

BRITISH PHILATELIC BULLETIN

40 YEARS
OF MACHINS
— A TIMELINE

PUBLICATION N°13 BY DOUGLAS MYALL



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Early in 1965 the then Postmaster-General, Anthony Wedgwood Benn, announced that The Queen had consented to a profile portrait being taken for a new series of definitive stamps. This was to replace the one based on a photograph by the Dorothy Wilding studio which had been used since her accession. At the end of the year, the task of creating the new portrait was given to Arnold Machin OBE RA, a gifted sculptor and painter. He chose to do so in bas-relief, a form of sculpture in which the image projects slightly from the background. It was an inspired choice as it meant that the new image would be three-dimensional although, as the artist well knew, the stamps would be printed from a photograph of it. He was already at work on a new image for the coinage, based on photographs by Lord Snowdon and he used his drawings for this as the basis of the new design, with the head, as on all postage stamps, facing left. These initial efforts showed The Queen wearing a tiara but other photographs, taken by John Hedgecoe, featured the same diadem that had been worn by Queen Victoria on the penny black (and used on all the Wilding definitives).

In June 1966, the Stamp Advisory Committee asked Machin to revise his sculpture to show the diadem. This direct link with the past was a major contribution to making the final image a timeless icon. At this stage, the head was coupé (cut off at the neck, perhaps an unfortunate allusion to the fate of some earlier Royal personages) and The Queen asked that it show a corsage, the upper part of a dress. Machin drew this in pen and ink on a photograph before including it in a new sculpture with a head and shoulders image. This removed the disembodied effect and gave the design stability. It was well-known that Her Majesty disliked fussy and superfluous decoration so the design was further refined to remove the four floral national emblems and even omitted the traditional words Postage and Revenue. This concentrated attention on the sculpture, greatly strengthening its effect.

There were three main stages in the production of the casts from which the photographs were taken for photogravure printing. These were: (i) original model in bas relief sculpted in clay, (ii) a mould taken from the model with the portrait in recess, (iii) a cast of the mould, also in bas relief. The process is described by Machin himself in the Royal Mail publicity film, 'From Picture to Post' made in 1969. This retrospective showed him at work on the final sculpture and the discussions he had with the printers concerning photography and colours to translate his work into stamps. Machin explains that this three-step process made it possible to achieve fine detail by engraving directly into the mould before taking the final cast. If he was not satisfied he thought nothing of taking a fresh mould and starting over again. Even when he had taken a cast from the mould he would do further work on the cast before pronouncing himself satisfied.



Machin sculpture of the head with tiara and without corsage - from an NPM card.



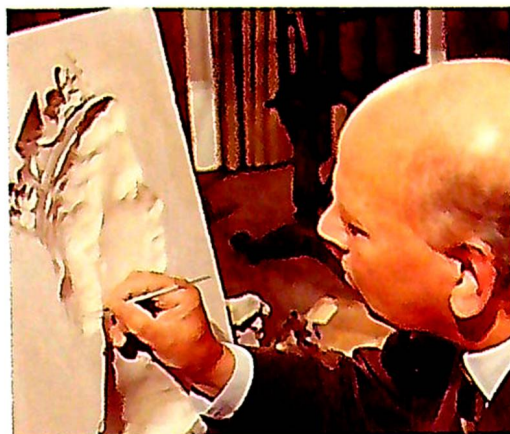
The final Machin head on a plain background - from an NPM card.

Genius has been defined as an infinite capacity for taking pains, a quality with which the artist was well endowed. He was meticulous in getting the photographs just right. Indeed, he so disliked the idea of any photographic re-touching that he preferred to start afresh with a new mould. Tremendous care was taken to retain the three-dimensional element and to ensure that shadows fell only where they were required. The ideal result was achieved when the final cast was photographed with a giant plate camera by the diffused light of a misty morning in Harrison's car park.

The aim of all involved was to produce a timeless image of dignity and simplicity which did not require updating as The Queen grew older. They succeeded admirably. In the 40 years since it first appeared in public the Machin head, as it is popularly known, has been reproduced almost 200 billion times. In 2006 it was officially declared to be an icon of England, and of the rest of the UK too I dare say. Today it is still essentially the same uncluttered image but in the intervening 40 years it has undergone subtle changes as new materials, technical improvements in printing, major advances in mechanical sorting of post and the need to make the product secure against fraud and forgery have all had their effect.

Among the more unusual uses found for Machin stamps was to provide receipts for bus fares in the 70s. The vehicles concerned were Royal Mail Post Buses which operate on many rural routes of the Kingdom. The Machin portrait has not been used only for stamps. Among other Royal Mail products which have carried this world-famous icon are phonecards, cufflinks, mugs, writing paper and a jigsaw. Curiously, one Royal Mail product that bears The Queen's image but has never carried the Machin icon is a postal order.

What follows is a timeline showing the major changes made to the Machin portrait and the uses to which it has been put. In some years, there were several new developments; in others none at all. It has been put to other uses than stamp production and some of these are recounted. For each year the number of new stamps issued is stated based on whether there was a change in one or more of the following criteria: face value, official colour, shape, size, design. Included in the latter are the country stamps, the penny black anniversary 'double head' design issued in 1990 and the 2000 'Millennium' stamp. The numbers for national and country stamps are shown separately; the cumulative totals are also stated. On this simplified basis, the number of different stamps with the Machin head is just over 400 with almost 50% of them being country stamps. They have been issued in more than 100 official colours.



Arnold Machin working on a mould of his sculpture of The Queen's head.

**Royal
Mail
Post
Bus
Ticket**



8d Machin used as a fare receipt on the Honiton postbus.

1967

Issued: 6 / —

After little more than a year's gestation the first three stamps with the Machin head were born on 5 June, with three more following on 8 August. The first to be unveiled was the 4d olive brown sepia, a colour chosen by Her Majesty in a conscious reference to the penny black; it had a solid background. The one shilling stamp had a gradated background. The 1s 9d was the first bi-coloured GB definitive for more than 50 years. All six stamps were printed by Harrison in photogravure on coated unwatermarked paper, the adhesive being gum arabic.

To meet the requirements of the Automatic Letter Facing machines in use at the time, the stamps were overprinted with lines in a phosphorescent ink; the 3d having a single centre bar to indicate that it prepaid the postcard and printed paper rates and the others two bars, one at each side. They were this country's first postage stamps to be issued without a watermark, a change that was welcomed by the printer who preferred to use paper that had not been thinned in that way. Coated paper had been trialled in 1963 on panes with Wilding stamps in a two shilling booklet sold in holiday resorts. It gave excellent results and almost all definitives issued since 1967 have been on coated paper.

The 9d stamp, issued in the second batch, had the value placed at the right. The 7d and 8d, issued the following year, had the same feature. This design change is said to have aided their recognition. At one stage, the 4d was also to have had the value in this position.



Unissued 4d sepia with the value at the right.



The first issue, June 1967.

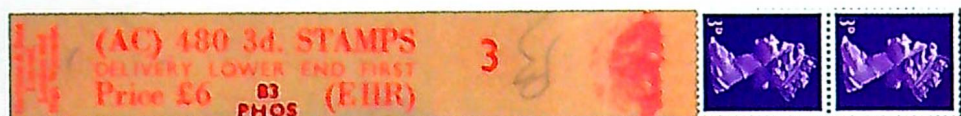


Cylinder pane of 6 × 4d from first Machin stamp book.



Front cover of the first stamp book with Machin stamps; 6/- with three panes of 6 × 4d.

Stamps are required in forms other than sheets; coil machines meet the occasional need for a single stamp at the time of posting and booklets enable one to keep a small supply on hand when post offices are closed. The first coils were issued on 18 June. They were rolls of 480 × 3d and 960 × 3d for sale to the public through vending machines. The 4d coils followed on 8 September. On 21 September, the first Machins in booklets were issued; these contained three panes each of 6 × 4d and sold for 6s 0d. Booklets with 3d stamps were not issued until the following year.



Coil leader with two of the first Machin stamps issued in coil form; AC 480 × 3d.

1968

Issued: 8 / —

Cumulative totals: 14 / —



4d sepia printed by letterpress for use on postal stationery; square frame with head separated from value.



5d letterpress Machin head in square frame produced for use on postal stationery.

The remainder of the low value definitive range was issued in sheets. On 22 January, the 4d was issued with PVA adhesive. Supplies of gum arabic were uncertain and the decision was made to use a synthetic adhesive for all future production, although some exceptions were made occasionally for production reasons.

On 25 March Britain's first stamp book with illustrated covers was issued. It was a 10s 0d book featuring Livingstone in a series on Explorers. Later in the year, illustrations were introduced to all other counter books, the first for each value being; 4s 6d Ships (Cutty Sark); 5s 0d English homes (Ightham Mote) and 6s 0d Birds (Kingfisher).

On 16 September, a 2-tier postal system was introduced coincident with a tariff change. This introduced the concept of different classes of service instead of different types of mail. It was officially described as a two-speed service giving priority to mail prepaid with a premium. The basic inland letter rates became 4d second-class and 5d first-class. One consequence was that the 4d stamp was re-printed that month with a single phosphor bar.

Also issued on 16 September were the first items of postal stationery; a 4d postcard and a 5d letter card. For these the Machin head was rendered in letterpress, also known to collectors as surface printing.

1969

Issued: 6 / —

Cumulative totals: 20 / —

The first colour changes occurred on 6 January. The sepia of the 4d obscured cancellations and the phosphor signal. It was changed to red; another echo of the penny black, which made a similar change 128 years earlier. This also required a change in the 8d stamp from red to duck egg blue.

The Machin head was regarded as such a striking design that it was decided to use it for the four high values of the time: 2/6d, 5/-, 10/- and £1, thus unifying the whole range of definitives. They were printed in new colours by Bradbury Wilkinson in intaglio, also known as recess or line-engraved. Her Majesty approved the die made by one of the firm's skilled engravers

and the stamps went on sale on 5 March, replacing those with the Castles designs. On the same day, they were issued in one of the first two presentation packs containing Machin stamps, the other being for the low values.

On 5 June, the Machin head was used for the first time by a non-UK postal authority. The £1 value in a set of definitives issued by the Cayman Islands used it with a floral spray over the corsage. Since then, the head has been used by 18 other overseas countries on definitives and special issues.

Among other firsts this year were: 27 August, a multi-value coil dispensing five stamps at a time for a shilling; 7 October, use of the head embossed in an octagonal frame on postal stationery; 1 December, Britain's first sponsored (prestige) stamp book, *Stamps for Cooks*; and on 10 December, a 1s 6d experimental printing on phosphor coated paper. The latter was designed to see if an alternative to overprinting phosphor bars was practicable.



£1 stamp with Machin head issued by Cayman Islands.



Embossed Machin silhouette head in octagonal frame used on pre-decimal postal stationery.



Set of four pre-decimal high values; on card autographed by Arnold Machin.



Cover of first sponsored (prestige) book.

1970

Issued: 3 / —
Cumulative totals: 23 / —

1971

Issued: 13 / 16
Cumulative totals: 36 / 16

In preparation for the decimalisation of the currency the following year and to accustom the public to the changeover following the introduction of 10p and 50p coins, the four high values, 10p, 20p, 50p and £1, were issued in intaglio on 17 June. The 10p was on the experimental phosphor coated paper but it was to be another decade before that came into general use. The £1 was much the same as the previous £1 issue but was from a new die. The stamps were again printed by Bradbury Wilkinson.



First Day Cover with the decimal definitive set.

February 15 was decimal day, when sterling became decimal with 100 new pence to £1. The complete range of low value definitives was issued in the new currency and in new colours. Strangely, this decimal system had a fraction in it (½p) and five of the new values included it. The basic inland letter rates became 2½p 2nd-class and 3p 1st-class. Pre-decimal stamps remained valid for a further year and the Post Office issued a leaflet with a table converting the old currency to the new. Cover collectors had fun obtaining as many combinations of the two currencies as they could. Decimal day also saw the Machin head in an octagonal frame printed on postal stationery in photogravure.

The first decimal country stamps -
Isle of Man (2½p), Northern Ireland (3p),
Wales (5p), Scotland (7½p).



The first country definitives with the Machin head were issued on 7 July. They comprised 2½p, 3p, 5p and 7½p for Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Isle of Man. (The Channel Islands postal administration had become independent on 1 October 1969.) On 11 August, the 10p became a low value and was printed in photogravure as a bi-coloured stamp in the standard size.

1972

Issued: — / —
Cumulative totals: 36 / 16



A quiet year. The first Air Letter with the Machin head was issued on 26 April. On 6 December, the value on the £1 stamp was changed from a script fount to Eric Gill's Perpetua typeface, bringing it into line with all the other values. Apart from the £1 value the pre-decimal stamps were invalidated from 1 March.

£1 sign in script and Perpetua founts.

1973

Issued: 3 / —

Cumulative totals: 39 / 16

A new adhesive, PVA with added Dextrin, was gradually brought into use. The first stamps issued with it appeared on 10 September.

For many years private stationery with values stamped to order had been supplied subject to a minimum number of items. This service was withdrawn on 31 October, but not before an enterprising dealer had had some self-adhesive labels printed. There were nine values from ½p to 5p, using the letterpress head in an octagonal frame. They are still valid



First self-adhesive label, STO by HMSO, square shaped, halfpenny value.

for postage although the ½p cannot now be used on its own. It was to be another 20 years before self-adhesive Machins became available to the general public. On 5 July the Manx postal authority became independent of the UK and began issuing its own stamps. Machin stamps were invalidated there but the decimal issues for the island continue to be valid in the UK.

1974

Issued: 1 / 15

Cumulative totals: 40 / 31

As inflation began to take hold, there were two tariff changes this year. Some values were demoted from 1st-class to 2nd-class duty and were reprinted with one instead of two phosphor bars. Single value stamps for second weight steps began to make their appearance starting with a 6½p. Country stamps are often issued some time after the National equivalents and this was a catch-up year for them.

1975

Issued: 2 / —

Cumulative totals: 42 / 31

Another year with two tariff changes but this time with only two new values, 7p and 8½p. The second tariff change, on 29 September, introduced metric weights. The minimum inland letter weight of 2 ounces became 60 grams. It was announced that this would be reduced to 50 grams eventually but it did not happen and the minimum weight was increased to 100 grams in 2006.

1976

Issued: 6 / 9

Cumulative totals: 48 / 40

Changes following a tariff increase on 5 January included the transfer of the 20p from a high to a low value and printing it in photogravure in the standard size. At the same time, the two bi-coloured stamps, 9p and 10p, were issued in monochrome 'to save printing costs'.

The production of stamp booklets by sewing the panes into the covers involved several manual stages and a review was undertaken during 1975 to find a less costly method. The result was a range of books with folded covers into which the panes were stuck. Their production required new machines

which the printers had to purchase and run in before printing could begin. On 10 March, the first booklets made by the new method were issued. They went on sale for 10p in selected vending machines in London; subsequent editions were on general sale. Counter books followed on 14 July. Only prestige books continued to be stitched; stapling for these had been tried and abandoned.



Cover of first stamp book in the folded style.

1977

Issued: 4 / —
Cumulative totals: 52 / 40



Pane in first 50p machine-vend book.



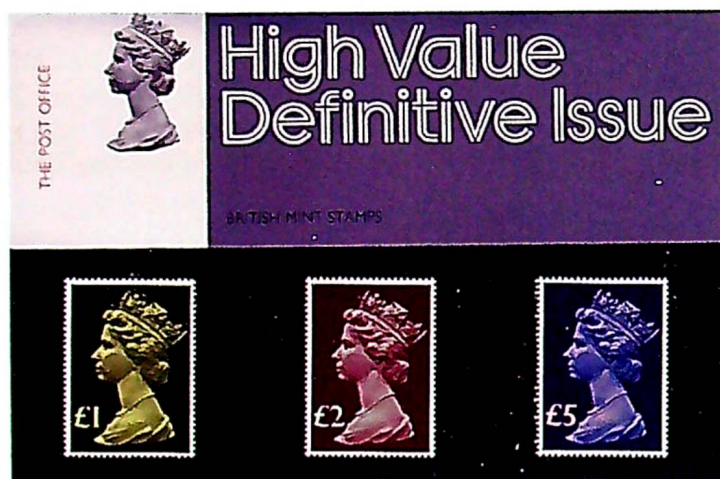
Carton of Scottish country stamps sold through adapted cigarette machines.

On 26 January, the first 50p books sold through vending machines appeared. They were in the new folded style. They replaced the 10p booklets which by this time provided stamps for only one posting. Their issue had been delayed while vending machines with new mechanisms were designed and developed.



Cover of first 50p machine-vend book.

On 2 February, Britain's intaglio high values were replaced with photogravure equivalents as part of a drive to reduce costs. They were joined by the first £5 GB postage stamp to be issued for 89 years. The size of the new stamps was increased to that of special issues. They were bi-coloured with the head and background in different colours. This enhanced the sculptured effect and made them among the finest representations of the Machin head ever to appear on a stamp.



Presentation pack with set of large decimal high values in photogravure.

A trial method of selling stamps took place in Scotland from 7 March to the end of 1978 when cartons of Scotland 1st- and 2nd-class Machins of the time were sold through adapted cigarette vending machines in six Scottish cities.

Three country values, 7p, 9p and 10½p, were issued on 18 January; among them the 100th Machin stamp. The 10½p was in blue although the national stamp was yellow and this was not changed until 26 April. It was done to improve visibility in artificial light.

1978

Issued: 1 / 9
Cumulative totals: 53 / 49

1979

Issued: 3 / —

Cumulative totals: 56 / 49

1980

Issued: 8 / 9

Cumulative totals: 64 / 58



First lithographed Machin;
Waddington 4p.

Staff problems at Harrison alerted Royal Mail to the need to ensure that supplies were secure and led to the first GB Machin printed by an overseas firm being issued on 12 December. What was required was a firm who had the capacity to print large quantities at short notice and to the required standard for a competitive price. The 8p red prepaid the basic 2nd-class letter rate at the time and a quantity was printed by Enschedé of Haarlem in the Netherlands. They did not print another Machin for 12 years.

On 30 January, the first stamp with the Machin head printed in lithography was issued. This was the 4p from Waddington. Questa's first Machin was the 2p, also printed in lithography, issued on 21 May. Lithographic printing requires different paper and ink, including phosphor ink, to those used for gravure. This method of printing results in a rather flat image and two colour plates were used in order to achieve the relief effect. The phosphor bars were applied by letterpress, sometimes erroneously called typography by collectors. The stamps were perforated 14, another first.

Lithography was to become an important method for printing Machin stamps, especially when the quantities required were smaller than usual, e.g., for the country issues. At times, up to four colour plates were used in a continual endeavour to attain the three-dimensional look for which the process was not really suited.

A good case for the first miniature sheet with the Machin head can be made for the one issued on 9 April for the London 1980 exhibition. This included a 50p stamp, also issued separately on 9 April. It was designed by Jeffery Matthews MBE FSAID who has made a major contribution to the development of the Machin head for many years. It showed a composite of London landmarks with The Queen's head in an oval. This was complete with diadem and corsage and was printed in intaglio. Perhaps the 50p stamp should be regarded as the first use in this country of the Machin head on a special issue stamp. (The artist designed a different head suitable for use on special issues.)

Printers contracted to Royal Mail are sometimes permitted to publicise their expertise by issuing reproductions of stamps they have printed or essayed. For the London 1980 exhibition which opened in May 1980 Harrison were authorised to print a souvenir sheet at their stand. This included the unused Machin head without the corsage. It was not valid for postage.



London 1980 miniature sheet with 50p
special stamp and Machin head.



Queen's head with laurel wreath and
ribbons created by Machin for use on
special stamps.



Harrison souvenir sheet for London
1980 showing an unused Machin
head without corsage.

1981

Issued: 6 / 12
Cumulative totals: 70 / 70

Production methods were by now fairly settled and most activity was directed to producing the rapidly growing number of new values and colours to meet rising tariffs. Of interest was the first of a series of stamp cards depicting the Machin head and issued in March by the then National Postal Museum, the one on a black ground being an especially fine rendering.



The Machin head in grey on a black background.

1982

Issued: 6 / 12
Cumulative totals: 76 / 82

The first Machins sold at a discount were issued on 10 November. The year's annual Christmas book contained 20 stamps with a face value of £2.80 but was sold for £2.50. To deter sales of the stamps for their full face value, they had a blue star printed over the gum in an edible ink. Similar discounts were given for other books over the next few years with the stamps being marked with a letter D or variations of the star pattern.



Cover of first Christmas book with Machin stamps sold at a discount.



Ten-paned pane of Machin stamps sold at a discount, showing star on reverse.

1983

Issued: 8 / 9
Cumulative totals: 84 / 91



First value (20½p) issued in redrawn fount by Jeffery Matthews.

The need for a 20½p stamp made it clear that the Perpetua fount was unsuited to the space allowed for this value and Jeffery Matthews was asked to design a narrower fount to replace Perpetua and overcome such problems. He had already modified the 10p value in 1976. The redrawn numerals, as collectors call them, were introduced gradually as new values were required. The first was the 20½p of 30 March.

The centenary of the parcel post service occurred in 1983 and a £1.30 stamp was issued on 3 August to prepay the then basic weight of 1 kilogram. Some regard this as the first GB commemorative stamp with the Machin head although stamps with other values for this service were issued in later years as tariffs changed. It was bicoloured and the same special issue size as the high values of 1977.

1984

Issued: 6 / 12
Cumulative totals: 90 / 103



Rory Matthews version of the Machin Head; printed in letterpress on 1st-class Postnote.



Full face portrait produced during the search for an alternative to the Machin head.

The increase in the number of stamps and the frequency of their replacement over the past several years meant that the number of available colours was shrinking fast. Royal Mail asked Jeffery Matthews to review the colours. His brief included the aim of setting off The Queen's head to greater effect as it was felt that this had been somewhat lost in recent years. He suggested that the version of the head which had a solid background rather than a gradated one would be more likely to give the best results. His work continued over several years and the final palette of 30 colours became available in 1988. (For an account of this see *The British Philatelic Bulletin*, Jan/Feb. 1993.) The first stamp issued in one of the new colours was the 2p dark green of 23 February 1988, still in use today.

Although it was not generally known at the time, 1984 was the year when the first serious attempt to replace the Machin head was made. The Queen observed that it would need a work of real quality. Jeffery Matthews and his son Rory were among those invited to assist. The latter also redrew the Machin head and this was used for some printings of country stamps and postal stationery, including a 1st-class Postnote issued in 1986. In the end the plans for a change were not proceeded with and it would seem that the Machin will last until the end of Her Majesty's reign.

1985

Issued: 3 / —
Cumulative totals: 93 / 103

The ½p coin had been demonetised on 31 December 1984 and the ½p stamp, the last fraction stamp still in issue, was withdrawn on 28 June. On 4 November, the basic 2nd-class letter rate was reduced from 13p to 12p, the first tariff reduction since the introduction of the penny black.

1986

Issued: 1 / 3
Cumulative totals: 94 / 106

On 2 September, a tariff change led to the first £1.50 stamp. It joined the list of photogravure high values and like the others was bi-coloured and printed in large format.



First £1.50 stamp.

1987

Issued: 1 / 3
Cumulative totals: 95 / 109

A new phosphor, Harrison's Lettalite B8, known to collectors as 'A' phosphor, was introduced on stamps issued 21 January and became the new standard.

In a news release of 3 July, Royal Mail announced a new range of stamp books with red and yellow laminated covers and a cutout in the front cover through which one of the stamps inside could be seen. Collectors soon named them Window books, a name that has survived the removal of the cutout in later editions. They were the first books to have barcodes. The books were issued on 4 August for test marketing in post offices and retail outlets. They lasted until the end of 2000 when they were replaced by books of self-adhesives.



First 'Window' books, 4 × 18p stamps for 1st-class service and 4 × 13p stamps for 2nd-class service.

1988

Issued: 12 / 12
Cumulative totals: 107 / 121

On 18 October, the four Machin high values were replaced with stamps having the same castle designs as the former Wildings. They were printed in intaglio. The Queen's image was engraved from a large photograph of the Machin head. Unusually, two of the values had it facing right.



£1 Castle stamp with Machin head, facing left and £5 Castle stamp with Machin head, facing right.

1989

Issued: 10 / 12
Cumulative totals: 117 / 133

The first Machins printed by Walsall were the 14p and 19p printed se-tenant in lithography for £1 machine-vend booklets issued on 25 April.

The first Non Value Indicators, NVIs, were issued in booklets on 22 August. These indicated a service (1st or 2nd) rather than a value and continued to prepay it even when tariffs changed. This revolutionary concept made it unnecessary for retailers of window books to buy odd make up values or to return stock for exchange. They did not appear in sheet form until 1993 or in coils until 1996.



1st-black and 2nd light blue issued 22 August 1989.

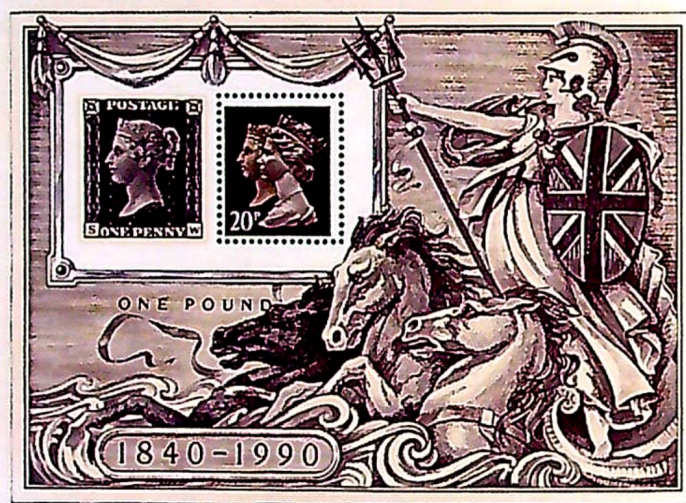
1990

Issued: 15 / 12
Cumulative totals: 132 / 145

To celebrate the 150th anniversary of the penny black, a set of 'special definitives' was issued on 10 January. Designed by Jeffery Matthews, they included the Machin head superimposed onto one of Queen Victoria. This was the first substantial modification to the original design and was well received by critics and collectors. A miniature sheet with the 20p stamp was sold at a premium from 3 May to publicise, and help pay for, the London 1990 exhibition.



The 20p 1990 stamp with double heads issued on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Penny Black.



London 1990 miniature sheet with Penny Black and 20p double head stamp; Seahorse design.

1991

Issued: 8 / 12

Cumulative totals: 140 / 157

1992

Issued: — / —

Cumulative totals: 140 / 157

1993

Issued: 7 / 12

Cumulative totals: 147 / 169

1994

Issued: 1 / —

Cumulative totals: 148 / 169

To deter would-be forgers, perforations with an ellipse at each side were introduced for the castles definitives on 24 March.

The accidental omission of phosphor overprints, although uncommon, led to the introduction of phosphor inks containing a fluor so that an on-press device could monitor its presence and registration. The first stamp with a yellow fluor phosphor was the 18p green issued on 19 November. It was also the first stamp to be printed from cylinders made by electro-mechanical engraving, which was to be brought into general use in 1997. Another change was that the paper omitted any optical brightening agent (OBA) but this was not adopted generally until April 1993.

From 2 January, Non Value Indicator stamps were made valid on mail to Europe. Their validity was later extended to all overseas mail.

Elliptical perforations were required for NVIs issued from 6 April and for all other definitives from 27 April. On 19 October, books of 20 1st-class self-adhesive NVIs were issued as a trial. These had die-cut simulated perforations including the half ellipses. The trial showed that some modifications were required and further issues of non-lick stamps did not take place until 1997.



First day cancellation of first official self-adhesive; signed by the designer.

On 9 August, the only Machin definitive not to have been issued in sheets was issued as 'a trial addition to the range'. It was a 60p stamp to prepay the second weight step (10g to 20g) for worldwide airmail letters and was sold in books of four.

The first product specially printed for a non-official (retailer's) sales campaign was issued on 16 August. It was a 'stamp card attachment' or label, containing a single 1st-class NVI and carried the name of the firm, Boots of Nottingham. It was rouletted to enable it to be folded around a corner of a greetings card before it was packaged for sale in their shops. The label was issued free with each card purchase.

Corner of sealed card showing how Boots label was used.



Valid whatever the current postage rate for First class items up to 60g in UK

FREE
First class
stamp
included
in the price



Royal Mail

Label (unfolded) issued for Boots the Chemist with 1st class stamp free with each greetings card sold.

1995

Issued: 1 / —
Cumulative totals: 149 / 169

1996

Issued: 7 / 12
Cumulative totals: 156 / 181

1997

Issued: 3 / —
Cumulative totals: 159 / 181

The yellow fluor phosphor was found to interfere with the operation of new sorting machinery and the colour was changed to blue. Stamps with the new fluor began to appear from 18 July.

The large £1 stamp was reprinted in gravure in small format and issued on 22 August. The background, but not the head, was overprinted with a special ink which gave it a pearlescent metallic sheen. The use of this ink was a security measure as stamps printed with it cannot be successfully photocopied in colour.

On 16 January, machine-vend books with glossy red covers replaced the theme books with illustrated covers. The mixed value contents had a face value of £1 and £2. They were stated to be a trial to see how they stacked up in new vending machines.



Cover and pane of four NVIs; first £1 machine-vend book with red and yellow covers.

A new image of the Machin head was prepared in digital form and sent to all printers contracted to Royal Mail for stamp production. This showed much greater detail, especially in the hair, and was a great improvement. It was first seen on coils of self-adhesive 1st-class NVIs printed by Enschedé and issued on 18 March. It rapidly became the standard image for the general issue national definitives we see today.

To meet the requirements of the Welsh Language Act, the four country stamps for Wales which had been issued the previous year printed by Questa (20p, 26p, 37p and 63p) were re-printed by Walsall and issued on 1 July without the letter 'p' for pence. The Welsh for penny is ceiniog and it was felt better to omit the currency indicator altogether rather than have both and risk the letter 'c' being mistaken for cent.



First four Wales values with no currency indicator.



Digital Machin head.

1998

Issued: — / —

Cumulative totals: 159 / 181

1999

Issued: 11 / 2

Cumulative totals: 170 / 183

The first business sheets of 100 self-adhesive NVIs were issued on 22 June. Questa's first Machins printed in gravure were the 1st and 2nd NVIs issued in booklets on 1 December.



NVI for European mail.

The NVI concept was extended to the European letter rate on 19 January. The prestige book 'Profile on Print' issued on 16 February contained panes with large format Machin NVIs printed by different firms in intaglio, letterpress and by embossing. Letterpress is the least suitable method of printing fine detail but Slania's engraving is considered by many to be the perfect Machin.

On 9 March Arnold Machin OBE RA died aged 87. On the same date the four high values, £1.50, £2, £3 and £5, were issued in small format printed in intaglio. They were printed from a common die of the head engraved by Czeslaw Slania from a photograph of his fellow artist's work.



Large 1st NVI in black, engraved by Slania.

2000

Issued: 8 / 5

Cumulative totals: 178 / 188



Machin head on white ground and with no borders; issued for new millennium.

To mark the beginning of a new millennium (a year early) a special rendering of the Machin head with a white background was issued as a 1st-class NVI on 6 January. This occupied all the available space so that not all of the corsage was visible.

On 15 February, the only country Machin NVIs were issued. A pane of nine in the 'Special by Design' prestige book contained three 1st-class flame stamps for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland vertically se-tenant.

A miniature sheet containing eight stamps on phosphorised paper was issued on 22 May as a souvenir of the London StampShow 2000 to illustrate use of colours from the Mathews palette.



London 2000 miniature sheet with stamps from Matthews' palette.

2002

Issued: 4 / —

Cumulative totals: 182 / 188

In May, Royal Mail issued three IDT National and International prepaid phonecards to commemorate the golden jubilee of The Queen's accession. Each card bore an image of the 1st-class stamp with the brown 'Millennium' version of the Machin head, although, curiously, they were 'perforated' 14 and not 15 × 14. A card cost £5, £10 or £20, and could be used for making calls in the UK or from almost any overseas country. They expired 12 months after first usage and were invalidated in July 2005.

As part of their obligations under the Disability Act, Royal Mail produced some essays of 1st- and 2nd-class NVIs with very large numerals and a small Machin head facing right. These were never intended for public release but both are known.



£10 phonecard with 'Millennium' head issued 2002 on occasion of Queen's golden jubilee.



1st and 2nd-class trial stamps produced for disabled people.

2003

Issued: 7 / —

Cumulative totals: 189 / 188

Two new NVIs, known as universal stamps, were issued on 27 March for the 40g airmail letter rates to Europe and Worldwide. As well as the head, these contained a vertical strip of airmail half chevrons. They were also the first Machins to include text. The four high values were printed in gravure and issued on 30 April. There are now no Machin stamps being printed in intaglio. At the Autumn Stampex in September, stationery cards and writing paper bearing the Machin head were sold from Royal Mail's stand.



Universal stamp for European letters up to 40g; first Machin stamp with text.

2004

Issued: 5 / —

Cumulative totals: 194 / 188

2005

Issued: 3 / —

Cumulative totals: 197 / 188

On 1 April, a non-value stamp for worldwide airmail postcards was issued in the same universal design of the previous year. The European NVI of 1999 was discontinued on the same day. Apparently, some members of the public thought the E stood for the Euro, a currency unit not applicable to the UK.

On 22 April, the 2p was trial printed on a paper named RMS (Royal Mail Specification). This became the standard for all future gravure definitives other than self-adhesives, which have their own special paper.

2006

Issued: 10 / —

Cumulative totals: 207 / 188

A fundamental revision of the way inland mail is classified came into operation on 21 August. Named Pricing in Proportion, size as well as weight was taken into account. Mail was divided into letters, large letters and packets, with appropriate 1st- and 2nd-class NVIs for the two letter classes being issued on 1 August. Those for large letters bore the word Large and were in horizontal format. The new stamps all had big numerals in a new typeface, reminiscent of the 'disability' stamps of 2002.



NVIs with large numerals for large and standard letters under the PIP scheme.

2007

Issued: 6 / —

Cumulative totals: 213 / 188

Four new stamps were issued in March for revised postal rates and the colour of the 50p was changed, for operational reasons, from sand to light grey. To mark the 40th anniversary of the Machin the £1 stamp is being reissued in ruby, and a miniature sheet contains both new and outgoing £1 stamps and two special stamps showing Arnold Machin himself and the 4d stamp of 1967. These will also be included in a Machin Anniversary prestige book. 2007 sees the number of basic Machin stamps just past 400, a modest average of about 10 a year since they began.

What of the future?

The Machin design is facing increasing competition from country pictorial definitives and the ubiquitous Horizon labels. However, judging by The Queen's opinion of the 1984 investigation into an alternative, its future seems secure. On 8 January 2008, it will become this country's longest-running continuous stamp design, overtaking the penny black/twopence blue which lasted until 8 December 1880 when the twopence rose was issued.

The timeline continues...

The Author



Douglas Myall, a retired senior civil servant, has collected and studied the Machin stamps since their inception in 1967. A key member of Machin specialists societies, he held office in them for many years.

He has published many Machin works under the Deegam name culminating with his Complete Deegam Machin Handbook, now available on CD (deegam@btopenworld.com). He has twice been awarded the National Postal Museum medal and is regularly voted the most popular writer for the British Philatelic Bulletin. His other main philatelic interest is Victorian perfins on cover.

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