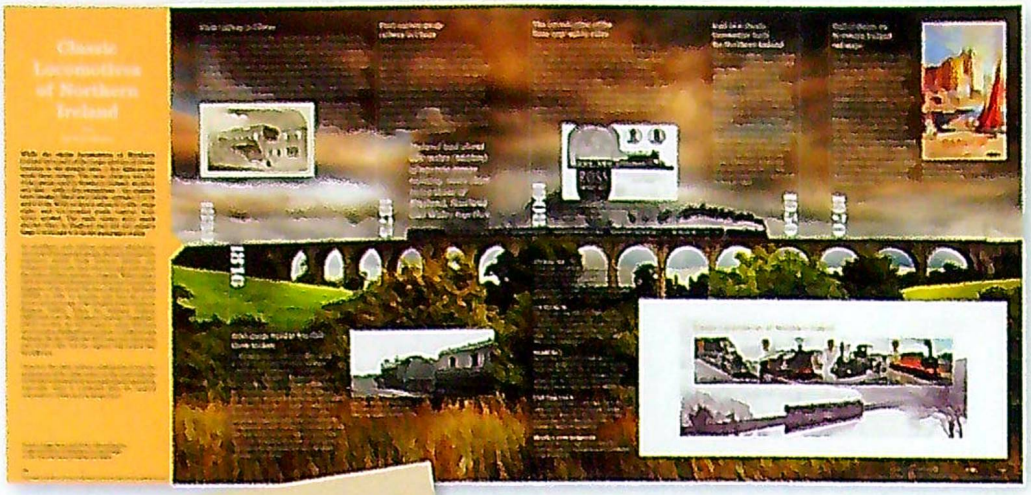
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First Day Covers are available with informative carrier cards from Tallents House (address on page 66). There is a choice of alternative postmarks, as shown right.

Following a television preview on BBC Breakfast, the stamps and Presentation Pack went on sale at www.royalmail.com/stamps on 1 November and at all Post Offices on 5 November, in addition to the Christmas 2013 issue of Madonna and Child stamps (see 'Christmas Collecting' on page 80 and page 41 of October *Bulletin* for philatelic specifications) ● ▸

Christmas 2013 Childrens' Stamp Designs – Specifications

Issue date	5 November 2013
Stamps	1 x 2nd, 1 x 1st
Products	First Day Cover, Presentation Pack
Designer	Royal Mail Group Ltd
Illustrator	2 x Competition Winners
Stamp Size	47mm (w) x 30mm (h)
Printer	International Security Printers
Print Process	Gravure
Sheet size	25 stamps per sheet



Below: a 2013 stamp souvenir to treasure, the Royal Mail 2013 Yearbook. Time is of the essence in its design: as well as contributions from experts and behind-the-scenes illustrations, the book contains fascinating chronological timelines relating to the subjects of this year's Special Stamps.
Right: background articles include this one by Norman Johnston, with timeline and details about the trains included in the Classic Locomotives of Northern Ireland Miniature Sheet



Annual Collections The 2013 Yearbook and Yearpack go on sale on 5 November. They both contain all the year's special stamps, as well as the Miniature Sheets of London Underground, Doctor Who, Football Heroes, Classic Locomotives of Northern Ireland, British Auto Legends Workhorses and Merchant Navy Atlantic and Arctic Convoys.

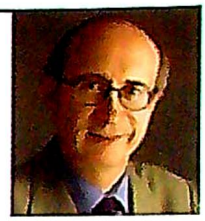
The 2013 Yearbook draws together many different subjects from many different eras, reflecting the rich variety of Royal Mail special issues and presenting a timeline pertaining to each subject area. Biographer Claire Tomalin delves into the life of Jane Austen, railway specialist Norman Johnston looks back at the age of steam in Northern Ireland and motoring aficionado Quentin Willson presents a round-up of classic British automobiles – to mention but three of the lavishly illustrated articles that explore the background to this Royal Mail's Special Stamp issues of 2013.

The standard version of the Year Book (shown above) costs £90 and the prestigious leatherbound version £134. Turn to page 95 for your chance to win one of these beautiful souvenirs of the year in stamps.

The colourful Year Pack, £85, is presented in a smart folder decorated front and back with illustrations of 2013 stamp themes. It contains more concise information, including technical details of the stamps and images of the alternative First Day postmarks for each special issue.

Also available from 8 November are the 2013 Year of Miniature Sheets pack, £33, and 2013 Presentation Pack Collection, £91. For more details and online ordering of annual products and stamp-themed gift ideas, visit www.royalmail.com/stamps •

Stamp Scene John Holman keeps you posted on events and activities in the philatelic world



Uk diary dates

8-9 November Stafford Stamp Show, Staffordshire County Showground, Weston Road, Stafford ST18 0BD. Friday 10am to 5pm, Saturday 10am to 4pm. Information: 01785 259350.

9 November National Philatelic Society meeting with Members' Displays of Covers, Cards and Stamps of Interest, Welsh Centre, 157 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8UE, 2.45pm. Members' auction at 12.50pm.

15 November Strand Stamp Fair, Royal National Hotel, Russell Square, London WC1. Information: 020 8946 4489.

15-16 November Leeds Stamp Fair, Pudsey Civic Hall, Pudsey LS28 5TA. Friday 10.30am to 5.30pm, Saturday 10am to 4pm.

16 November Joint meeting of GB Philatelic Society and the Postal Stationery Society at Royal Philatelic Society, 41 Devonshire Place, London W1, from 11am.

16 November Bexhill Philatelic Society Stamp Fair and Philatelic Community Day, St Augustine's Church Hall, Cooden Drive, Bexhill TN39 3AZ. Free parking near Collington railway station. Information: Ray Burnett, 01424 214294.

30 November National Philatelic Society Country Meeting, J N Fear Institute, High Street, Keynsham, Bristol BS31 1DG, 1.30pm.

4 December GB Philatelic Society Members' Displays, Stanley Gibbons Ltd, 399 Strand, London WC2, 6pm.

13 December Strand Stamp Fair.

14 December National Philatelic Society Annual Competitions, Welsh Centre, 157 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8UE, 2.45pm ●

Below: popular venues for stamp collectors this month include Bexhill and London's Welsh Centre





Stamp exhibitions overseas

An international stamp exhibition, Brasiliana 2013, will be held in Rio de Janeiro from 19 to 25 November.

The MonacoPhil exhibition of world rarities takes place in Monte Carlo from 5 to 7 December. The Monaco show includes items from the collections of Prince Albert II of Monaco, Her Majesty The Queen, various postal museums and members of the Club de Monte-Carlo. For more information, see www.monacophil.eu ●

New catalogues

Stanley Gibbons published the 2014 edition of its Commonwealth & British Empire Stamps 1840-1970 catalogue in September. A number of varieties have been added to the listings and a fully priced listing is now provided for the 'interprovincial stamps' of South Africa – the stamps of the four provinces used in the union prior to the issue of the first definitive and postage due stamps.

Significant additions have also been made to the sections on Australian States, Burma, Indian Feudatory States and Malaysia. The new edition costs £82.50, and a deluxe leather-bound version is available. Stanley ▸

Photographs: Philip Wragg, Ian Wright

Gibbons has also published a handbook, *The £5 Orange* by Dr John Horsey, which provides a comprehensive guide to the famous £5 orange stamp issued in 1882. It gives a clear assessment of the relative scarcities of shades, papers, cancellations, and more. At 312 pages the guide costs £75, and a deluxe edition is again available. Orders and enquiries: Stanley Gibbons, 7 Parkside, Ringwood, Hampshire BH24 3SH, 01425 472363, or www.stanleygibbons.com ●

Stamp-related exhibitions

In May Royal Mail issued stamps showing famous footballers to mark the 150th anniversary of the Football Association. This was formed at the Freemasons' Tavern in London in October 1863 when a group of men came together to establish a unified code of rules to regulate the sport.

The FA minute book that documents the origins of association football can be seen in a 'Football Rules' exhibition at the British Library until 17 December. Information: 020 7412 7676 or see www.bl.uk/whatson. If you go to this exhibition, remember to take a look at the British Library's permanent Philatelic Collections display.

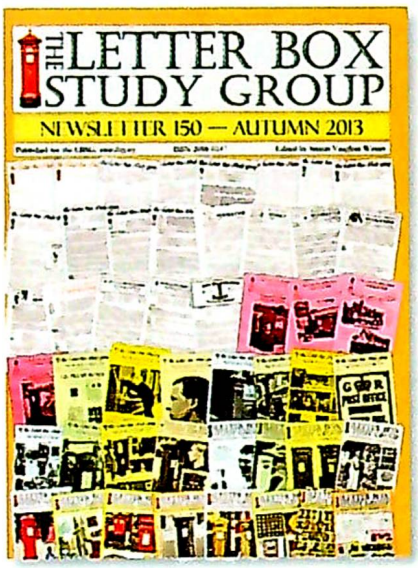
Society anniversaries

Last month I noted that several philatelic societies celebrate important anniversaries next year. I should be pleased to hear, via the Editor, from societies holding anniversary events open to the public so that details can be published here at the relevant time ●

Auction round-up

Forthcoming Spink auctions are: Collectors Series Sale (13 November); the Robert Marion Collection of Mauritius Stamps & Postal History and Lionheart Collection of GB & British Empire (14 November); and Postal the History & Historical Documents (15 November). For more information call 020 7563 4094 ●

Letter Box Study Group



The Autumn 2013 Newsletter of The Letter Box Study Group LBSG) is its 150th and is more of a commemorative book than a newsletter. In its 68 pages, with excellent full-colour illustrations, are articles on Olympic gold boxes, post box-maker Edward Cole, boxes at St Aldgate's in Oxford, Prismatique pillar boxes of Belgium, airmail boxes outside London, post boxes in Thailand, and philately and the letter box featuring pages from the collection of Glenn Morgan.

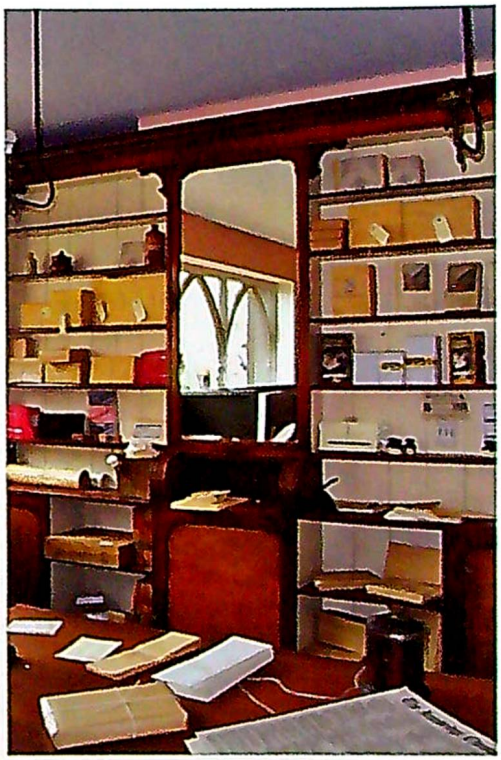
For collectors of the former Postal Region postcards, there is an interesting feature on the postcards that were produced by the Midlands Postal Board showing post boxes. This is a superbly produced publication, a true exemplar for society journals. For mor information about the LBSG, contact Val Scott, 38 Leopold Avenue, Birmingham B20 1ES, email membership@lbsg.org or see wwwlbsg.org ●

BPMA exhibitions and events

The British Postal Museum & Archive, located at Freeling House, Phoenix Place, London WC1, near the famous Mount Pleasant sorting office, is open Monday to Friday 10am to 5pm (Thursdays until 7pm) and on Saturday 9 November and 14 December (10am to 5pm), but closed on Monday 11 November and 16 December. On show at Freeling House is a display of photographs of Mail Rail. The Post Office in the Community display can be seen at Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge, Shropshire (see *Bulletin* article on page 283, Volume 49, May 2012), and 25 exhibitions online at the BPMA website include: Aerial Post, regional stamps, Machins, David Gentleman, postal vehicles and letter boxes.

Popular GPO walking tours, led by accredited guides, tell the story of Victorian postal reform and the growth of the GPO. The next tour is on 23 November at 11am – to book, phone the number below. A tour of the Museum Store at Debden takes place on 6 November at 1pm, and there is a tour of the Archive on 11 December at 3pm.

Sian Price gives a talk called 'If You're Reading This: Last Letters from the Front Line' at the Phoenix Centre, alongside the BPMA, on 14 November at 7pm. There will be a 'double whammy' on 3 December when BPMA Director Adrian Steel, will talk on 'The Future of Britain's Postal Heritage' at 6pm and Tony Williams on 'Charles Dickens and Postal Communication' at 7pm.



Above:the Post Office at Blists Hill Victorian Town, Ironbridge

The Great Train Robbery, one of the most famous crimes of the 20th century, occurred on 8 August 1963. Material relating to the event is held at the BPMA, which has arranged a touring exhibition about the robbery. It can be seen at: Head of Steam – Darlington Railway Museum, North Road Station, Darlington DL3 6ST until late December, but check with the BPMA for confirmation of dates and opening hours.

For more on British Postal Museum and Archive displays and events, contact the BPMA for a copy of its comprehensive Events Guide. Information and bookings: 020 7239 2570, info@postalheritage.org.uk, or the BPMA's website at www.postalheritage.org.uk ●

Friends of the BPMA

The Friends will hold their Annual General Meeting at the Phoenix Centre (adjacent to the BPMA), Phoenix Place, London WC1X 0DL at 3pm on 3 December. After the meeting Friends are invited to a viewing of the display 'Off with her Head', originally prepared by Curator of Philately Douglas Muir for the ABPS exhibition in Perth, and a private viewing of the exhibition of photographs depicting the Mail Rail underground line in the BPMA search room. These will be presented by Head of Collections Chris Taft. Refreshments at the Mount restaurant are available from 5pm to 6pm. The two talks by Adrian Steel and Tony Williams of the BPMA on Postal Communication and Dickens (see above) follow.

For information about the Friends of the BPMA – and how to become one – see www.postalheritage.org.uk/friends or email friends@postalheritage.org.uk. Membership is £20 a year (£15 for the over-65s) ● ▸

Photograph: Paul Ellmes

New BPMA museum update



Above: the Post Office Underground Railway, which the BPMA hopes to restore and preserve for posterity

The BPMA has unveiled plans to restore London's underground mail train system and open it to the public. The ambitious move is part of the BPMA's multimillion-pound campaign to build a new national postal museum and archive in the capital.

Called the Post Office Underground Railway or Mail Rail, the 23 mile-long narrow gauge track operated from 1927 to 2003, taking mail across London from Whitechapel to Paddington via six stations in electrified, driverless cars. The network could carry up to four million letters a day and operated for 22 hours out of every 24.

If the proposals are approved by the local planning authority, the BPMA will open up part of the tunnel network around Mount Pleasant mail centre, and develop the car maintenance depot and old workshops there. Visitors would be able to ride passenger cars on over 1,000 metres of track through the original tunnels. The 15-minute rides would also take in the platforms of Mount Pleasant station. The car depot will become exhibition and venue space, showing a collection of vehicles associated with moving the post. The space traces the history of Mail Rail, the world's only purpose-built subterranean mail transport network. The BPMA hopes the local authority, Islington Council, will consider the Mail Rail proposal in a planning meeting before the end of the year.

The Mail Rail centre is seen as vital for the success of the new museum, which would be supported by revenue brought in by visitors. The museum and archive complex is expected to open in 2016 at Calthorpe House next to Mount Pleasant, at the same time as Mail Rail. The entire project will cost £22.4 million, and the BPMA already has £10.9 million, with a major fundraising campaign underway to find the balance. This drive for cash has become more critical after a Sotheby's sale of BPMA duplicate stamps in July was expected to raise over £5 million, but fetched less than £400,000.

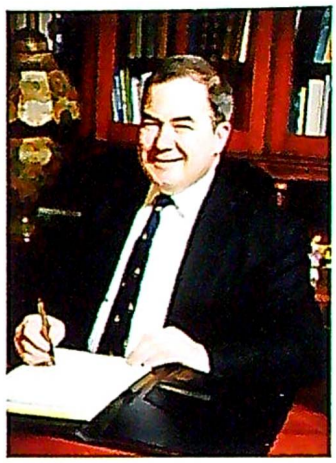
In five exhibition zones, the museum will display stamp sheets, pillar boxes, an 18th century mail coach, postal uniforms and vehicles, medals, posters and more. The zones are as follows:

- The 'Royal' Mail: this covers the setting-up of the postal system and the age of the mail coach.
- Communication Revolution: this zone will demonstrate how new methods of communication were developed, such as mail by rail, steamship and air.
- The Post Office in Conflict: this shows the history and role of the postal service in times of social unrest, protest, during the World Wars and on Britain's Home Front.
- Designs on Delivery: here visitors will learn about stamp design and history and publicity, branding and advertising for postal service products.
- Post Office Community: this section looks at mechanisation, the Post Office in the community, icons of the post, and the post in popular culture.

The Calthorpe House site will also accommodate a purpose-built archive repository, conservation studios, extensive research facilities and a state-of-the-art education centre. BPMA officials say the new premises are sorely needed: the organisation currently looks after several million stamps, 60,000 artefacts and two and a half miles of archives • *Andrew Neish*

Obituary

Peter Jennings, the well-known philatelic writer, died on 10 September aged 65. He was best known for articles on pioneer airmails and aerogrammes, and published a book called *Aerogrammes* in 1972. He wrote pieces on airmails for *Bulletin* in the early Nineties, and subsequently his journalism covered a wide range of philatelic subjects, principally in *Gibbons Stamp Monthly*, where his distinctive voice will be missed.



Peter was perhaps more a journalist than a philatelist, adept at securing interviews and with a nose for a good story. Always keen to meet the famous, he obtained an interview with Prince Philip, and presented Palestinian stamps at a private meeting with Pope John Paul II.

He was active in the Roman Catholic Church as press secretary to the Archbishop of Birmingham and wrote several books on Papal visits. Peter worked with the Isle of Man Post Office on the miniature sheet issued to commemorate the visit of Pope Benedict and the beatification of influential 19th-century theologian Cardinal Newman in 2010. He was also involved with the Isle of Man's recent News Headlines stamps.

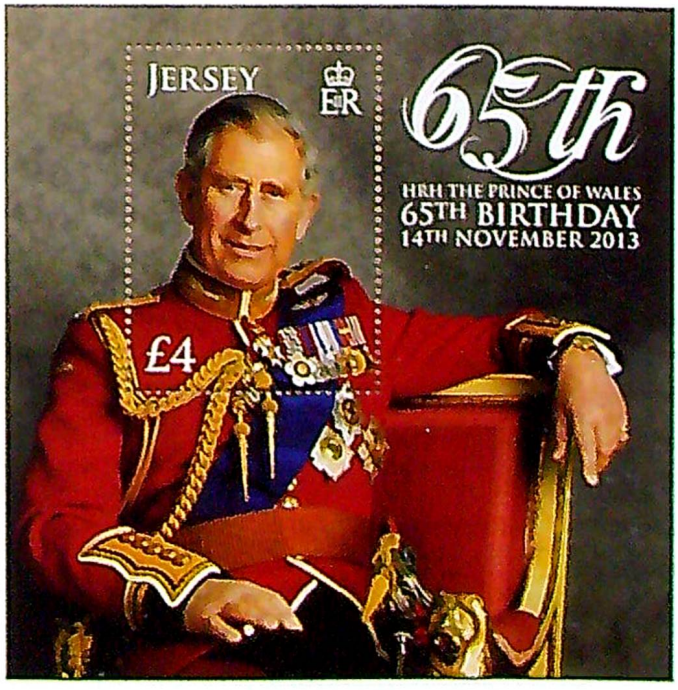
For a short while Peter helped with publicity for new stamp issues. He displayed items from his collections in the Rare Stamps of the World exhibition in London in 1997, and was, as a PR consultant, involved with the organising of the 'Stamp' exhibitions in the Nineties • *William Doherty*

Island news

Jersey Post's next issues comprise six stamps and a miniature sheet marking the 65th birthday of HRH The Prince of Wales (14 November), and a Christmas Fayre issue of six stamps and a souvenir miniature sheet (20 November, see page 80). Information: Jersey Philatelic Bureau, Freepost JE793, Jersey Post, Jersey JE1 1AF or www.jerseystamps.com.

Guernsey issued a £3 miniature sheet commemorating the birth of Prince George of Cambridge on 24 September. The first issues for 2014 will be: Chinese New Year – six stamps and souvenir sheet (8 January) and Endangered Species – Orangutan miniature sheet, and Alderney Ladybirds – six stamps and souvenir sheet (both 12 February). Information: Guernsey Philatelic Bureau, Freepost GU267, Envoy House, La Vrangue, Guernsey GY1 5SS or email philatelic@guernseypost.com.

Below: on 14 November Jersey Post releases a special stamp issue celebrating Prince Charles's 65th birthday



The Isle of Man's six Christmas stamps went on sale on 17 October. The 73p stamp is in a new design featuring a stained glass window; the other stamps reproduce designs from Christmasses of 1988, 1990, 1991, 1995 and 2006 (see page 80), marking the 40th anniversary of Isle of Man postal independence. The 2014 issues start with Island of Culture, Winter Flora and World War issues in January, followed by RAF Red Arrows 50th Anniversary on 19 February. Information: Isle of Man Stamps & Coins, PO Box 10M, Douglas, Isle of Man IM99 1PB or www.iomstamps.com •





Coptic credentials

The artist commissioned to paint one of this year's Christmas stamps packed his picture with intriguing hidden meaning – we decipher his secret code…

THE COPTIC SCHOOL of Egyptian Christian art is almost as ancient as the story of Jesus himself, and its exquisite yet fading paintings, of Mary and Jesus and a procession of saints, have adorned the crumbling walls of centuries-old churches and monasteries from Luxor to Old Cairo. But, along with other ardent followers of Coptic iconography, young English-Egyptian artist Fadi Mikhail is committed to rediscovering the colourful history of this venerable art, and finding in it meaning for today. Once it was lost, after the culture of Egypt's Coptic Christian community was buried by centuries of religious repression. Now Slade graduate Fadi's quest to rediscover Coptic art has received a modern boost, with a Royal Mail commission to paint a 'Madonna and child' icon for the £1.88 stamp (above) in the seven-stamp 2013 Christmas issue. Royal Mail's aim for the commission was to reflect ethnic diversity in the UK.

He is delighted by the chance to promote the art that is an articulation of his Coptic Christian faith. 'It's a big blessing, I feel honoured and privileged to work on something that's so high-status,' says the 29-year-old, born in the



UK to Coptic parents and now living and working in Hertfordshire. Fadi was taught by Egyptian artist Isaac Fanous (1919-2007) – one of the founders of the Neo-Coptic school that aimed to resurrect the original Coptic style in the Sixties. Fadi studied under Fanous in California, where he was painting a new cathedral, before going to the Slade. 'Professor Fanous was a lyrical poet with a brush,' recalls Fadi. 'I would sit for hours a day, just soaking in every flick of his brush and every stretch of his arm over the paintings.'

Fanous would have been proud of his apprentice. Fadi's icon boasts a distinctive aesthetic of contemporary clarity and simple lines; yet the image is packed with an ancient code of fascinating religious symbolism harking back to the earliest Coptic painters. First, his painting is called *Theotokos, Mother of God*: Coptic artists portrayed Mary as 'theotokos', meaning 'God-bearer' in Greek. Gestures, looks, even colours, must be unlocked by the initiated. Cue Fadi: 'The Virgin isn't looking directly at Christ,' he says of the picture. 'Instead she is looking just beyond him in a sad way, premeditating what is to happen to him because she knows that he ▸

Above: Fadi Mikhail explains that Coptic iconography is full of special religious symbolism

Opposite: Fadi's beautiful stamp for this year's Christmas issue

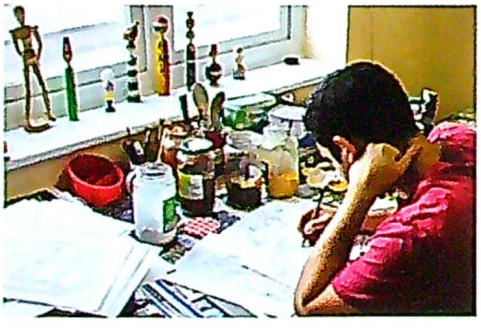


Above: Fadi's art is a celebration of his faith

Below: the dedicated Egyptian Coptic artist hard at work at his studio in Hertfordshire

will suffer torment in his life. In our iconography, the Virgin is portrayed in blue or brown. Blue symbolises the sky or the heavens (since she is often glorified by the title 'Queen of Heaven' in the Orthodox church), and brown the earth depicting her humanity. The inside of the robe is red, signifying her royalty – as the Psalm indicates: "...the glory of the daughter of the King is within..." '





Of Jesus he says: 'His white robe denotes purity, suggesting that He is divine, pure, perfect and unblemished. The red on His robe denotes Christ's martyrdom, the shedding of His blood.'

There are even hidden meanings in the style of halos 'worn' by Mary and Jesus ('in gold to show heavenly glory,' says Fadi), portrayed as full circles surrounding their face and head in Coptic art. This is quite distinct from the more usual crowns or discs that hover above the head in western iconography. The Coptic circle-halos are in contact with the subject's face and head, to indicate that a divine light flows from within. Note the lines on Christ's halo: this gives a visual hint of the cross.

Interestingly, Fadi broke with Coptic tradition to make one major concession to the modern medium of the postage stamp: 'There is one element that I left out consciously and in hindsight I probably would have added it in – this was the set of three stars that are usually painted on the Virgin's robe to symbolise her

Photography: Conor Masterson



virginity before, during and after her pregnancy. These stars are a very common, if not compulsory, feature for the icon, but I thought that they would not be visible on a stamp.'

Tradition rules, however, in the production of Fadi's simple yet stunning picture. He used the ancient painting methods and materials to reflect as much as possible the methodology of the Coptic Period that began in the 3rd Century and arguably had its zenith in the 7th. An entirely appropriate decision when you consider just how 'traditional' the Coptic Orthodox Church is: established by St Mark The Evangelist in 61AD, it is the oldest church in Africa, and the Copts are the largest group of Christians in the Middle East. (The word Copt, by the way, comes from the Greek '*Aigyptios*', via the Arabic '*qibt*', the name originally given to the indigenous people of the Nile Valley by Arab invaders in the 7th Century.)

Fadi's painting took 50 hours of exacting preparation and brushwork to complete. First he covered the wood panel with linen, then painted it very thinly with gesso, a liquid chalk compound with gelatine, in a series of layers. The result is a very porous chalk board, which mimics the limestone walls Coptic pictures would originally have been painted on almost 2,000 years ago. 'The paint seeps into the porous material,' explains Fadi, 'so that centuries on, even if the paint has flaked off the surface, the paint colours are still there, impregnated into the board, and the image still remains.'

Gold leaf was also added layer by layer, and Fadi used traditional egg tempera for the painting. The paint is a challenge: 'Iconography is different to oil painting. Oil are much more forgiving when you want to remove or add a brush stroke,' Fadi says. 'But with egg tempera, it is pretty much what you put down is what is going to remain: you can only over-paint a little bit.'

Fadi worked closely with leading stamp designers Robert Maude and Sarah Davies, who were creating the Christmas issue. 'It was lovely working with Robert and Sarah because they could empathise with what I was trying to say with the picture's symbology,' says Fadi. They selected one of Fadi's preliminary drawings to develop into the painting, advising him on how to adjust it to fit the design. The final vibrant image is, it seems, as much a product of Fadi's faith as his talent. His verdict is all the more poignant when you consider that this work is for the season of good will, at a time of persecution for Copts, when their churches are being burnt and worshippers killed in Egypt. 'What does this icon mean to me?' he says. 'It speaks to me of God's grace and forgiveness.' •

'It was exciting knowing that the work I was doing for the stamp with the designers was going to be something that was so national and had such high status'

Happy Christmas

Welcome to this year's collection of UK special Christmas stamps – all ready for sending your seasonal greetings to friends and family...

Royal Mail – 5 November

Children's Design Competition



Two special stamps showcase the artwork of the winners of Royal Mail's Children's Christmas Stamp Design Competition: a jolly Santa by seven-year-old Molly Robson appears on the first-class stamp and a trio of singing angels by ten-year-old Rosie Hargreaves is featured on the second-class. For further details and to order see pages 38 and 69 and www.royalmail.com/stamps.

Royal Mail – 5 November

Madonna and Child

Royal Mail's 'Madonna and Child' Christmas issue takes you on a glorious stamp tour through the history of religious art. Four classic paintings, and a contemporary one specially commissioned by Royal Mail, reflect the development and range of artistic representations of the Virgin Mary and the infant Jesus since the 15th century. English-Egyptian iconographer Fadi Mikhail has painted the new picture, a modern take on the traditional Coptic style that is almost 2,000 years old.

For philatelic specifications of this issue, see the Preview pages of October *Bulletin*. An interview with Fadi Mikhail is on page 76 of this edition.



Isle of Man – 17 October

A Christmas Stamp Gallery



Taking a look back at the Isle of Man Post Office's 40-year history, six classic festive stamps from years gone by were issued last month. They are 32mm x 26mm, with 13 perfs per 2cm and were designed by EJC Design, with Presentation Pack text by Richard West. For more details and to order, visit www.iompost.com/stamps or phone +44 (0)1624 698430.

Jersey – 27 November

Christmas Fayre



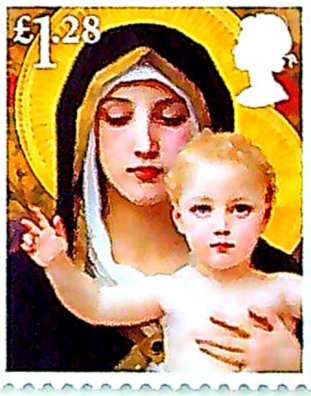
Pudding, wine, gingerbread, chocolate log... The tasty theme of Jersey Post's Christmas issue is Christmas Fayre. Printed by Enschedé and issued at the end of this month, the set comprises eight stamps featuring a selection of traditional food and drink. The stamps are 30mm x 40mm, and the paintings are by Michael Pollard. For more details and to order, email stamps@jerseypost.com or phone +44 (0)1534 516320.





















Guernsey – 12 November

When Santa Got Stuck up the Chimney

Designed by Nick Watton, Guernsey Post's Christmas set of seven features Santa on his Christmas Eve journey – but thanks to his ample girth he spends a tricky moment or two wedged inside a chimney! Printed by Cartor, the stamps are 30mm deep x 40mm wide, and will be issued on 12 November.





Alderney – 13 November

Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Also designed by Nick Watton, the perfect partner for Guernsey's Santa set are Alderney's Christmas stamps. Telling the story of everyone's favourite reindeer and his special glowing gift, across seven 30mm x 40mm stamps, the issue is printed by Southern Colour Print. For more details and to order, visit www.guernseypost.com/new issues.

Stamp images are copyright © Guernsey Post © Isle of Man Post © Jersey Post © Royal Mail



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High-speed greetings Colin Baker looks at air letters – also known as aerogrammes – that sparkled with their own Christmas decorations

Figs 1, 2: in 1965 the first air letters were issued that featured special designs for the festive season

Fig 3: a charming illustration of Ely Cathedral alongside the last special stamp used on an air letter – issued in 1989

Fig 4: for Christmas 1986 this air letter showed the use of holly and evergreen branches as decorations

Fig 5: the Christmas cracker and jolly Santa Claus design that appeared on the air letter issued in 1997

Fig 6: angels were regularly used in Christmas-themed air letters, as in this 1998 issue

Fig 7: the English/Welsh issue was the last air letter to be sold, from 2006 to 2010

Look in any stamp catalogue and it will tell you that the first Christmas stamps were issued in Great Britain on 1 December 1966. That is, however, not strictly correct. It is true that the first adhesive Christmas stamps came out on that date, but a year earlier, two Christmas air letters were released (Figs 1,2), each with their own special Christmas stamps and festive designs. Both of the 6d stamps incorporated stylised snowflakes: one with the Star of Bethlehem on a carmine background, an angel alongside the address line and a Nativity scene printed on the inside panels; the other with a Christmas tree on the front and an array of more stylised snowflakes inside.

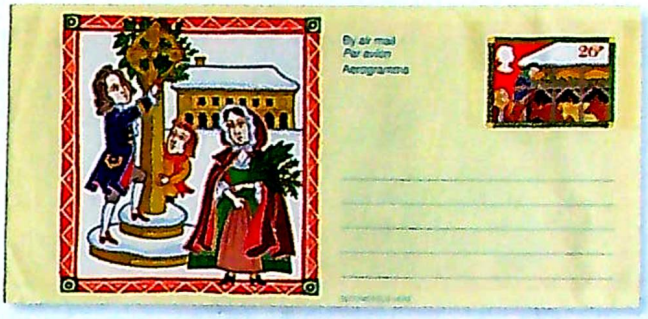
The air letters were designed by Michael Goaman and leading design agency Negus Sharland. They were released on 1 November 1965 and were sold at 10d each – a premium of 4d above the cost of the stamps to cover the cost of their production. Although they were more expensive than regular air letters, they were very popular. Emails and the internet were decades away, phone calls to foreign countries were costly, and even the normal air mail postage was not cheap. So a colourful air letter neatly filled the gap at a time of year when families and friends particularly want to keep in touch.

Decades of festive designs In the years following 1965, Christmas air letters were issued annually, with the illustrations regularly changing from secular to religious, or featuring a mixture of both. Generally only one design of air letter was made available each year, though in 1965, 1967 and 1968 pairs of air letters could be bought.

For the first 25 years, specially designed Christmas stamps had been used for each air letter issued. The 1989 Christmas air letter (Fig 3), celebrating 800 years since the completion of the main part of Ely Cathedral, carried the last of these special stamps. The next Christmas air letter was issued in 1990 and used the standard NVI (no value indicator) Machin stamp to



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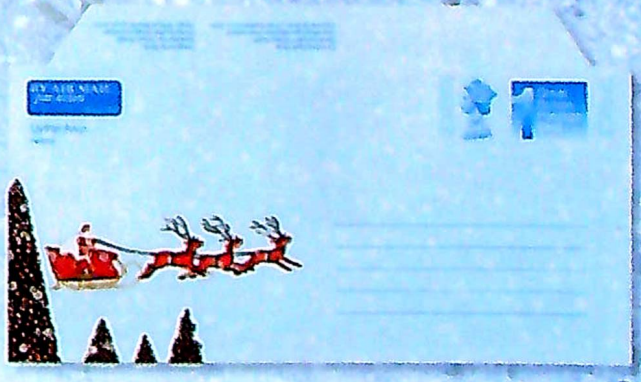
6

show that the postage had been prepaid. This method was in line with the other definitive and special issues of that period.

Classic Christmas collectibles Collectors of air letters will have their own festive favourites. For me, some of the more memorable designs were issued from 1981 onwards. The 1984 issue featured a Victorian mail coach, loaded with passengers and their baggage, a striking example of one of the modes of mail transport used over the centuries. Some classic Christmas favourites have also been incorporated into these air letters, such as holly and Christmas trees in 1986 (Fig 4), the history of Christmas cards in 1993 and Christmas crackers in 1997 (Fig 5). Angels have also featured on many occasions (Fig 6).

One other change took place in 2001, when for the first time two types of Christmas air letters appeared: one had the text in both English and Welsh and was intended for sale primarily in Wales; the other had text only in English, for sale in the rest of the UK.

In January 2005 there were still substantial stocks remaining of the 2004 Christmas air letter and it was put on sale again for the following Christmas. The last design of Christmas air letter was released in 2006 (Fig 7), showing Santa being pulled across the snow by three reindeer. Sales of air letters had now dropped to such a low level that by the end of December 2006 the Post Office was again left with large stocks. It was decided to reissue the 2006 air letter each Christmas for the next four years, and they were finally withdrawn completely at the end of 2010. Today no special or definitive air letters feature in the Post Office list of items available for sale: it shows how the internet has changed our communication habits but also neatly defines a time-span for collectors ●



7

Inside Royal Mail

The workings of SAC



Richard West explains the vital role of the Stamp Advisory Committee in helping Royal Mail decide on the final designs of its special stamp issues

THIS YEAR UK STAMP COLLECTORS have enjoyed many stunning Royal Mail stamp issues. For every one of them, a huge amount of careful planning, artistic creativity and design work is carried out to bring the series of stamps to colourful perfection. Many individuals and groups are involved in this lengthy, exacting process, from deciding what events, figures and subjects to feature in the special stamps programme, and the images, designers and artists to use, to how the final stamps should look.

Here we will examine the decision-making process and the involvement of the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC) in it. The work of the SAC is long-established and well-respected. Concerns have been expressed about its future following the privatisation of Royal Mail but, as a member of the SAC myself, I can assure readers that the rigorous process involved in creating Royal Mail stamps remains unchanged, certainly for the forseeable future.



Your opinions are important to the SAC: please use the voting form enclosed with this edition to influence stamps of the future. Next month you can vote for your favourite stamp of 2013

Immaculate forward planning

Within the Royal Mail Stamp Design Team, the programme of special stamps is normally first considered about four years in advance, with the Head of Policy identifying the key commemorative dates for the year in question. Each year there will be those anniversaries that must be included, but understandably there are many more that have to be considered, all very important in their own way. A filtering system is essential, to determine which occasion will be marked by stamps.

The list of potential events is shown to several interested groups, including readers of *Bulletin* (subscribers will be receiving a voting list for 2016 with

Illustration © Robert Churchill/iStock

this edition) so that a shortlist can be drawn up. The hope is that all the major UK anniversaries can be marked in some way, hopefully by an actual set of stamps, but otherwise possibly with a miniature sheet or commemorative sheet. Seeking advice from a wide range of opinions ensures that the annual programme has a broad appeal.

To reach out to as many as possible, the list of anniversaries is interspersed with issues that have a clear thematic attraction. These have an advantage of not being time-sensitive, so can be slotted into the programme as required. This year, for example, Butterflies and Dinosaurs have fallen into the thematic slots.

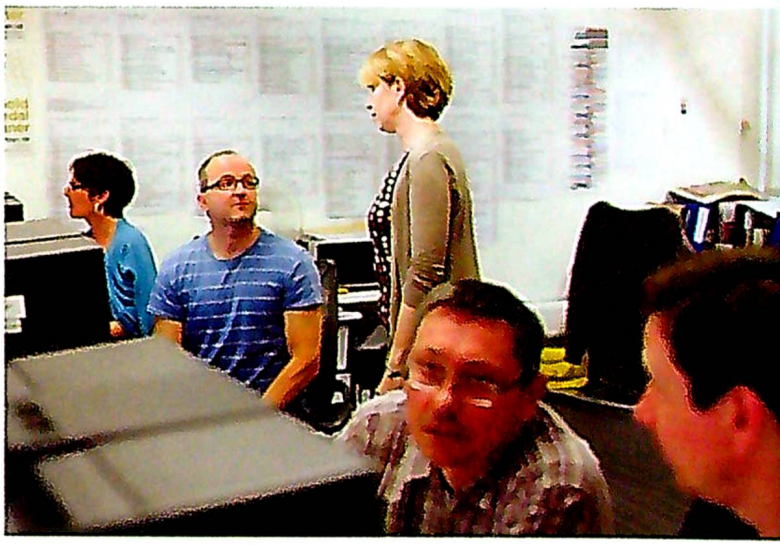
Inevitably there will still be more ideas for appropriate topics than can be accommodated in a single year's programme: the final decision as to what is issued is made by involving not only the Design Team, but also those responsible for product marketing and overall policy.



Above: a stamp from the 2013 Butterflies issue illustrated by Richard Lewington and designed by the marc&anna studio

A brief is created

When the list of stamps for a particular year is finalised, usually at least two years in advance, the Head of Stamp Strategy (currently Philip Parker), in consultation with the rest of the Stamps and Collectibles Design Team, will create a 'brief' for each issue. This includes the reason for the stamps, identifying the potential market for the issue, any aspects that need to be avoided, and the major institutions that will need to be consulted and perhaps be more closely involved.



Above: Royal Mail's Stamps and Collectibles department works closely with the SAC on the special stamp programme

With the brief prepared, the Design Team then discusses the design options that might be feasible and, based on expertise gathered over several years, they will suggest design agencies or individual artists best suited for each selected approach. If a stamp issue is to include a miniature sheet, invariably a different approach is used for the miniature sheet stamps than for those in the standard sheet. Indeed, the two might be the work of different designers.

Such are the strengths of particular designers that the choice will vary greatly from issue to issue. Each special stamp issue is allocated to a member of the Design Team, who will then follow the project through to fruition. The aim is always to commission original work, whether it be photographs or illustration and artwork, though this is not always feasible. Invitations will be extended to those artists and teams that have been selected for a particular issue.

Cue the SAC

The result is a wealth of ideas that are carefully perused, determining which looks the most promising to take forward. Further work is undertaken until it is felt that the key ideas can be presented to the Stamp Advisory Committee (SAC), whose members are drawn from all walks of life but always include leading designers, Royal Mail officials and a British Government representative. SAC members are chosen by Royal Mail and the Committee meets every two months to decide on the designs of future British stamp ▸

Photograph: Conor Masterson



Above: the SAC agreed to asking The Queen to sit for this specially commissioned portrait, marking this year's 60th anniversary of Her Majesty's Coronation in a unique manner

issues. The key word here is 'designs'. The SAC is not involved in policy in any way. It is totally the decision of Royal Mail as to how many issues there will be in any year, the themes chosen, the number of stamps, the face values of each set, the date of issue and any associated products that might be produced, such as miniature sheets, booklets and prestige stamp books.

For each issue, the SAC is shown the design approaches that have been developed. It sees two or three (and maybe more) different ideas from the artists selected – indeed, an individual artist or design team might well put forward more than one approach. At the initial viewing the SAC will often not make a final decision, but will select those designs it would like to see developed. It has been known for the SAC to feel that none of these initial designs fulfils the requirement, and asks Royal Mail to go back and reconsider. This may result in further designers being approached. More than once the SAC has thought that design ideas for the miniature sheet would be better suited to the series of stamps, and vice versa. The SAC generally sees the designs three times as they are developed into a finished series with which all the members are content.

An unprecedented decision

The minutes of all SAC meetings are confidential. Records are archived along with other records of Royal Mail and are available for the public to view only as the 30-year embargo elapses. Plans for new stamps are kept under wraps until the agreed date for informing the press – usually between three weeks and two months before the issue date. One particularly memorable issue of this year, from the perspective of SAC procedure, was Six Decades of Royal Portraits, because the decision was taken at the initial 'brief' stage that one stamp among the set depicting paintings of The Queen would feature a work of art specially commissioned by Royal Mail.

On previous occasions, photographic portraits have been commissioned and of course photographs of The Queen have appeared on many stamp issues, but this was the first time that Royal Mail had considered asking The Queen to agree to sittings for a painting. The task of interpreting this brief to create the issue of stamps was entrusted to designer Sarah Jones in the Stamps and Collectibles department. And on this occasion the SAC could not be shown all the initial designs, but instead was presented with the concept of the portraits, together with the idea of one specially commissioned. The SAC was very pleased to endorse the project.



Above: one of many design choices presented to the SAC during the creation of the Classic Children's TV stamps. Watch out for the Preview in your December *Bulletin*

The final selection

Once the designer and designs of a stamp set have been approved, there may still be modifications in design and colour choices to make sure that the issue works as a coherent group, rather than a random-looking collection of attractive stamps. Even with the most traditional of subjects, a variety of approaches should not be excluded, to make the set more interesting and distinctive. From start to finish, the SAC's involvement in the creation of a stamp issue takes up to three years and members will generally see the designs on three occasions as they are developed into a finished series with which all are content – and which, it is hoped, will satisfy the high standards of collectors! ●



British stamps at Stampex

John Holman reveals the displays that caught his eye at this year's Autumn Stampex

THE INVITED DISPLAYS at Autumn Stampex, held from 18 to 21 September, were of French stamps and postal history, but as most *Bulletin* readers are collectors of British material, I am limiting my report to British items in the Association of British Philatelic Societies (ABPS) Competition. For collectors of British stamps and postal history there was much to see, enjoy and learn from. Dr John Horsey provided a fine display on the Queen Victoria £5 stamp to coincide with publication of his book on that subject. His exhibit included the most important use of four £5 stamps, plus four £1 and a 10s (totalling £24 10s) on a PO docket from the London WC area dated June 1883. He showed well over 100 of the £5 stamp plus proofs of the proposed Edward VII issue, specimen overprints, plate varieties and curious 2012 reproductions in gold and magenta, said to have originated in Latvia.

Peter Shaw's 'Decimal Castle High Values 1988-89' featured both Harrison and Enschedé printings with enlarged illustrations demonstrating the differences. Peter included plate blocks, paper variations, the missing chimney pots variety on the £1.50 Harrison and a nice offset on a £5 Harrison, and ended with use of the stamps on registered, parcel post and overseas express mail.

Brian Sole's 'Scottish Regional Issues' was well-presented and included, in addition to the stamps, a first day cover of the 3d that had been signed by the designer Gordon Huntly, a 1962 Scotex sheet with 'black print' reproductions, use with HVP label, an advertising slogan for the 1967 9d and 1s 6d stamps, a National Postal Museum card reproducing regional ▸

Above: Autumn Stampex at the Business Design Centre in Islington included fine displays in the ABPS Competitions, with much to interest collectors of UK stamps



Above: competition displays from leading philatelists, adjacent to the Royal Mail stand (below)

stamps, and much else. He also displayed miniature sheets and prestige book panes containing Scottish country stamps.

Graham Homer-Wooff looked at the George VI 2½d stamps, both blue and red, telling their story with control blocks, shades, booklet panes, coil leaders, school specimens and postal stationery. He included the six commemorative stamps of this value – Victory, Silver Wedding, Channel Islands, Olympics, UPU and Festival of Britain. It was a very interesting and well put together exhibit, an exemplar for displays on stamps of a particular denomination.

In the Open Philately section, Chrissie Baker's display 'Mariah's London' told the story of her great-great-aunt Marion, known as Mariah. Using historical documents and artefacts, she recalled what life was like for a woman born into the upper-middle class in London, in relation to the social, economic and political changes of the time. As well as stamps and postal stationery, her unusual but fascinating exhibit included birth, death and vaccination certificates, letters, coins, photographs, bills with 1d stamps used for receipt, and even a pair of pince-nez glasses.



Graham Booth's 'The Rise and Fall of the Liverpool Forwarding Agent 1807-57' included items handled by William Dixon & Co, D & T Willis and Maury Latham & Co. There were paid handstamps, ship letters and a fine cover with a strip of six 2d blue sent from Edinburgh to New York in 1844.

Liverpool was also the subject of Kenneth Clark's display covering the period 1670 to 1900, when Liverpool grew from a village to a major trading city of the British Empire. He included a good map, engravings, pre-stamp and ship letter mail, covers with Penny Blacks and Twopence Blues, Mulready envelopes, Spoon Duplex postmarks and mail sent to many overseas destinations.

Among the other postal history displays were David Huggins' 'Mail from Watford 1769-1801' and Al Hurst's and Jon Aitchison's studies of mail from the tiny islands of Holy Island (Lindisfarne) off Northumberland and Herm in the Channel Islands. David included covers from Bushey and Lechmere Heath with Penny Blacks and Twopence Blues cancelled by black and red Maltese Cross cancels, Mulreadys and other items of postal stationery, parcel post labels and a very nice mourning cover with an extremely wide black border. Al Hurst's earlier display of Holy Island had not included modern material, but this time he brought the story up to date (though with a rather poor example of the island's current self-inking datestamp). He does, however, ignore modern special handstamps inscribed Holy Island, perhaps because they are not applied on the island. Cancelling of stamps on Holy Island is known by 1911; previously the datestamp was applied alongside the postage stamp, which was cancelled at Beal. Jon Aitchison's fine exhibit included a letter from Colonel Lindsay on Herm in 1823, the rare HERM cachet on cards of 1903 to 1904, the elusive Herm postmark used from 1925 to 1938, and the very rare Herm registration label

on a 1930 cover to South Africa. He showed two examples of the rare Herm meter mark used very briefly in 1948. Herm issued local stamps from 1949 to 1969 when an official Guernsey post office opened.

Robert Galland's study, 'The Franking System and Official Mail from Elizabeth I to 1840', was well worth seeing. It had a Treasury warrant for letters carried from London to the West Country in 1567, a warrant from the Earl of Warwick as Lord High Admiral in 1648, covers with FREE handstamps, and printed envelopes sent 'Pursuant to Acts of Parliament'.

Two excellent exhibits were provided by Michael O'Hara. His 'Movement of Money from Bank to Bank by Post' told the story of the High Value Packets (HVP) service in England, Wales and the Channel Islands from 1930 to 1973, and in Scotland 1961 to 1975. His display featured items with HVP labels, many from Scotland, and a sheet of 27 of the labels dating from 1960. Also shown were bankers' letters from the 19th century. His display, 'Three Sets High Values in Use at the Same Postal Rates 1969-71', comprised HVP items with matched frankings of unwatermarked Castles (1967), Machin £sd (March 1969), and decimal (June 1970) high values. Items with HVP labels were little-known a few years ago, but interest in them has grown and it is amazing just how many seem to have survived, probably saved by collectors working in bank offices.



As well as the displays of British material, I also looked at the youth exhibits and, as always, was impressed by the ingenuity of the young collectors. In the Brilliant Britain section, for competitors aged up to 12 years, there were entries on royal families, robins, Robert Burns, cars and more. Thematic exhibits covered canoes, the American Dream, churches, rescue and emergency services, China, Elizabeth II, Christmas, Australia and birds. Most of the young collectors made good use of appropriate covers, postal stationery, stamp books and other items to tell their story and to maximise the visual impact of their exhibits. I always enjoy seeing the youth displays, and some are more interesting and better prepared than some of the adult entries.



Above: award-winning displays are marked with rosettes after the judging on the final day of Stampex. Youth exhibits were impressive and some keen young collectors were photographed with the Bulletin 50th birthday cake

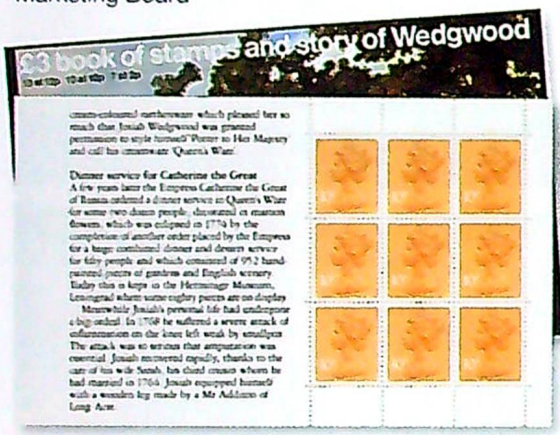
I visited Stampex on the Wednesday and Friday and it was busy both days. There were decent numbers looking at the exhibits, though of course for most visitors the dealer and Royal Mail stands are the main attraction. This was the exhibition's diamond jubilee, having started as the Coronation Year Stamp Exhibition in 1953 and renamed Stampex in 1956. The next Stampex will be held from 19 to 22 February, when the exhibits will cover all FIP plus cinderella and picture postcard classes, with invited displays from the British Thematic Association •



Another view Douglas Myall reviews Royal Mail's longest-running stamp book series

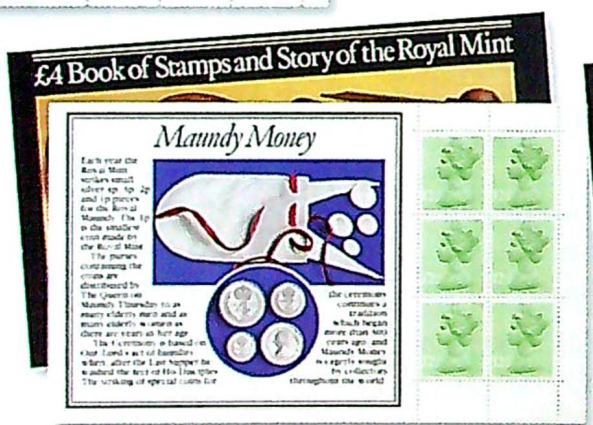
Above: First Day Cover from Stamps for Cooks, the mother of all PSBs. It included recipes and was sponsored by the Milk Marketing Board

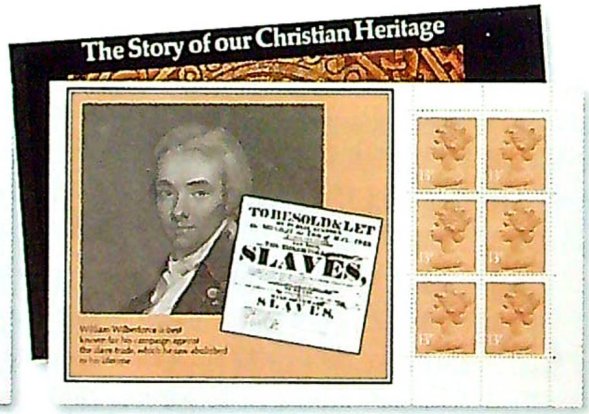
Books of stamps have been issued since the reign of King Edward VII and are very popular with the public. As well as counter- and machine-vended books there have been two other series. One was issued from 1978 to 1983 and contained definitives for the then current first- and second-class tariff with covers illustrating a Christmas theme. This was replaced in 2001 by a series containing pictorial stamps and is now an established annual issue. The other series began on 1 December 1969 with a £1 book titled Stamps for Cooks. On 19 September this year, the 61st book in that series was issued. It is, of course, the Merchant Navy Prestige Stamp Book (PSB). In this article I take a look at what has become Britain's longest-running series of stamp books and recall some of the highlights for collectors that PSBs contain.



The £1 book followed a format first put forward by De La

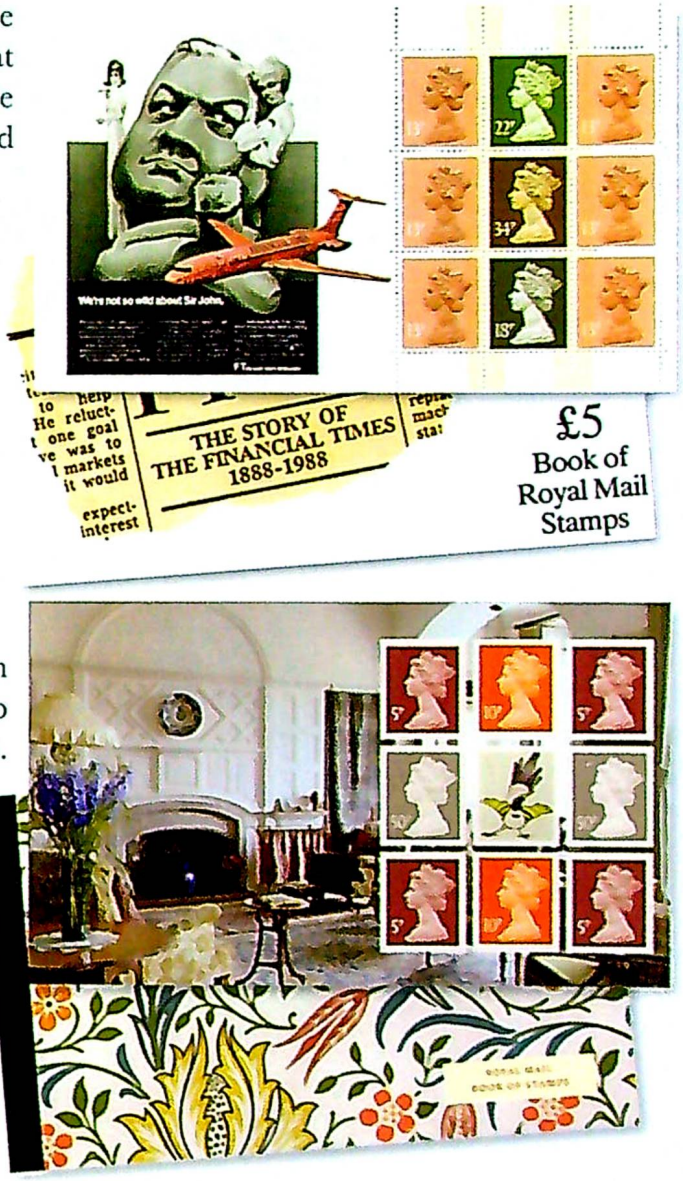
Above and right: among sponsored books were the Story Of Wedgwood in 1980, the Story Of The Royal Mint in 1983 and the Story Of Our Christian Heritage in 1984





Rue as long ago as 1885 and named by them 'cheque book style'. In March 1969, the idea was looked at again. A market survey found that cooking was the most popular theme, ahead of gardening, sport and art. The new book contained 12 recipes and illustrations taken from *The Dairy Book of Home Cookery* published by the Milk Marketing Board. The Cooks book was said at the time to be 'an experiment aimed at the housewife's handbag and to test the market'. It was sponsored by the Milk Marketing Board, who paid the production costs. The print run of the Stamps for Cooks book was 400,000. Of these, the first 10,848 books were bound with wire staples. This caused production problems and so the rest were stitched, a format still followed today.

The experimental book proved popular and soon sold out. The marketing department was keen to repeat the idea and looked for other sponsors. Wedgwood, Stanley Gibbons, The Royal Mint, Christian Heritage, *The Times*, British Rail, The P&O Steamship Company and *The Financial Times* all took the opportunity to sponsor a book – or two, in the case of Wedgwood. Subsequent books were not sponsored but employed themes chosen by Royal Mail. These came to be known as Prestige Stamp Books. Since there was no income provided by the sponsor's advertisements, the change meant that the costs of production had to be borne by Royal Mail. Nevertheless, they continued to be sold at the face value of the stamp content. An attempt was made to charge a premium for the Beatrix Potter book of 1993 but this decision was reversed following protests. The policy of selling PSBs at the face value of the stamps continued for many years, but this became increasingly difficult to justify, especially as the issue of just one book a year had increased to four a year by 2009. Beginning with the Morris & Co book of May 2011, a modest premium of 95p has been added to the price of each book. This is fully justified, considering the expert information and the quality of the images that they contain. Still, an interval of six months between PSBs would not go amiss in these strapped times.



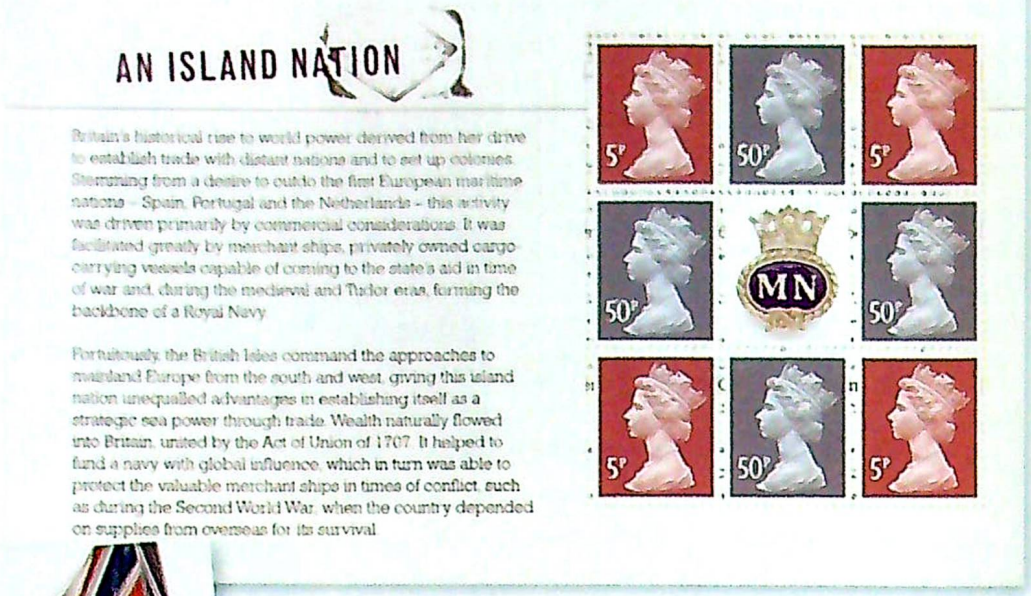
Above: the Financial Times stamp book of 1988 and the Morris & Co Prestige Stamp Book of 2011

The £1 Wedgwood book contained what has become probably the most famous Machin single, the ½p with left phosphor bar. This stamp with full perforations is now sought after by collectors, as many of them were trimmed during the bookmaking process. All subsequent stamp panes in this series have margins all round so, while the perforations might sometimes be slightly off centre, stamps have never again been found clipped.

The Prestige Stamp Book series has become a source of other unusual stamps and many attractive se-tenant pairs. These pairs often included ▸









Above: the recently issued Merchant Navy Prestige Stamp Book, with pane 1 of four panes comprising eight Machins with unusual perforations and a central label showing the Merchant Navy crest

stamps for both the first- and second-class rates. This led to the single phosphor bar on the second-class stamp being placed to one side rather than at its usual place in the centre. Indeed, some books contained the same value with the bar in all three positions. Novelty is not confined to definitive stamps. Often, the special issue stamps in Prestige Stamp Books differ from their sheet counterparts in having PVA gum rather than being self-adhesives.

The latest PSB, featuring the Merchant Navy, continues the traditional theme of having some unique features. The two value stamps, 5p and 50p, are the only stamps with security codes (MPIL/MA13) to have been printed in lithography by Enschedé. Unexpectedly, they are perforated with the ellipses at the top rather than in the traditional position at the bottom. I gather that this was inadvertent* but many collectors will wish to add them to their collection. The figures for good books delivered are no longer provided but there should be enough to meet the expected demand. Collectors of se-tenant pairs will need four books to get all eight pairs provided by this pane and this will impact on the number of books remaining for purchase by others. It would be prudent not to leave it too long before obtaining your own wants.

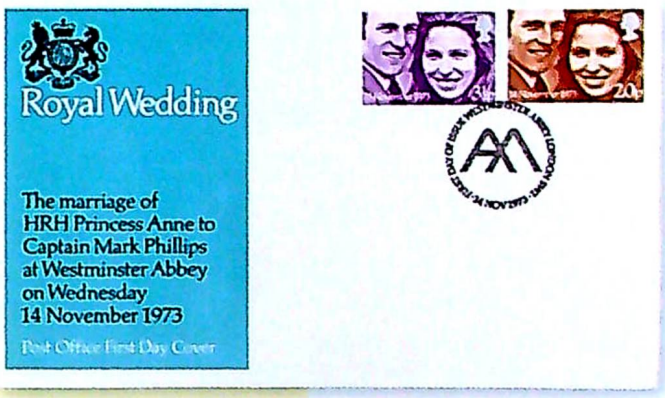
Many books get broken up for their unique stamp content. However, I like to keep one of each intact as I like to re-read the very informative text. A complete set of sponsored/prestige books to date can be obtained for around £500. This would be a worthwhile investment as their market value will almost certainly increase. To house your collection, Royal Mail sells a very attractive album binder inscribed 'Royal Mail Prestige Stamp Books' in silver (order number PA709). Each plastic pocket holds a single book and there is a dedicated strip at the top for an insert, which I use for a printed label giving the book's name and other pertinent details. This album is shown on page 95 ●

* *This inverted ellipse perforation has occurred once before. In 1996, three non-cylinder £1 machine-vended books printed in lithography by Questa were discovered. These yielded six 1p, three 20p and nine 26p stamps with the error. A set of the three values would cost you several hundred pounds today.*

This month in history John Holman recalls the issue of Royal Mail's first Royal wedding stamps

Forty years ago this month Royal Mail issued its first ever Royal wedding stamps, to commemorate the marriage of HRH Princess Anne to Captain Mark Phillips. The issue comprised two stamps, in a common design of a photograph showing the engaged couple. The date of the wedding, 14 November 1973, was at bottom left and the Queen's silhouette embossed in silver at top right, with the value at bottom right. The stamps covered the basic UK first-class rate (3½p) and parcel rate (20p), and were printed in dull violet and deep brown respectively.

The stamps were designed by Collis Clements and Edward Hughes using a photograph by Lord Lichfield. Preliminary sketches and designs by Clements and Hughes were shown in the December 1973 *Bulletin*, together with seven unadopted designs by Peter Branfield, Jeffery Matthews and Martin Stringer. An article about the Royal couple appeared in *Bulletin* the previous month to coincide with their wedding.



Above: First Day Cover with the first Royal wedding stamps and the special postmark of Westminster Abbey, London SW1

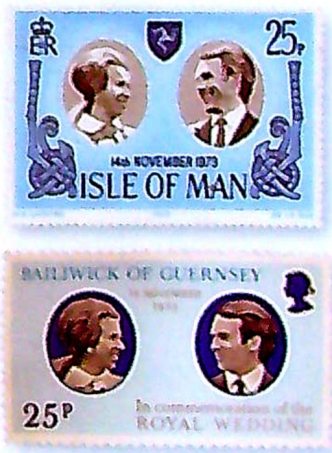
The stamps were printed in photogravure by Harrisons in sheets of 120, the first special stamps produced by its famous Jumelle press. The 3½p is known imperf and with the all-over phosphor omitted, and ten examples of the 20p exist with silver (Queen's head) omitted. One constant variety is of sufficient significance for inclusion in the Stanley Gibbons GB Specialised catalogue – a retouch under the Princess's left eye on stamp four of row two of the no-dot pane.

Three first day of issue postmarks were: Philatelic Bureau, Westminster Abbey, London SW1, and Windsor, Berks. In addition, a special handstamp was used at Great Somerford, the Wiltshire home of Mark Phillips, and covers also exist with the Great Somerford circular datestamp. Most sought-after are covers with Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle datestamps. A PHQ stamp card was produced of the 3½p value. This is now quite highly priced with first day postmark.

The stamps remained on sale for one year, though the presentation pack sold out in August 1974. Quantities sold were: 3½p, 54,034,900; 20p, 7,723,600; and pack, 130,390. These stamps were the first depiction of Princess Anne on a British stamp, though she had earlier been shown on savings stamps. She also features, as a child and teenager, on three stamps in the miniature sheet marking the Diamond Wedding of The Queen and Prince Philip in 2007.

The two 1973 wedding stamps were reproduced on a souvenir card for an exhibition at Olympia in London on 30 November and 1 December 1973; they were printed in black in halftone. Royal wedding stamps were issued by Guernsey, Jersey and Isle of Man and many Commonwealth countries. There were also local stamps (local carriage labels) from some British offshore islands.

Royal wedding stamps have subsequently been issued for the marriages of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer (1981); Prince Andrew and Sarah Ferguson (1986); Prince Edward and Sophie Rhys-Jones (1999); Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles (2005); and Prince William and Catherine Middleton (2011) •



Above: the wedding of Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips was celebrated in stamps from the Isle of Man and Guernsey, as well as Jersey and many Commonwealth countries

Angels delight Win the 2013 Christmas collection



1



2



3



4

Answer these questions about angels making heavenly music on festive stamps for your chance to win Royal Mail's two 2013 Christmas issues

The stamps shown above share a tuneful theme: all show angels playing pipes or horns on stamps of Christmas Past. Answer the following questions correctly and you could be among 12 winners to receive this year's special Christmas stamp issues.

1 Angels with musical instruments heralded Christmas 2007. Which word appeared on the sash of the pipe-playing angel?
a) Peace b) Joy c) Glory

2 This celestial piper joined four other musical angels in 1998. Their designer was Irene von Treskow, a former art director of Saatchi and Saatchi and at the time working in Berlin as an
a) Anglican priest b) Anglican bishop c) Anglican archbishop

3 Another angelic herald, on an aerogramme issued in what year?
a) 1908 b) 1998 c) 2008

4 More musical angels in 1975 included this 13p stamp. What was its name? a) Angel With Horn b) Angel with Harp c) Angel with Saxophone



Name That Stamp Can you tell us the number of singing angels on the new special stamp issue shown under the magnifying glass below left?

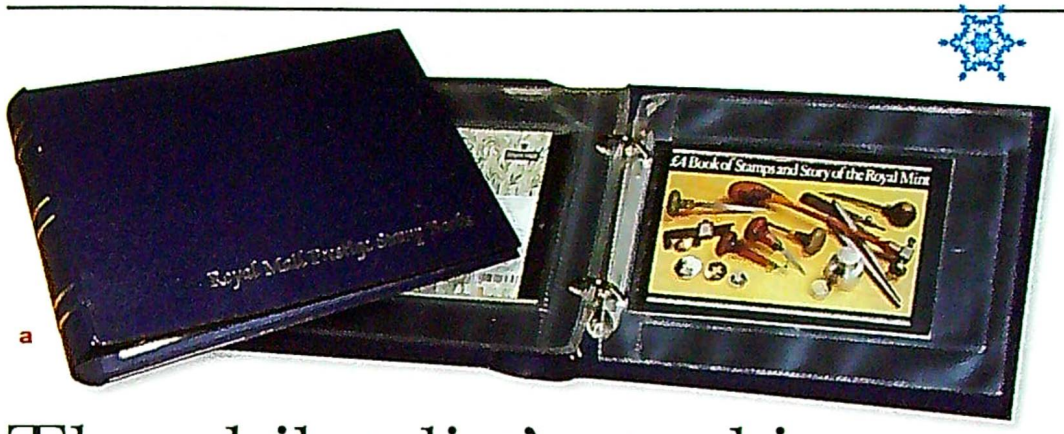
How to enter Send your answers, marked 'November Angels Stamp Quiz' and/or 'November Name That Stamp' to: Bulletin Prize Draws, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB.

Closing date 11 January 2014. Senders of the first six correct entries drawn in each section after the closing date win Christmas 2013 and Children's Design Competition stamp issues •

September *Bulletin* quiz solutions and winners
In 1963: a) Frank Langfield was *Bulletin*'s first editor. In 1973: b) 3p was the cost of a first-class stamp for a letter up to 2oz, from 15 February 1971 to 9 September 1973. In 1983: c) The Aldershot postmark was used for the 1983 British Army Uniforms stamp issue. In 1993: a) £110,000 is the estimated value of the 2d Tyrian Plum stamp. In 2003: b) Tim Graham photographed two of the portraits shown on stamps marking Prince William's 21st birthday. In 2013: c) Two stamps of the Andy Murray Wimbledon Champion 2013 Miniature Sheet show the trophy. Winners: Zaheer Jamil, London. Mrs S Levitt, Yorkshire. 48 more readers and Stampex entries receive *Bulletin* 50th birthday prizes.

Prize draw rules and regulations
1 The closing date is 11 January 2014. 2 Promotions are open to all readers aged 18 and over, except employees of Royal Mail Group Ltd, their business associates and immediate families. 3 Responsibility cannot be accepted for entries which are incomplete, damaged or not received for any reason. Proof of posting is not proof of receipt. Prizes must be accepted as offered; they are not transferable and there are no cash alternatives. 4 Winners are notified within 28 days of closing date. 5 For prize draws where readers must answer a question, winners will be the senders of the first correct entries drawn at random by an independent person after the closing date. 6 Promoter's decision on any aspect of the promotions is final. No correspondence will be entered into. 7 Entry implies acceptance of these rules. 8 Prizes are subject to suitability and availability. The promoter reserves the right to a) substitute a prize of equal or greater value if circumstances so demand and b) to suspend or cancel or hold void any of the competitions or prize draws at any time without notice. 9 Winners' names are available 28 days after closing date; send an SAE to The Editor, *British Philatelic Bulletin*, Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. The promoter is Royal Mail Group Ltd, 100 Victoria Embankment, London EC4Y 0HQ.

Stamp images: © Royal Mail Group Ltd



a



b

The philatelist's stocking

James Cooper has Christmas wrapped with a seasonal selection of gifts for stamp collectors

COLLECTOR ESSENTIALS

Prestigious present Keep your Prestige Stamp Books in mint condition with Royal Mail's special album (**a**), holding up to 20 PSBs. Price: £15.99.

Fantastic philatelic year The Royal Mail 2013 Yearpack is packed with the year's philatelic delights (**b**) – you get all the special stamps issued during the year, background details and reproductions of the associated alternative postmarks. Price: £85.

BRILLIANT READS

Your ultimate goal Leading football photographer Stuart Roy Clarke gathers together his iconic images and memories of the beautiful game in one stunning book. *The Cradle of the Game* (**c**) is the perfect companion to the Football Heroes issue. Price: £35.

First-class history Chris West's *First Class – A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps* (**d**) tells our nation's story via a fascinating parade of classic issues. Price: £11.99.

The four items above and many more great gift ideas are all available from www.royalmail.com and Tallents House (address on page 67).

Go Green Get the inside track on postal history with the Green Papers. These fascinating booklets feature collections of lectures given in the 1930s by the GPO on the latest business and technical innovations in the postal service. Price: £3, www.postalheritage.org.uk.

YOU WILL ALSO LOVE...

Penny wise Want to know more about the world's most famous stamp? Douglas Muir's scholarly book, *Postal Reform & the Penny Black: A New Appreciation* (**d**), is your ideal guide. Reduced price: £4.99, www.postalheritage.org.uk.

Designed by a Gentleman *David Gentleman Design* (**e**) is an exquisitely crafted book paying tribute to the great stamp designer. Price: £12.50, www.postalheritage.org.uk.

PERFECTLY AT HOME

Cool for cooks Every dinner party will be a first-class affair when you cook in this apron (**f**) featuring a line-up of telegram messengers from 1933. Price: £9.95, www.postalheritage.org.uk.

Big night in Settle back and revel in the classic 1936 documentary *Night Mail* with this DVD (**g**). It tells the story of the Travelling Post Office from London to Glasgow and includes the famous Benjamin Britten score and lyrics by W H Auden. Price: £11.99, www.postalheritage.org.uk

Long story scarf The official replica of the splendid scarf (**h**) worn by Tom Baker's Doctor Who makes a witty, original gift. It measures 13 feet, including tassels, and is made of easy-wash 100 per cent acrylic. Price: £45, www.royalmail.com/doctorwho.

The perfect cover For the floor of your stamp cave, this handmade woollen rug (**i**) features the Penny Red, and is from a stamp-themed rug collection. Price: £765, www.giftedpenguin.co.uk.



e f c d

THE ART OF STAMPS

Wall space We are talking outer space with a special offer of two framed pictures – one showing all 11 Doctors and the other featuring their greatest enemies, including the Daleks and the Cybermen. Price: £60, www.royalmail.com/doctorwho.

Costume drama From the V & A comes a quaint print with a 19th century design using a one-penny stamp as a theme for a theatrical costume – proving how long philately has been at the hub of popular culture! Price: from £15 for a frameless print to £150 for a framed canvas, www.vandashop.com.

Season of good will Make a gift donation to the BPMA to help fund the preservation of original stamp artwork and in return you receive a Victorian Innovation Commemorative Cover. Suggested donation (online): £25, www.postalheritage.org.uk.



f g h i



Personal touches for Christmas Smilers®

Now it is easier than ever to send personalised stamps – using the Royal Mail Smilers® app.

Smilers® stamps are available in sheets with blank labels that allow you to add your own design or photograph. If you have a smartphone*, just scan the code on the right, follow the simple instructions and soon you will have your very own set of Smilers® to send to loved ones or even frame and keep as a unique souvenir of 2013 •

*Available for most Android and iOS phones and tablets. Visit Android Market or Apple App Store for download details.

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