

BRITISH PHILATELIC

The ROYAL MAIL magazine *for stamp collectors*

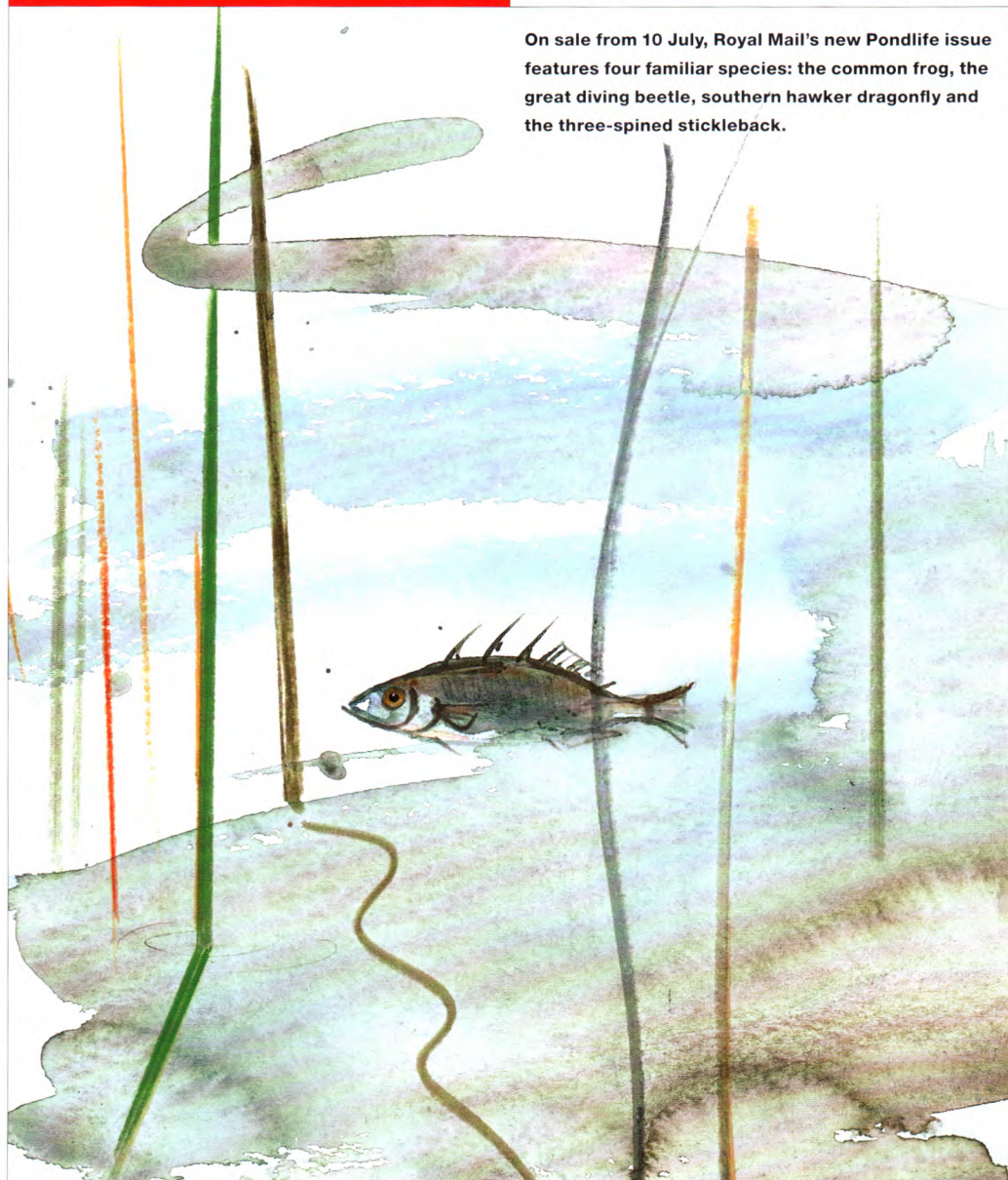
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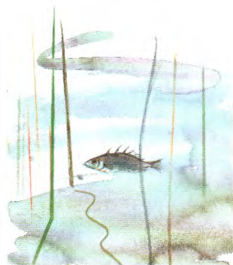
Bulletin

500 years of post in Europe •
Royal Mail Pondlife stamps

On sale from 10 July, Royal Mail's new Pondlife issue features four familiar species: the common frog, the great diving beetle, southern hawker dragonfly and the three-spined stickleback.



Forthcoming issues and withdrawals



Cover A three-spined stickleback is one of the four species featured on Royal Mail's new Pondlife stamps, previewed on p304. Illustration by David Holmes.

Issues Note some items are available only from Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets at main post offices in Bath, Belfast, Birmingham Brighton, Bristol, Cambridge Canterbury, Cardiff, Chester Colchester, Coventry, Croydon Durham, Edinburgh, Exeter Gatwick Airport, Glasgow Gloucester, Grimsby, Guildford Harrogate, Leeds, Leicester Liverpool, London (Eastcheap and Trafalgar Sq), Manchester Newcastle upon Tyne, Norwich Nottingham, Oxford, Plymouth Portsmouth, Southampton, Southend-on-Sea, Stevenage Stratford-on-Avon, Truro, Windsor and York

5 June	Issue Occasions stamps in 'Smilers for You' sheet with greetings labels (available from Royal Mail Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets).
5 June	Withdrawal Millennium People and Place stamps, presentation pack and stamp cards.
12 June	Issue Fabulous Hats stamp cards.
19 June	Issue Fabulous Hats stamps and presentation pack.
20 June	Issue Queen Victoria coin and banknote covers (available only from Royal Mail Tallents House).
July	Issue 'Smiles' greetings stamps in 'Smilers' sheets – see Late news, p319.
3 July	Issue Pondlife stamp cards.
4 July	Issue Horizontal rolls 1st & 2nd class NVI definitives.
4 July	Withdrawal Millennium Stone and Soil stamps, presentation pack and stamp cards.
10 July	Issue Pondlife stamps, presentation pack and postbag.
18 July	Issue Welsh standard airletter, worded 'Llythr Awyr/Airletter' instead of 'Aerogram/Aerogramme'.
31 July	Withdrawals Millennium Tree & Leaf stamps, presentation pack & stamp cards • Bulletin Publication No 7 <i>New Technology for Stamp Collectors</i> by Ron Negus.

English Country definitives Some customers were unable to obtain English Country definitive first day envelopes, presentation packs and stamp cards from their local post office on 23 April. Royal Mail apologises to those who were affected for the obvious disappointment and frustration this caused. Steps are being taken to ensure this problem does not recur with any future stamp issues. In the meantime, presentation packs and stamp cards can still be ordered or purchased from all post offices in England as well as from the 40 PostShop Plus outlets nationwide.

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Detail of a 1973 stamp celebrating the Thurn and Taxis service.

500 years of post in Europe

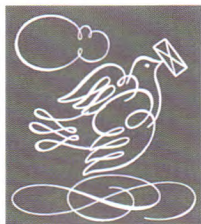
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The British Philatelic Bulletin is published monthly by Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ. • **Editor** JR Holman • **Price** 85p for single copies, from Post Office Counters philatelic outlets • **Annual subscription** £9.50 in UK and Europe; £13.50 rest of the world. Subscriptions should be sent to Royal Mail Talents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB • **Binders** to hold 24 issues, price £7, are available by post from Royal Mail (Edinburgh address above) • Royal Mail also publishes the fortnightly *British Postmark Bulletin*, which gives details of forthcoming special hand-stamps. Available on annual subscription, from Edinburgh address above; UK and Europe £10, rest of the world £21.75 • **Copyright** Design and text Consignia PLC, unless attributed to specific author. Requests to reproduce any article should be sent to the Editor, British Philatelic Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ • **Design** by Robert Maude • **Printed** in Great Britain by The White Dove Press • **ISSN** 0953 8119 • Royal Mail is a trading name of Consignia PLC, Registered in England and Wales, number 4138203, registered office 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ

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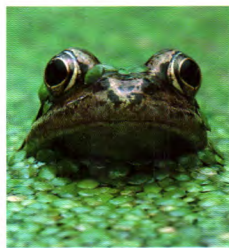
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Stamp scene Auction news • Exhibitions • Society news • New books

Left to right: Francis Kiddle, award-winner Frank Soutar, Nigel Haworth, award-winner Ron Shelley, and ceremony compere Clarissa Dickson-Wright.



Rowland Hill Awards The awards for philatelic achievement during 2000 were presented at a dinner held at the Dorchester Hotel, London on 27 March, and the winners' names were published here last month •

Cavendish Philatelic Auctions 153-157 London Road, Derby DE1 2SY.

Auction news A busy room greeted the start of the Cavendish sale on 10 March which featured the Alan Gilbert and Bob Murton collections of Bristol Postal History and Postage Dues. A 1d Mulready letter sheet used on 6 May 1840 realised £2185, and a state 5A Valentine's First Ocean Penny Post caricature used to St Andrews made £632, just over double the estimate. Postal history proved as popular as ever with £862 paid for a 1565 Elizabethan Treasury Warrant for a Messenger, and £690 each for a 1644 Parliamentary Spy's report and a PO announcement about the introduction of the Bishop Mark. Bristol postal history has a wide following, thus the Alan Gilbert Collection achieved high prices. £690 was paid for a Bristol 'B' dated Bishop Mark on Cross-Post cover to Taunton and a Bristol Spoon Duplex cover went for the same amount. The rare red 'Squared Crown' oval Bristol Ship Letter mark on outgoing cover realised £632. There were few unsold lot in this section. In the Murton Postage Dues section, 1936-37 Imprimatur imperf pairs made £2760 and the 'Herne Bay Provisional' cover of 1951 £2070. Sales on 20-21 June include the Table Mountain Collection of Cape of Good Hope and world-wide material.

Shreves Philatelic Galleries, Inc 14131 Midway Rd, Suite 1250, Dallas, TX 75001-9829, USA.

The Grand Prix Collection of GB 1840-41 line-engraved stamps formed by Dr Pichai Buranasombati was auctioned by Shreves Philatelic Galleries Inc at the Hyde Park Hotel, London on 15 March. A master die proof of the 2d blue realised £27,000 and a 1d black plate 3 imprimatur £30,000. An attractive cover sent from Castle Carey to Taunton bearing eight 1d blacks made £3250 and the 'Seymour' block of 18 1d blacks (the largest used multiple) went for £75,000. Realisations ranged from £85 to an incredible £165,000 for a mint reconstructed block of 24 1d blacks – one of the largest surviving mint 1d black multiples still in private hands. Realisations quoted exclude buyer's premium. A lavish catalogue was produced which is itself a collector's item •

Spink GB auction enquiries +44 (0)20 7563 4000.

A 762-lot auction of GB stamps (Victoria to decimal Machins) and postal history will be held by Spink on 7 June •

Exhibitions The first international exhibition of 2001 – Belgica 2001 – takes place at exhibition halls 3, 4 and 9 at the 'Heysel' Parc des Expositions, Brussels, 9-15 June. Some 130 postal administrations, including Royal Mail, will be present or represented and some 70 dealers will have stands, including 13 from the UK •

Thematica will be held at the Carisbrooke Hall, Seymour Street, London W2 (near Marble arch) on 23-24 June. Opening hours are Saturday 10.30-17.30, Sunday 10.30-17.00; admission free. In addition to the usual leading thematic dealers from the UK, there will be dealers from Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands, and Russia. The Friends of Thematica will provide displays. Harry Wright will entertain young collectors in a special youth area, and there will be special displays on the Canadian Pacific Railway and by the Association Francaise de Philatelie Thematique. Richard West writes about John Fosbery, founder of Thematica, on p316 of this *Bulletin* •

Society news The GB Philatelic Society is holding a two day meeting at the York Racecourse Grandstand venue, which coincides with the popular York Stamp and Coin Fair, Friday and Saturday 27-28 July. In view of the number of collectors likely to be calling in at the fair, the GBPS extends a warm welcome to any GB collector to look in on its activities. There will be several displays during the two days, from pre-stamp postal history through to modern Elizabeth II •

The March issue of *Rundbrief*, published by the German GB study group, Forschungsgemeinschaft Grossbritannien EV, contains worthwhile articles on George V stamped to order envelopes, Machins, Victorian and Edward VII postal history, a review of new Royal Mail issues, and a useful list of articles in recent GB society publications •

The Great Britain Decimal Stamp Book Study Circle held a meeting on 8 April to celebrate the founding of the Circle and the introduction of decimal currency in 1971. Representatives from Royal Mail Stamps & Collectibles in Edinburgh attended with a sales counter and Kevin Giles gave a presentation to members about the work of Tallents House, and a series of postal and philatelic videos was shown during the day. A special limited edition cover containing stamps from both 1971 and 2001 and autographed by stamp designer Jeffery Matthews was presented to those attending and a unique cover was raffled on the day. Mr Matthews kindly donated his signature in aid of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, raising £138 for this worthy cause •

Mail van postcard The North of Ireland Philatelic Society has issued its postcard for 2001 – number 16 in the series. It features loading mail from a Post Office van onto BEA aircraft at Nutts Corner, Crumlin, 1961. Price 30p unused, 60p with first day postmark. Postage 40p on all orders, which should be sent to: N Scott, 49 Kingsdale Park, Belfast BT5 7BZ •

Other international exhibitions this year will be Philanippon, Tokyo (1-7 August) and Hafnia 01, Copenhagen (16-21 October).

GB Philatelic Society Further details and a free brochure are available from Tony Walker, 3 Nazareth Mews, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 1EW.

Rundbrief Bernhard Weiss, Florianweg 57, 47574 Goch, Germany.

GBDSBSC For details of the Circle write to Roger Knights, 7 Old Farm Close, Needingworth, St Ives PE27 4SG, or visit the Circle's website: <http://www.gbdsbc.kabsi.at>



SG catalogue From Strand shop or by post from Stanley Gibbons Publications, Parkside, Ringwood BH24 3SH. Price £17.50. Postage £2.95 UK, £8 Europe, £12 elsewhere.



Railway Letter catalogue
Available from Moorland Publishing Ltd, 34 Meadow Road, Pickering YO18 8NW. Price £20 or £25 signed by author and with original railway letter stamp. UK postage £1.50

New books The 2001 edition of *Stanley Gibbons Great Britain Concise Stamp Catalogue*, published on 27 April, contains additional information on perforation and watermark rarities plus errors of missing colour, embossing and phosphors. There are many price changes to Victorian and Edward VII stamps, and revisions to Elizabeth II prices to reflect current market values •

1991 marks the 110th anniversary of the introduction of the railway letter service, operated by railway companies on behalf of Royal Mail. Interest in the early railway letter stamps is growing and a new catalogue – *The Railway Letter Stamps of Great Britain & Ireland 1891-1947* by the Revd Roger de Lacy-Spencer – will be welcomed by collectors. It supersedes earlier catalogues by H L'Estrange Ewen and Captain Jackson. Mr de Lacy-Spencer provides a concise history of the railway letter post, and reproduces the regulations as published by the Midland Railway. The listings are arranged alphabetically by railway company, with separate sections covering England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland. There are historical notes about each railway company, and for many, a map showing its routes and principal stations. The listings are detailed, giving sheet size, serial numbers, shades and numbers printed. Stamps are valued unused and used. The valuations are considerably increased on Jackson's catalogue of 1979, reflecting the growing interest in these issues. Some of the stamps are still quite plentiful, others have survived in tiny numbers and clearly command high prices at auction. This handsomely produced book – much easier to use than the Jackson catalogue – is likely to remain the standard guide to these issues for some years. 112 pages, card covers •

Royal Mail news Future stamps • Smilers • New covers • Buses Postbag for children

Punch & Judy book The date of this will now be the same as the stamps, not 11 September as previously announced.

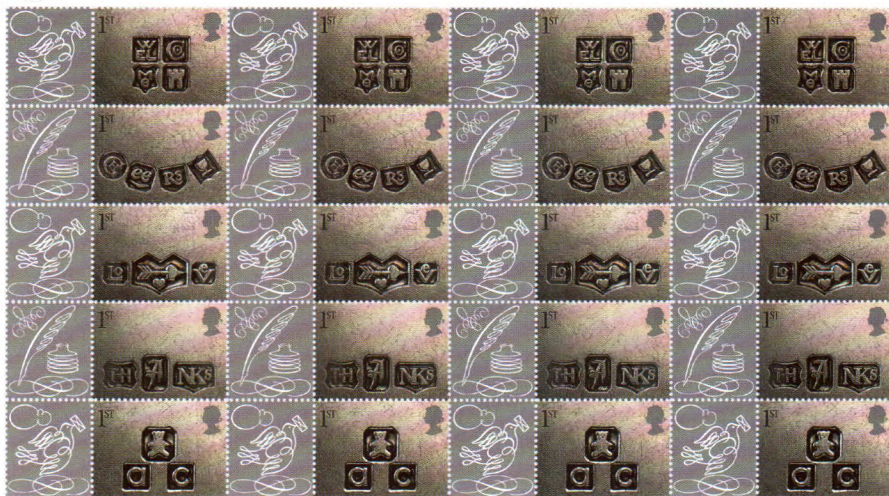
Forthcoming stamps There will no new special stamps in August; the programme continues with six 1st class stamps featuring Punch & Judy on 4 September. Two of these stamps will be included, with four 1st class definitives, in a £1.62 stamp book to be available from 4 September. The Nobel Prize stamps (2 October) mark the centenary of the awards. The designs relate to the awards for Chemistry, Economic Sciences, Peace, Physiology or Medicine, Literature, and Physics. The stamps are 2nd, 1st, £ (European rate), 40p (airmail postcard), 45p, and 65p (basic airmail letter).

The Christmas stamps (6 November) will be 2nd, 1st, £ (European rate), 45p and 65p values, all printed on self-adhesive paper for the first time in response to requests from the public. This will make stamping Christmas card envelopes quicker and easier. The stamps will be in sheets of 50 and rouletting will make for easy removal of singles or multiples from the sheets. The 2nd and 1st class values will also be available in books. The stamps, designed by Arthur Robbins, appropriately feature chirpy cartoon robins. Two Christmas airletters will be issued – one inscribed in English, one bilingual in Welsh and English for sale at post offices in Wales •

Occasions

Celebrations let us be grateful to people who make us happy, they are charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

There are a host of occasions on which to celebrate, express our love and best wishes. These stamps have been specially designed to enhance the sense of occasion. Birthdays and anniversaries, Christmas, may simply need the addition of a message and a postmark to become a lasting memory.



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Royal Mail

Occasions stamps in Smilers sheets A 'generic sheet' containing four of each Occasion stamp with related labels will be available from Royal Mail Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets from 5 June, price £5.95. Enquiries 08457 641 641 (UK) or +44 131 316 7483 (overseas). The sheets were printed by Questa in lithography. There will be no first day facilities.

Since 1 May 'Smilers for You' sheets of Occasions stamps have been available to order with your own image on adjoining labels in the formats listed opposite. These sheets can be ordered from Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB, price £12.95 for a single sheet. Discount prices apply for two or more sheets of the same type. For details of ordering contact the special department on 0845 074 2000 (UK customers) or +44 131 316 7489 (overseas).

The Smilers for Christmas sheets with Christmas greetings labels remain on sale from Tallents House, for as long as stocks last, until October. Price £3.99 sheet of 20 x 19p stamps, £2.95 sheet of 10 x 1st class •

New stamp rolls Horizontal rolls of 1000 gummed 1st and 2nd class definitives have been produced for bulk mailers, including mailing houses in the USA. The rolls will be available from Tallents House Edinburgh and to order from Post Office philatelic outlets from 4 July, price £270 and £190 respectively for roll of 1st class and 2nd class stamps. Single stamps or strips for the rolls will be available to collectors from Tallents House only. The rolls were printed by De La Rue. Rolls of 500 and 1000 1st and 2nd class stamps, rolled vertically, are still available – these were issued in 1997 •

Occasions sheets contain four columns of stamps, and a half stamp size label positioned to the left of each as shown.

Smilers for You formats

- 1 Sheet of 20 'Love' stamps
- 2 Sheet of 20 New Baby stamps
- 3 Sheet of 20 New Home stamps
- 4 Sheet of 10 Celebrations and 10 Thanks stamps



Orders for covers should be sent to: Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB.

Note that the Osborne House postmark will differ from that shown in May, p265.

Queen Victoria covers Two special covers will be available from 20 June. A coin cover (illustrated last month, price £15.95) will bear two 1st class Queen Victoria/Elizabeth II NV1 definitive stamps and the self-adhesive label showing Victoria and the Albert memorial from the stamp book issued in January. The stamps are cancelled by a pictorial Osborne House postmark applied in gold ink. Encapsulated in the cover is the new £5 coin featuring Queen Victoria. A banknote cover (above, price £49.95) honours the Queen and one of the great scientists of her reign, Charles Darwin. The cover features a photograph of Victoria in old age and bears two of the 26p Darwin stamps from the 1999 Scientists' Tale set cancelled by a pictorial postmark showing Westminster Abbey. The cover encapsulates the new Victoria £5 coin and Bank of England £10 note showing Darwin; the notes on the covers bear a unique serial number prefix •

For an application form write to: Collectors Club, Freepost NEA 1431, Sunderland SR9 9XN. Annual membership is £15 UK, £22.50 overseas.

Collectors Club The May edition of *Stamp!*, the magazine of the Royal Mail Collectors Club, includes features on the Buses and Fabulous Hats stamps, the cartoon adventures of Sammy the Stamp Bug, and jokes sent in by readers. Members of the Club – the only one aimed solely at young collectors up to age 14 – receive a fun starter pack, membership card, bi-monthly magazine and six sets of stamps annually •



Postmark Bulletin anniversary Our companion magazine, the *British Postmark Bulletin*, is 30 years old this month: the first issue was published on 1 June 1971. The *Bulletin* announces forthcoming special handstamps, and includes interesting feature articles and literature reviews. Published fortnightly, the annual subscription is £10 UK/Europe and £21.75 rest of world from Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. For a free sample copy write to: The Editor, British Postmark Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ •

Postbags for children The first of a new product aimed at young collectors went on sale with the Weather stamps in March. The second, for the Buses issue, contains the Buses miniature sheet, five colourful postcards, a transparent bus pass holder and inserts to put inside along with your bus pass. A set of comedy stickers can be affixed to the inserts and a sheet of self-adhesive lettering can be used to create your own bus destination board. A Bus Bingo game can be played whilst travelling by bus (or other means of transport) and a pen and a rubber complete the contents, which are all enclosed in a stout plastic wallet. Further postbags – attractive gifts for young collectors – will follow for the Pondlife and Nobel Prizes issues •



Buses Postbag Price £5.99 from Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh and Post Office philatelic outlets.

Opening of Tallents House Last month we reported on the official opening of Tallents House in Edinburgh by stamp designer David Gentleman. Our picture this month shows Mr Gentleman (left) and John Roberts, Chief Executive of Consignia plc at the opening.

The poem below, *Moving the Bureau*, was written by Mimi Khalvati, Royal Mail's poet-in-residence during 2000, to mark the move from Brandon Street to Tallents House last year •



*I've never owned a bureau. If I had,
I'm sure I'd move it. I move everything.
Compulsively. I'm not sure I even know
what a bureau is. But what furniture
I do have, moves and I move with it. Dance
with it really, left, right, left right left, up
to the skirting board, back into the chimney.*

*And then admire it. See who else to dance with.
I'm sure a bureau would be admirable
in its tact and adaptability.
All those cubbyholes. And drawers and flaps.
I could keep my stamps in it. First day covers,
Millennium issues, letters cards, catalogues,
bulletins, bills, then move the whole shebang*

*again if necessary. Which it would be.
Size is never what it seems at first glance.
The first dance never wholly innocent.
And once you've moved one thing, everything
shifts: that play of light on the wall, the way
your hips swerve corners, even in the dark,
and your hand unerringly finds the switch.*

*Even the way you think or don't think changes.
But once you've done the tango, quickstep, mastered
the paso doble with a fridge, a bureau's
nothing. A Nureyev. Baryshnikov.
Lord of the Sword Dance, of the Highland Fling.
A bureau's a beau armed with a secret spring.*

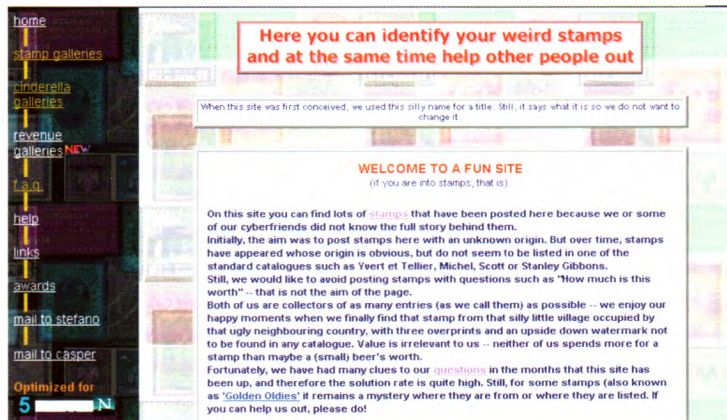
Welsh airletter A new printing has been made of the standard Welsh air-letter, now inscribed 'Llythyr Awyr/Airletter' instead of 'Aerogram/Aerogramme'. The new printing will be available at post offices in Wales as old stocks are used up, and from Tallents House Edinburgh and Post Office philatelic outlets from 18 July (not 4 July as announced in May), price 40p •

Buses miniature sheet The miniature sheet was printed in large (primary) sheets of 12 (3 × 4) guillotined into single sheets for sale. No plate numbers were shown on the primary sheet but the colours used – cyan, yellow, magenta, black and grey – were noted in the bottom sheet margin ●



Bulletin publications Copies of publication 7, *New Technology for Stamp Collectors*, by Ron Negus will be withdrawn from sale on 31 July. This was given free with the April 2000 *Bulletin* but readers wanting additional copies should order now (order code PB346) from Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PE, price £2.95. Publication 8, *Alternative Ways of Collecting*, by Richard West was included with the April 2001 *Bulletin*. Additional copies can be ordered (code PB348) from Tallents House, price £2.95. Publications 1-6 are now out of print ●

Philately on-line Ron Negus identifies some unusual issues



www.raster.it/stefano/a Two collectors, one Italian and one Dutch, who wanted help in identifying stamps in their collections, originated this site in 1997. Since then, collectors across the world have used it to ask for help with their own identification problems.

FROM TIME TO TIME, most collectors come across stamps that they are unable to identify. Diligent searching of specialised catalogues and handbooks will sometimes provide an answer. If the collector belongs to a club or study group, asking others can often aid identification. As well as using these routes, it is also possible to seek assistance via the internet.

A site with this objective can be found at the address given above. This site has a title which explains its entire purpose: it is called 'Here you can identify your weird stamps and at the same time help other people out'. The two collectors who run it say that they had thought of finding a snappier title, but decided the existing one described the purpose they had in mind exactly when they set it up in October 1997.

The concept is simple, but very effective. If you have a stamp that you cannot identify, you send a scanned image with any details you possess by e-mail to the site administrator, who vets your enquiry. If he considers it to be suitable for inclusion, it is allocated a reference number and added when the next updated page is published on the web. The original enquiry together with the e-mail address of the sender is shown alongside the image. Other collectors who are able to recognise the piece are invited to send details to the person who enquired, and they, in their turn, are asked to pass the answer back to the site so it

can be added against the relevant reference numbered item. Over a period of time, therefore, the site has built up a fascinating accumulation of unusual material from around the world, and many items have been successfully identified.

The site is arranged into three sections, covering Stamps, Cinderellas and Revenues. On the main page of each section, the reference numbers are shown in groups of ten and for the stamp entries the countries involved are listed where known. The distinction between the various categories is not always clear-cut and whilst Cinderellas were split off from Stamps in September 1999, the introduction of Revenues as a separate class did not occur until December 2000. As a result, it is worth looking at all the three sections if interested in a specific country. In total, the site now lists some 650 images.

My only minor criticism of the site is a technical one. Because there are so many illustrations the individual pages often take quite a long time to download. The title page for the Stamps section, in particular, contains thumbnail stamp pictures against each group of ten questions. These delay the download but add nothing to the listing of countries on the page. Despite this slight reservation, it is a site I would recommend as well worth a visit. The opening page starts off with the words 'Welcome to a Fun Site (if you are into stamps, that is)' which sums it up extremely well ●

Celebrating 500 years of European posts

From Rome to Belgica, by James Mackay

AT THE HEIGHT of the Roman Empire there was a sophisticated and well-organised postal service known as the *Cursus Publicus*, whose two-wheeled horse-drawn mail carts travelled over good, metalled roads between *mansiones* (hostelries) and *mutationes* (relay-stations where horses were changed). Each was in the charge of a *stationarius* (postmaster) who directed the *tabellarii* (postmen). The regulations which have survived from the 4th century indicate that the service was under the control of the *Praefectus Vehiculorum* (transport chief) in each province. This system fell into decay in the 5th century, although parts of it survived in the Visigothic kingdom of Spain (6th century) and in the dominions of Charlemagne (8th century).

Metzger Post After the Dark Ages, some semblance of a postal service began to emerge again. In the early Middle Ages the first posts were organised by trade guilds for their members, the earliest on record being the Metzger Post operated by the butchers' guild in Germany. One of the conditions of becoming a butcher was the possession of a good horse and a promise to carry mail as and when required. The butchers adopted a cow-horn as their badge, and from this comes the posthorn in the insignia of many postal administrations.

The Metzger Post survived till end of the 16th century when it was absorbed into the official service of the Holy Roman Empire. By 1301 the Florentine merchants' guild known as the *Arte dei Mercanti de Calimala* (the drapers' society) had organised a postal service between Florence and the major trade fairs in France. Monastic posts operated between the abbeys, convents and monasteries, keeping them in touch with the headquarters of the great religious orders. Postal services operating between the medieval universities were in existence by the beginning of the 13th century, the Sorbonne creating a network that stretched from Glasgow to Cracow. Unlike the other early services, the university posts carried the private letters of the general public as well as their own official correspondence.

The world's oldest municipal post was organised by the Hanseatic League in Bremen by the middle of the 12th century. Bremen was eventually the centre of the Hanseatic network from which routes went via Hamburg to Lubeck and via Rostock and Stettin (Szczecin) to Danzig (Gdansk).

Master of Our Posts All of these early services were fragmented and intended for specific groups. A major breakthrough came when Count Roger I of Thurn and Taxis (or *della Torre e degli Tassi*) established a relay service of posts linking northern Italy and the Tyrol, and was knighted by the Emperor Frederick III for his services in 1450. Francis I of Thurn and Taxis (left) was appointed 'Captain and Master of our Posts' by Philip I, Archduke of Austria, in 1501 with a commission to extend the network of posts throughout the Habsburg dominions.



Posthaus and post rider. Mary Evans Picture Library



Right, Francis I of Thurn and Taxis, appointed 'Captain and Master of Our Posts' by Philip I, Archduke of Austria. By 1850 the Thurn and Taxis operation had been reduced to parts of Germany; from 1852 to 1867, it issued stamps for use in these areas (top), three being reproduced on a 1965 German stamp. Below, the Thurn and Taxis posthaus at Augsburg in 1616.





The Thurn and Taxis family's property included the palace in Frankfurt am Main which housed the Diet of the German Confederation. The impressive gateway of this palace was featured on a German stamp of 1953.

Four years later Philip, now King of Spain, signed a postal treaty in Brussels establishing a courier service between Spain, the Low Countries, France and Germany. In 1506 a route linking Mechelen (Malines) in Belgium with Innsbruck in Austria was established. Later members of the Thurn and Taxis family rose in power and prestige as their postal network expanded. Leonard I was appointed Chief Postmaster of the German Empire by Charles V. In 1574, when Prince Lamoral I was appointed Grand Master of the Posts, the service was thrown open to members of the public and no longer restricted to state correspondence.

The Thurn and Taxis postal service continued to expand throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, despite such setbacks as the Thirty Years War (1618-48). At the height of their power the Thurn and Taxis family operated a service which stretched from the Baltic to the Adriatic and from Poland to the Straits of Gibraltar, yielding an annual profit of 4 million livres. The family had 20,000 employees, thousands of horses and carriages, as well as a considerable amount of property.

Their supranational power was broken by Napoleon who permitted the states of the Rhine Confederation their own postal services. Although their privileges were restored by the Congress of Vienna, they could not resist the march of national postal progress. By 1850 their operation had been reduced to three grand duchies, three duchies and a handful of petty principalities in various parts of Germany.



End of an era The princely family of Thurn and Taxis backed Austria in the Seven Weeks' War and paid the penalty by being forced by the victorious Prussia to sell its postal monopoly in 1867, for 3 million thalers. Prince Maximilian Charles, Count of Thurn and Taxis, was the last hereditary Grand Master of the Posts and died in 1871. The family postal service that eventually spanned most of Europe had lasted over 420 years.

In 1952 Belgium belatedly celebrated the 450th anniversary of the world's first truly international postal service by issuing a set of 12 stamps (two are shown on opposite page). Francis I also appears on Spain's Stamp Day issue of 1988, while his descendant Juan de Tassis y Peralta, chief courier under Philip III and Philip IV, was shown on a stamp of 1991. Belgium returned to this theme in March 1959 (opposite), 1960 (opposite) and 1973 (bottom left below). Incidentally, the yellow and black livery of this service survives today in the colours of the German postal service. A 15f of 1992 showing the arms of Thurn and Taxis celebrated the 500th anniversary of the earliest mention of their service in the Lille account books.

Joint issues In 1990, Belgium joined Austria to issue a stamp apiece reproducing Albrecht Dürer's engraving of a Thurn and Taxis post-rider (bottom right below). This motif was used not only by West Germany and West Berlin but also by the German Democratic Republic – the only occasion on which stamps bridged the political gap between the two republics. East Germany subsequently re-issued the stamp as a 30pf, (instead of 35pf) along with three others showing mail transportation through the ages •

The 500th anniversary of Europe's first truly international postal service is being celebrated widely this year, and provides the theme for the Belgica international philatelic exhibition, 9-15 June. Left, a 17th-century Dutch post rider.



Opposite below, top row: two of 12 Belgian stamps of 1952 for the 13th UPU Congress in Brussels. This set featured portraits of the house of Thurn and Taxis from Francis I (80c) to Charles Alexander (20f) and, on the top value (40+10f), the family's principal seat in Belgium, Beaulieu Chateau.

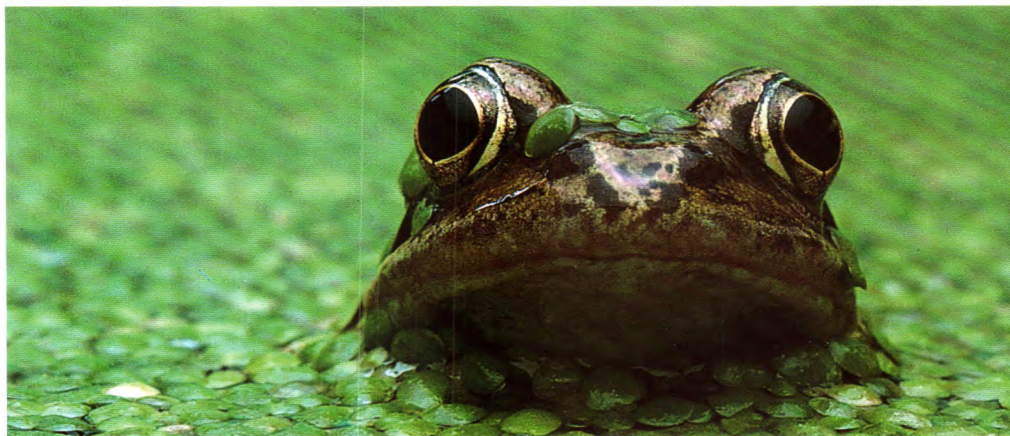
Opposite below, bottom row: Belgian issue for Stamp Day March 1959, reproducing J E Van den Bussche's painting of John Baptist of Thurn and Taxis receiving seals of office from the Emperor Charles V. A tapestry portraying Countess Alexandrine of Thurn and Taxis on horseback appeared on the Stamp Day 3f of 1960.

Pondlife Beneath the surface of a new issue

FOUR STAMPS featuring Pondlife will be available from post offices, Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh, and philatelic outlets from 10 July. The stamps are Royal Mail's contribution to the Europa series issued by member countries of PostEurop; the theme for this year's issues being Water – a Natural Resource.

The stamps feature: 1st class (27p) Common Frog; € (European rate, 37p) Great Diving Beetle; 45p Three-spined Stickleback; and 65p Southern Hawker Dragonfly. The EUROPA symbol, as used since 1994, is positioned at top left on the 1st and E stamps. The Queen's silhouette is printed in silver at top right, with the value or service indicator below in black.

The basic European letter rate will increase 1p to 37p from 2 July.



Technical details

Printer De La Rue

Process Gravure

Stamp size 41 × 30mm

Sheets 100

Perforation 15 × 14

Phosphor Two bands

Gum PVA

Gutter pairs Vertical

The Common Frog (*Rana temporaria*) is found throughout Britain and Ireland in damp vegetation near water, and it is often a visitor to suburban gardens. Famed for its leaping ability, its muscular back legs enable it to leap six to seven times its own body length. The shade and markings of its skin vary from a pale greenish-grey, through bright yellow, to a dark olive-coloured brown, and can be marked by spots, speckling or marbling in black, brown or red. The frog can change its colour by spreading dark pigment cells scattered over its body beneath the outer skin. It becomes paler in light, warm and dry conditions, and darker in cold, damper weather. It feeds on slugs, worms, flies and insects, all of which are found near ponds, and may travel half a mile to reach its spawning site. The frog returns to the same spawning site every year. The jelly-covered spawn of up to 4000 eggs absorbs water and floats on the pond – two or three weeks later, the tadpoles wriggle free of the eggs. Sadly, few survive to adulthood.

The Great Diving Beetle (*Dytiscus marginalis*) can fly long distances from pond to pond, usually at night, and is equally adept underwater when it swims rapidly, its streamlined body propelled by hair-fringed back legs. Fierce carnivores in either adult or larvae form, they have large curved jaws for piercing prey such as worms, tadpoles and sticklebacks.



The stamps are designed by John Gibbs, with photographs by Frank Greenaway. Mr Gibbs designed the 1981 Year of the Disabled, 1986 Parliamentary Conference, 1990 Thomas Hardy and Gallantry, 1993 Roman Britain, and 1999 Royal Wedding issues. Natural history photographer Frank Greenaway photographed his subjects in special tanks he keeps for this purpose at his Sussex home. Mr Gibbs then worked on the photographs, adding water foliage on computer as required.

Below, common frogs among Duckweed.



The Three-spined Stickleback (*Gasterosteus aculeatus*), found in most well-established ponds, is named for the strong spines in front of its dorsal fin; these become erect when the fish is disturbed. In May the males develop their brilliant breeding colours: the back is bluish, the belly a fiery orange and the eyes an emerald green. The male constructs a tubular nest of pond weeds and other fragments of plant material before chasing a female into the nest, where she lays a few eggs before being chased out again. The male repeats this process with several different females until the nest is full of eggs which he then fertilises. Until the eggs hatch, the male guards the nest, and fans the eggs with his fins – the current of water aerates the eggs and prevents the growth of moulds. The eggs hatch within five to 12 days depending on the water temperature. The baby sticklebacks then stay with their father for a while.

The Southern Hawker Dragonfly (*Aeshna cyanea*) can usually be seen flying in the vicinity of large ponds or canals, keeping well out over the water. A tireless flier, its flight period lasts from the end of May to the end of August. They are voracious hunters, living among weeds and growing gradually, changing their skins as they outgrow them. The 65p stamp shows the female sitting on a water lily bud.

Cylinders and colours

1st, E & 65p 1A black ● 1B greenish yellow ● 1C bright magenta ● 1D new blue ● 1E bluish silver (iridium ink) ● 1F silver

45p 1A black ● 1B greenish yellow ● 1C bright magenta ● 1D new blue ● 1E bluish silver (iridium ink) ● 1F dull silver (tint on fish) ● 1G silver (Queen's head)

Phosphor cylinder number P4 is positioned opposite row 8, above the ink cylinder numbers on all values. The iridium ink is printed below the water-line on all values to give a purlucent effect. This was also used on the Occasions issue in February.



Pondlife first day cover (£2.45 UK, £2.09 overseas) above, and presentation pack (£2.10) right. The pack contains the four stamps.



FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets about a week before 10 July, price 25p. Orders for serviced FDCs with the four stamps or cancelled by a pictorial first day postmark of Royal Mail Tallents House Edinburgh or Oundle, Peterborough must reach Tallents House (address below) by the day of issue. Price £2.45 UK (including VAT) or £2.09 overseas (no VAT). Oundle was chosen for the alternative postmark as it is the closest location to the National Dragonfly Centre.

Collectors may send stamped covers on the day of issue to: Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB (Tallents House postmark), or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, St Stephen's Street, Birmingham B6 4AA (Oundle postmark), marking the outer envelope 'FD0115' (Tallents House), or 'FD0116' (Oundle). Covers can be posted or handed in at main post offices for the Oundle postmark. Details of other handstamps for 10 July will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from Tallents House (£10 UK/Europe; £21.75 elsewhere). For a sample copy write to: The Editor, British Postmark Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HTQ.

PHILATELIC PRODUCTS A well-illustrated pack (price £2.10) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets. The pack, designed by John Gibbs, features text by Philippa Kerr, with illustrations by Andrew Davidson/The Artworks. A Postbag – a pack for young collectors – will be available from Tallents House and philatelic outlets, price £5.99. This will contain the four stamps, temporary tattoos, a 'food chain game', Pondlife poster, postcards, and other goodies ●

Pondlife on stamps These are the first Royal Mail stamps dedicated to the subject of Pondlife, although birds, animals and insects that live on or near ponds have featured on some earlier issues, as shown here. A mallard and a frog also featured on one of Tony Meeuwissen's delightful Good Luck greetings stamps of 1991, and the the 1st class stamp in the 2000 Mind & Matter Millennium set features gathering water lilies on Norfolk Broads.

The Emperor Dragonfly, Four-spotted Libellula and Yellow Flag and Common Frog, Fennel-leaved Pondweed and Long-stalked Pondweed, Moorhen and Little Grebe, and Giant Pond and Great Ramshorn Snails were featured on the covers of four 50p stamp books issued between May 1986 and February 1987.



Top: Moorhen from the 1980 Birds set. Middle, left to right: a Yellow Waterlily from the 1988 Linnean Society stamp; a frog's legs and waterlilies, representing National Pondlife Centre, Merseyside, from the 2000 Water & Coast set; and the Natterjack Toad from the 1986 Nature Conservation set (Mr Toad, from *The Wind in the Willows*, features on the 1979 10½p International Year of the Child stamp). Bottom: Emperor Dragonfly from the 1985 Insects set.

Mainly Machins D G A Myall begins a new series of articles



The Submarines book issued 17 April follows the Cats and Dogs book in a series intended to bring special issues to the public's attention. Left, D G A Myall.



Submarines



Issued April 2001

New beginnings At the end of my regular article in the March *Bulletin* I said that the self-adhesive products meant that the traditional dividing line between sheets, rolls and booklets had become blurred and that maybe it was time to consider enlarging my remit to include other forms of issue than decimal stamp books. The Cats & Dogs issue of 13 February illustrates this well. Because the sheetlet (Royal Mail's description) was rouletted in the same places as the the book, many people see it as a book. Typical is Mrs Smithers of Surrey who wrote to say that 'it appears that you have to fold it yourself aided by the two lines of perforation...thus obtaining a booklet'. I know that several post shops folded the sheetlets before selling them as books. Some of the labels on packs of 2000 of these 10 x 1st referred to them as Stamp Panes. The wording on these labels is specified by Royal Mail so it might be thought that there is some official ambivalence over the status of this product. However, the word pane is not confined to books even in philatelic circles; see the following definition given in Collins English dictionary, CD-ROM version. It seems that both sheetlet and pane are accurate descriptions in this instance.

Pane: 4. Philately.

a. any of the rectangular marked divisions of a sheet of stamps made for convenience in selling. b. a single page in a stamp booklet.

In a new series of articles, therefore, I will endeavour to cover all forms of self-adhesive stamp issues and thus will not need to be concerned about whether or not they are booklets. Nor will I be restricted to self-adhesives. Although the new series will perforce be mainly about the Machin series, the country pictorial definitives will also be included.

While the emphasis will be on definitives rather than on special issues, these will not be entirely excluded. The new series of books which began with 10 Cats & Dogs and two Machin 1st class xvts is intended to bring special issues to the public's attention. Thus the mighty Machin is reduced to a merely promotional role which is further reduced by the advent of pictorial definitives for all four countries of the UK.

The second book in this series is the 2 x 1st Submarine plus 4 x Machin 1st issued on 17 April. It will be followed by similar layouts later in the year.

Self-adhesives Those readers who have decided to make a fresh start with these issues might like to know of several inexpensive errors which have occurred. Inaccurate registration of the phosphor overprint cylinders has resulted in several 'phosphor shifts'. These include single stamps with the left bar inset and well clear of the perforations (Questa 1st from sheets and Walsall 1st from booklet panes of 6); right bar inset (Walsall 1st from panes of 12); centre bar short at the bottom (Walsall 2nd from sheets 1998 and 2000). There may be others. Such misprintings are of little concern to Royal Mail as they do not affect the operation of the sorting machines. An error of rather more interest to them is the complete omission of the phosphor bands on the Walsall books of 12 recently reported to have been found in some non-cylinder books. Another is a report of the Walsall book of 12 missing its perforations.

One result of the way in which self-adhesives are issued is that there will be no se-tenant pairs.

Country pictorial definitives Another opportunity for a new start, and one that might appeal to non-Machin enthusiasts, is provided by the country pictorial definitives. By the time you read this, the sets will have been completed by the issue of four stamps for England on St George's Day, 23 April. Ever since the first 'Regional' stamps were issued in 1958 there have been periodic calls for similar stamps to be issued for England. The impetus given to devolution by government legislation in the late 1990s fuelled the growing consciousness of the English as a nation and may have contributed to the decision to issue England stamps for the first time. Unlike the sets for the other three countries, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, these issues are not prompted by the establishment of separate parliaments or assemblies; Westminster continues to be a national parliament.

Each set comprises four stamps: 1st class, 2nd class, E or European rate (these three are Non Value Indicators or NVIs) and a value stamp pre-paying the second weight step for overseas letters. The current rate is 65p. There were 64p stamps for Scotland and Wales under the previ-

ous tariff and the designs did not change when the rates were altered. It is doubtful whether this policy will be continued for future rate changes; there would be too many opportunities for underpaid postal items and confusion by mail sorters. One solution, of course, would be to make this stamp an NVI.

The sheet stamps for Scotland and Wales were printed in gravure by Walsall. Those for N Ireland were printed by the same firm by lithography. The England stamps were printed in gravure but by De La Rue. Several factors influence the choice of printing process. The most important are the number of colours to be used and the quantities required. Another is the nature of the design. Multicoloured stamps mean more cylinders and higher costs of production. These can be borne if the quantities are not too great; hence the Scotland and Wales issues. Large print runs of permanent issues mean single colour stamps printed by gravure; this is why the England stamps are printed that way. Relatively small quantities may indicate lithography as the preferred method. However, in the case of the N Ireland set, the main factor was the designs. These were proofed in both gravure and lithography. It was considered that the latter gave the best results in view of the density of the multicoloured designs and the suitability of the process to solid colours; gravure inks are more transparent.

I understand that post offices will automatically supply these pictorial stamps in response to requests from the public for 'a first class stamp' etc. Anyone who wants the standard Machin stamps will need to ask for them specially.

There are no present plans to issue the pictorial definitives as self-adhesives. Nor is it intended to issue them in book form. The exception to this, as always, concerns prestige books. Both the Scotland and Wales 2nd class stamps have already appeared in prestige books, as has the Scotland 65p. The two Scotland stamps were printed se-tenant around a label on a pane in the *Life of the Century* book celebrating the birth centenary of HM The Queen Mother last August. The Wales stamp was printed se-tenant with the brownish olive millennium 1st class NVI on a



The England stamps issued on St George's Day, and the four different sans serif type-faces used for the different country issues (from top left): England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales (at 310%).

pane in the *Treasury of Trees* book last September. This year's prestige book, which will be issued in October, will contain Scotland 1st and E stamps se-tenant.

Sheet stamps and those in prestige books are often printed by different firms. Also, these books usually contain different values se-tenant. The result is that the sheet and book stamps can generally be distinguished by even moderately specialised collectors. If you intend to start a collection of these issues you will need to take this into account. I will draw attention to such differences in future articles in this series. Meanwhile, one of the most obvious differences concerns the Wales 2nd class stamp. The phosphor bar on the sheet stamp is centrally placed and is 4.5mm wide. On the book stamp it is at the right and is 5mm wide. Another difference between them is that the sheet stamp is perforated 15 x 14 whereas the book stamp is perforated 14. Both were printed by Walsall.

Although the Scotland 2nd class stamps were printed by different firms (the sheet version was by Walsall and the book version was by Questa) the differences are less obvious. Probably the easiest is the value tablet. On the Questa stamp this is noticeably thicker than on Walsall's sheet version. Another difference, which requires viewing under a x10 glass, is that the Questa stamps were printed in a much finer screen and do not show the circular cells apparent on Walsall's. There are other differences, such as the direction of print-

ing, but these are probably too specialised for these articles.

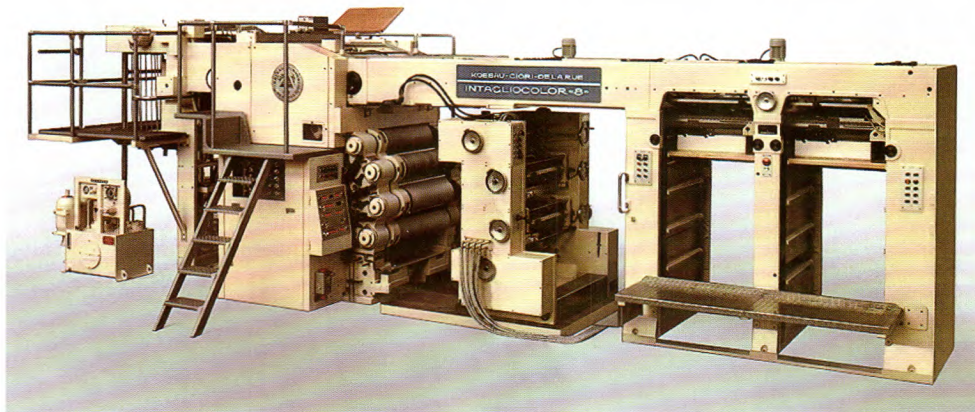
The two Scotland 65p stamps can best be distinguished by the placement of the value. On Questa's book stamp it is much lower in the frame than it is on Walsall's sheet version.

One curious aspect of these pictorial issues is that, although the value tablets, including the non-value elements, are all in a sans serif font, they all differ from each other. (A sans serif font is one which does not have the little projections at an angle to the main strokes of the letters.) Look, for example, at the figures 65 on the four stamps involved (see enlargements above). All are different. Also, note that on the England 1st and 2nd stamps the letters are in lower case. While such differences are probably of little interest at the moment, who knows what the future may hold?

I hope I have given some idea of the kind of things to look for that will help you to build up an interesting collection of these issues. They are set to be with us for years to come •

Errata John Bird has drawn my attention to a couple of errors in *Decimal Stamp Books* 55. The date of issue of the Walsall sheets of 100 1st class self-adhesives was 22, not 25 June 1998. The 4 September 2000 issue of 100 x 2nd was printed by Walsall, not Questa. I am grateful to him for giving me this opportunity of correcting the record •

High value intaglio stamps by Brian Janes, Director, Post Office, De La Rue Security Print



THE PRINTING PROCESS used for the current high value definitives is more associated with bank notes than postage stamps. The process which is most commonly known by the names intaglio, line engraving or recess is easily identified by the very fine lines making up the design and the use of a very viscous ink which sits on the paper surface giving the image a natural feel or embossed look. There is no screen used in the platemaking process so the subtleties of light and shade are created by the thickness and depth of each individual line, which therefore carry varying quantities of ink. Historically the lines that go to make up the design have been engraved into specially prepared steel tablets, which will then become the 'master die'. The engraver can introduce a depth of field to his design by the angle depth and width of engraved lines.

In the creation of the High Value series this procedure was followed with a 'master' created of the Machin head by the world-renowned engraver Czeslaw Slania, who has an illustrious postage stamp career of over 1000 different engravings.

Slania was responsible for previous Royal Mail intaglio designs including Victorian Britain, The Royal Mail, and Maritime Heritage. Once engraved, the master die steel tablet is hardened to protect the image in the subsequent printing plate

manufacture. In the case of the high value die the image was of the head only, allowing the same image to be used for any value. The value tablets were engraved separately and combined with the master design in the platemaking process.

Plate manufacture, or more accurately print surface manufacture, can be achieved by a number of routes mainly dictated by the image size and the final type of printing machine. For example the printing surface may be a sleeve or cylinder on a printing press that uses paper in reel-fed form. The sleeve may be a copper surface on a steel cylinder, in which case the image from the master die would be transferred by an impression technique onto a small soft steel roller which is then subsequently hardened.

This in turn is used to roll or impress the image into the sleeve, which is chromium faced for protection against wear and damage, and this then constitutes the printing surface.

However, the more common printing technique which is used by a majority of the world's state printing works and independent security printers uses De La Rue Giori printing machines with paper in sheet form. It is this type of machine that is used for high values, and thus requires a different plate preparation technique to that described above.

Crona system De La Rue secured the printing contract in November 1999 from Enschedé who supplied the original engraved die and a single image intaglio plate of the Machin head and value combined. These single images were used to create highly accurate films using the Crona system.

This involves a sandwich film of very fine air bubbles which when bombarded with small steel balls burst in the areas of the actual engraving. By subsequent dipping in a dye solution a film of the image is produced. This is then scanned at a very high resolution and the resultant files retouched to ensure a perfect image. A multi image film is then produced incorporating all the peripheral information including total sheet value, De La Rue imprint etc. Once complete this film is used to make an interim nyloprint plate where, after developing or 'washing out' with alcohol, the image is left in relief on the plate. After careful drying the surface of the plate is sensitised with stannous chloride and sprayed with mirror silver. The silver acts as a conducting layer before being placed in a nickel depositing vat where by an electro plating technique a 2mm thick nickel alto plate is produced. This is carefully examined and the image polished before sensitising as this alto is the 'mould' or 'mother' plate from which all the subsequent printing plates are produced. Following sensitising, the mother plate is immersed in the nickel plating tank and again by electro plating the printing place is grown onto the mother. Once at the correct calliper after approximately 24 hours immersion the sensitised layer allows the printing plate and mother to be parted.

The mother starts the sensitising/plate cycle again while the first printing plate now requires finishing. This involves dressing-off the rough sharp edges of the plate, grinding the back of the plate until it is the correct uniform thickness all over and then trimming it to size. At this stage an engraver will engrave by hand directly into the plate in reverse the plate number and alto number that the plate was made from. The plate then has holes punched in the top and bottom edges which are used to register and clamp the

plate onto the plate cylinder of the printing machine.

The final operations in this long plate preparation cycle are to Chromium face the plate again by a deposition technique. The twenty microns thickness of chrome provides protection to the image to withstand high pressure and temperature coupled with long printing runs on the intaglio press. Lastly, the plate is polished by hand and is at last ready for printing. However, the platemaking cycle is not truly complete as four identical plates, but with different numbers, are required for use on the intaglio printing press.

Giori press The printing press used for high value stamp printing is a Koebau-Giori-De La Rue Intagliocolor 8. As mentioned earlier this press uses four plates, so at every revolution of the printing cylinder four identical but differently numbered sheets are produced.

The principle of the press involves flooding the printing plates with ink, which is of a very viscous constituency. The excess is pre-wiped from the plates by a rubber blade before a wiping cylinder revolving in the opposite direction to the plates, aided by a hot caustic and soft water solution, wipes the plates clean. The ink is left in the lines of the image below the surface of the plate – hence the word intaglio, meaning beneath the surface. Following this the paper is introduced between the plates and the impression cylinder and under great pressure (of approximately 40 tonnes per square inch) the ink is drawn from the image onto the surface of the paper. The ink film stands proud of the surface, and although sheets are able to be stacked on top of each other, they are not dry enough to handle for 24 hours. In fact intaglio ink never fully dries but just oxidises or skims over.

The wiping rollers are vital to the production of clean printed sheets, ie no surface scum tone on the surface or drags or lines. These like the plates are a surface that is grown from a rubberised silicone material and turned to a smooth finish before printing. All excess wiping solution containing dissolved ink solids is treated by the effluent plant before disposal.

With the sheets now printed the next stage is to perforate the individual stamps. Unlike the gravure Jumelle press this is not done in line on the 18 press but on a rise and fall perforating machine using either a one or two comb block. Sheets are perforated in frames of up to six sheets together. The perforating operation tends to encourage the sheets to cling together so, before examining, the sheets are separated by fanning them with a rolling action. After examination to remove waste or imperfect sheets the sheets are trimmed to size, counted, banded in 50s and packed ready for despatch.

Every stage in this long and exacting production process is under the control of experienced technicians where quality is the watchword. They are helped in this by all stages of production operating under the ISO 9002 accreditation required by Royal Mail.

Some collectors have enquired as to how to distinguish stamps printed by Enschedé and ourselves. As I explained we used the same 'master'



The £5 stamp printed by Enschedé (left) and De La Rue.

and thus there should be no appreciable difference in the image of the stamps. However there are always minute and subtle differences between the work of different printers which the keen-eyed collector will be able to detect. To begin with, the paper we use is slightly more translucent than that used by Enschedé and our gum has a slight bluish tinge. The shades of ink vary slightly, our stamps being a little paler in comparison, noticeable especially in the background and on The Queen's forehead, nose and chin. It is a tribute to modern printing methods that the work of the two printers is so difficult to tell apart.

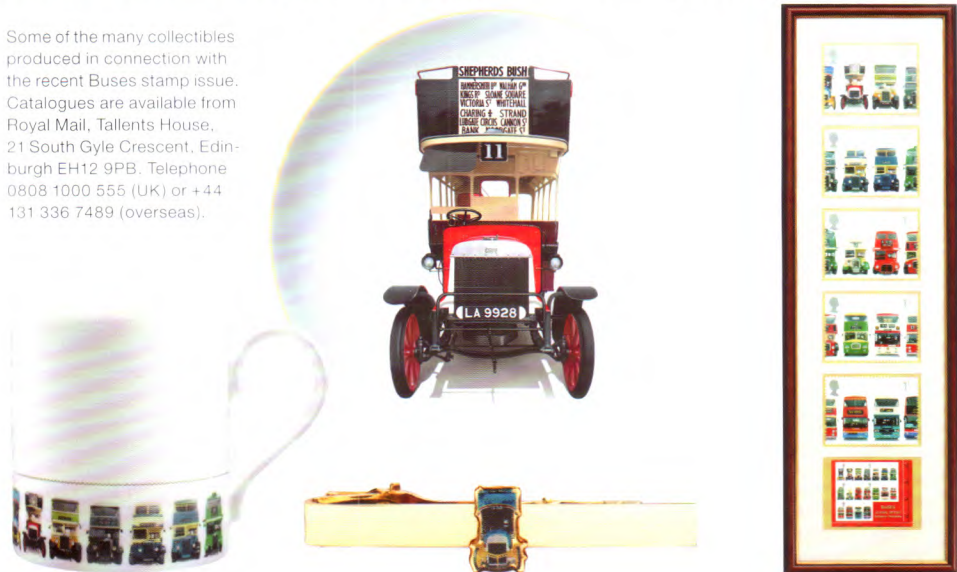
Special prize draw Win a 2000 Yearbook of special issues

WE HAVE five of these attractive and interesting books for this month's draw. Simply write your name and address on the back of a postcard and send it to Yearbook Draw, British Philatelic Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 8HQ to arrive by 29 June.



More than stamps Richard West on Royal Mail collectibles

Some of the many collectibles produced in connection with the recent Buses stamp issue. Catalogues are available from Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. Telephone 0808 1000 555 (UK) or +44 131 336 7489 (overseas).



So, you think that Royal Mail's links with collectors are limited simply to stamps. These days, this is not so. The department responsible is Royal Mail Stamps and Collectibles, and recently the 'collectibles' side has been ever more prominent.

The rationale is very simple: Royal Mail needs to be profitable. This could be achieved by producing more for the stamp collector, but that would be counter-productive. So the aim is to latch onto other collecting interests – many markets, such as plates, are in fact greater than stamps.

Naturally all the Collectibles have a direct relationship with Royal Mail, and especially stamp issues. An early idea was to link first day covers with issues of coins or medals, produced in conjunction with the Royal Mint. These PNC (philatelic numismatic cover) or PMC (philatelic medal cover) remain extremely popular.

Works of art Stamps are, of course, works of art, so why not frame them? The ambitious 1999 Millennium stamp programme was available specially framed (containing all 48 stamps), and thanks to the success of these framed collections, the idea was repeated for the 2000 Millennium stamps.

This has led to a wealth of framed stamps being available, and indeed not only stamps but stamp cards as well. Any current Royal Mail stamp can be framed, but particularly popular have been the new Country designs. These new definitives have given birth to a distinctive series of collectibles, not least being a playing card set with the four countries represented. The English definitive designs are available as a most unusual paper-weight, with the designs reproduced by laser technology inside optical quality glass, mounted on a pewter stand. This distinctive form of paper-weight will be developed for other stamp issues.

The St George and the Dragon design used for the 10s definitive of 1951 has been reproduced as a sterling silver ingot, and is available within a first day cover of the English definitives. The same design is also reproduced as a Wedgwood plate, in either black or blue jasper. The ingot is also available together with a Crown coin minted for the Festival of Britain in 1951. The Festival was celebrated by two stamps, reproduced as two silver cufflinks or as silver pendants. Or how about the 2½d Festival of Britain design, together with cancellations, on the sides of a candle holder?

Penny Black range The Penny Black design understandably also features prominently, as cufflinks, necklaces, earrings, leather goods and on a range of very attractive ties. (And other stamp issues could form the subject of ties, so bus enthusiasts, keep a look out.)

Mugs and plates reproducing famous British stamps, passport and driving licence holders, a silver desk set and letter openers are all produced, as are model Royal Mail vans (and some model buses), T-shirts and even jigsaws.

The incredible Eden Project at St Austell in Cornwall was the subject of one of the 2000 Millennium series. A range of collectibles features the Project's Sunflower image. This can be found on a jigsaw, trinket box, plates, cereal bowls, mugs, tankards, T-shirt, coasters and even an umbrella.

And there is still more being developed. A lovely chess set in pewter, with the pieces taking the form of Sir Rowland Hill and Queen Victoria, and including letter carriers and handstamps. Or how about the history of the postmark, comprising a framed reproduction of the most significant markings that have been in use, as selected by Douglas Muir of Post Office Heritage Services? The eleven markings range from a Bishop-mark to a cancellation of the British Empire Exhibition in 1924.

While aiming at different markets, there is no doubt that many of the collectibles offered by Royal Mail will have an appeal to stamp collectors, and can prove to be the perfect gift from (or indeed for) non-collecting friends. A catalogue is available – if you have not already received one, contact Royal Mail at the address opposite •

Cover corner Insurance & Banking Philatelic Society of GB

THIS MONTH'S COVER was produced in 1972 as a souvenir of an exhibition to mark the 21st anniversary of the Insurance & Banking Philatelic Society of Great Britain. The cover bears a special handstamp which includes a reproduction of the famous Dockwra Penny Post postmark.

The Society celebrates its 50th birthday this month, having been formed on 14 June 1951. Initially the intention was to form a federation of the philatelic societies of insurers and banks but after correspondence and meetings the outcome was the formation of a new philatelic society. Membership was, and still is, open to the staff and pensioners of the insurance and banking professions. The initial subscription was five shillings (25p), increased to 10 shillings in 1965 and is currently only £2.50 per annum. In 1966 the Society hosted the British Philatelic Association's Spring Convention and at the time of its 21st anniversary exhibition in 1972 there were 800 members.

Activities in the 50th anniversary year include displays at Spring Stampex 2001 which ranged from thematic subjects – tennis, Concorde, chess and Olympics – to greetings telegrams, Malayan postal stationery, and Machins. It was a fine sel-

ection of the wide-ranging interests of the members. An anniversary weekend was held in Leamington Spa, the AGM plus grand auction at the British Philatelic Centre, and a dinner at the Strand Palace Hotel. The Society publishes a lively Newsletter with interesting short articles as well as details of Society activities •

The Insurance & Banking Philatelic Society For membership application forms write to: John Payne, Kelso, Devonshire Avenue, Amersham HP6 5JE. A limited number of the Society's 21st anniversary covers are still available, price £1 postpaid, from: Brian Sole, 3 Stockfield Road, Claygate, Esher KT10 0QG.

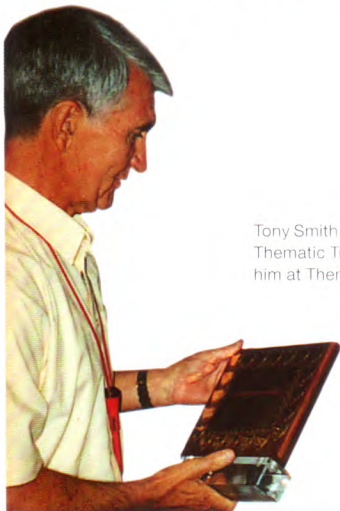
21st ANNIVERSARY



EXHIBITION-LONDON
10th-12th May 1972

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The father of thematics Richard West meets John Fosbery



Tony Smith with John Fosbery Thematic Trophy, awarded to him at Thematica 2000.

WHO CONCEIVED the idea of thematic collecting? John Fosbery feels he can justifiably claim to have introduced the word 'thematics' into common usage among collectors. Back in the 1940s John bought a collection at auction from Harmers for £20. It consisted solely of stamps depicting animals, and he found it fascinating. At that point he realised there was much to be gained from collecting by subject, and started dealing in themes. He was amazed by the response, and found that many were interested in collecting in this way.

In 1948 he placed an advertisement in the then weekly magazine *Stamp Collecting*. In this advertisement he recommended readers to 'collect thematically'. From that time John believes the word entered the collector's vocabulary. He felt that 'thematics' was a good way to describe this way of collecting, although he acknowledges that the late Albert Harris did once use the word in 1936.

John, born nearly 92 years ago, has had a long collecting career. Before the war he was a commercial traveller in the 'rag trade' and, as he himself admits, was not averse to copying a few ideas which he saw on the Continent. Stamp collecting was already his hobby, but clearly it did not have the approval of a girlfriend, who one day threw the collection out of the window – and it was pouring with rain outside.

During the war he served in the Army. Being bored in Burma, he took up collecting once more, and started building up a collection of Burma overprints. The war over, he decided to combine his interests as a stamp collector with dealing, and established a stamp shop off the Brompton Road in London. However, he did not feel suited to London life, and later moved to Devon, from where he dealt on a mail order basis.

Latin America From the mid 1950s he decided to collect Latin America, and over the years has built impressive collections of Nicaragua, Haiti, Venezuela, Brazil and Panama. His collections have achieved considerable success, with no fewer than three small gold medals, and several vermeil medals. In recognition of all his achievements, he was invited to sign the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists in 1986.

His interest in Latin America led him to establish The Spanish Main Society, together with its magazine, *The Mainsheet*. (The Society still flourishes, today under the guidance of Brian Moorhouse, PO Box 105, Peterborough, PE3 9TQ.) John still collects, but today the collections focus on Poland and Paintings on Stamps.

Thematica However, back to The Spanish Main: it was at a meeting of the Society held at Carisbrooke Hall (part of the Victory Services Club near London's Marble Arch) that John thought that the venue would be ideal for an exhibition – on thematics. He booked the hall for a Saturday, and Thematica was born. He included a mixture of both dealers and collectors, having tables from which to buy and sell. He also had the idea of including a competition, but one which the visiting public would judge. That successful formula has been subsequently used at several events.

Today, Thematica is as popular as ever with thematic collectors, although a stroke meant John had to hand the reins to Maurice Gale. Dealers are still very much in evidence, plus competitions and displays organised by the Friends of Thematica. (Details of the Friends of Thematica may

and discovers the origins of collecting stamps 'thematically'

be obtained from Brian Sole, 3 Stockfield Road, Claygate, Esher, Surrey KT10 0QG.)

The next Thematica will be at Carisbrooke Hall on 23 and 24 June (Saturday 10.30am to 5.30pm; Sunday 10.30am to 5pm). Among the competitions on display will be one named after John, still judged by the visiting public. A second Thematica is held each November (on 23 and 24 November this year) at Carisbrooke Hall, again with dealers, plus this year with a seminar series.

In recognition of all his work on behalf of thematics, John has been made an Honorary Life Member of the British Thematic Association. And what are John Fosbery's own thoughts on thematics? He feels that 'It's not philately. The end product should be enjoyable for someone to look at. It's stamp collecting to be enjoyed without spending pots of money.' •

Richard West is the Editor-at-Large of Stamp Magazine.

Postbag Letters to the Editor

Recent issues In March Douglas Myall recorded the differences between the self-adhesive stamps printed by Questa and Walsall in the new books issued on 29 January. The differences are principally in the width of the phosphor bands, the thickness of the 1st and 2nd indicators, and the shape of the simulated (die cut) perforations. In addition, one can distinguish by shade and the detail in the Queen's diadem. The 2nd class by Walsall has a deeper blue background and a somewhat brighter Queen's head. The 1st class stamps in the Walsall book of six have a noticeably orange head compared to those in the book of 12 and Questa book of 10. The background colour is also 'warmer' in the book of six. On both 2nd and 1st class Questa stamps the two sections of the diadem at the front of the Queen's head appear joined whereas there is some orange background colour separating them on the Walsall stamps. This can be seen with the naked eye; a magnifying glass helps but is not essential.

Turning now to the Cats & Dogs stamps, printed in sheetlets of 10 and books with two definitives by Walsall. On those I have examined, the images appear sharper on the sheetlet stamps, noticeable particularly on the faces of the dogs on stamps 3 and 6 (row 1 stamp 3 and row 2 stamp 1), the tiles behind the cat on the final stamp on the bottom row. The phosphor bands are more solid on the sheetlets – less easy to see with the naked eye than under the ultra-violet lamp.

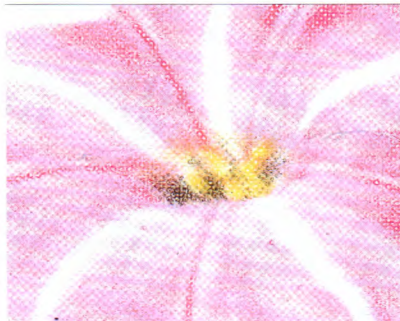
Finally the Weather stamps and miniature sheet. The principal difference on those I have seen is the lower positioning of the Queen's head on the stamps from sheets of 100 compared to the miniature sheet. On the miniature sheet stamps the head nearly touches the top of the stamp, whereas it is almost 2mm below on the sheet stamps. This is quite noticeable on the 65p value – there being three clear black horizontal lines above the head on the sheet of 100 printing. The colours between the two printings are well matched: I can detect no appreciable difference.

I look forward to comparing the Buses stamps from the normal and miniature sheet printings, and the 1st class Submarines stamps in sheets and the self-adhesive version in books. I hope these notes are of interest to fellow collectors. KEN MARKS, PORTSMOUTH •

Stamp design Mr Witham (March Postbag) pours scorn on the Sunflower stamp from the Tree and Leaf series, yet this stamp was voted the second favourite stamp of 2000 by *Bulletin* readers (April *Bulletin*). Indeed it came close to winning, only nine votes behind the owl stamp from the Above and Beyond set.

Perhaps collectors did not need to know that this stamp represented the Eden Project in Cornwall to appreciate its bold appeal. MARY PRICE, TORQUAY •

Competitions Win £200 in two easy-to-enter competitions



March identify The detail is from the Australian Hospital ship stamp shown on p209 of the March issue. The winner was G Edwards of Devon.

March knowledge Answers: 1) Christopher and Robin Ironside; 2) Scientists' Tale; 3) 1988. The winner was Capt P Nielsen of Spain.

Ten runner-up prizes were also sent for each competition. Our thanks to all who entered.

FIRSTLY, identify the stamp from the detail above. Send your answer to June *Identify* Competition. Secondly, test your philatelic knowledge by answering the questions below. Send your answer to June *Knowledge* Competition.

1 Who designed the 1958 Empire & Commonwealth Games 3d stamp?

2 In which year did Ely Cathedral feature on a stamp?

3 Which firm printed the Mind & Matter stamps?

Send your answer (addressed to either the June *Identify* competition or the June *Knowledge* competition), name and address on a postcard or back of a scaled envelope to: British Philatelic Bulletin, Royal Mail, 2-14 Bunhill Row, London EC1Y 3HQ. The senders of the first cards drawn in each competition on 13 July will each receive £100. Ten runner-up prizes of presentation packs or FDCs will be awarded in each competition. Competitions are not open to Royal Mail employees •

Events

Until further notice Postal Memorabilia displays at Museum of Lincolnshire Life, Burton Road, Lincoln and Manchester Postal Museum, Wythenshaw Park, Manchester (open 10.00-16.00). **Enquiries** D Harrop, 15 Hawthorn Road, Stockport SK4 3DQ.

2 June Ringpex Stamp & Postcard Fair at Greyfriars Community Centre, Ringwood, 10.00-16.00. Dealers, Penny Black raffle, etc. Admission free. **Enquiries** 01425 474310.

2 June Yorkshire Phil Assn Annual Convention at Pudsey Civic Hall, 09.30-16.30. Admission free, car parking, refreshments. 25 dealers, competition and invited displays. Civic Hall at Dawson's Corner at the junction of ring road (A6120) and the Leeds and Bradford Road (A647). **Enquiries** Alwyn Peel, 01924 505724.

9-15 June Belgica 2001 general world stamp exhibition at exhibition halls 3, 4 and 8, Heysel, Parc des Expositions, Brussels. **Enquiries** +32 2 512 24 78.

23-24 June Thematica at Carisbrooke Hall, Seymour Street, London W2. Open Sat 10.30-17.30, Sun 10.30-17.00.

30 June MIDPEX 2001 (ABPS national show for specialist societies) at Midlands Sports Centre for the Disabled, Tile Hill, Coventry, 10.00-16.00. 40 dealers, 60 societies. **Enquiries** M Benford, Cloudshill, High St, Shutford, Banbury OX15 6PQ.

7 July SWIPEX 01 at Peter Chalk Centre, Exeter University.

19-22 July 83rd Philatelic Congress of Great Britain at Green Dragon Hotel, Broad Street, Hereford.

Enquiries Alan J Griffiths, 01923 712384 •

Late news

Bulletin back issues Mrs P Luscombe has for disposal vol 1 no 1 to vol 9 no 12 (1963-August 1972) complete with Cancelled Compac stamp (vol no 3) and test stamps (vol 2 no 1) included. Offers to Mrs P Luscombe, 35 Lincoln Avenue, Bournemouth BH1 4QS. Telephone 01202 395338.

Mr K Clarke has vol 2 no 5 to the present – anyone interested should telephone 01922 746725.

Miss F Sutton has vols 12 to 27 (1975-89) with just one issue missing available free to anyone willing to pay the postage. Contact Miss Sutton at 12 Gorrington Valley Road, Lower Willingdon, Eastbourne BN20 9SX •

Obituary John O Griffiths, who died on 13 April, built noted collections of British Victorian stamps, British Leeward Islands, 1757-1902, and European Settlements of North America, awarded a Large Vermeil medal at the Stamp Show 2000. He was Secretary of the Royal Philatelic Society London, 1973-81 and signed the Roll of Distinguished Philatelists in 1987.

Les Holding, who died on 22 April, worked at the former National Postal Museum from 1973 to 1988, the last six years as Chief Custodian. His family had been connected with the Post Office since the 19th century; his ancestors supplied horses for the use of postal staff. Les worked for the PO for 34 years in total and was at his best showing parties of school children around the Museum; they appreciated his stories and quirky sense of humour. A large, imposing figure, always nattily dressed, Les was affectionately known to his colleagues as 'Bald Eagle' •

Further 'Smilers' stamps Following the popularity, especially with female customers aged 18-45, of the Smilers for Christmas and Smilers for You (Occasions stamps) issues, a further set will be available from early July. Customers can send in photographs to be printed on labels alongside the stamps in sheets of 10 reproducing designs from the 1991 'Smiles' 1st class greetings stamps (SG 1550-9). The sheets available will be: 1) 10 Smiles stamps, one of each design; 2) 10 Teddy Bear

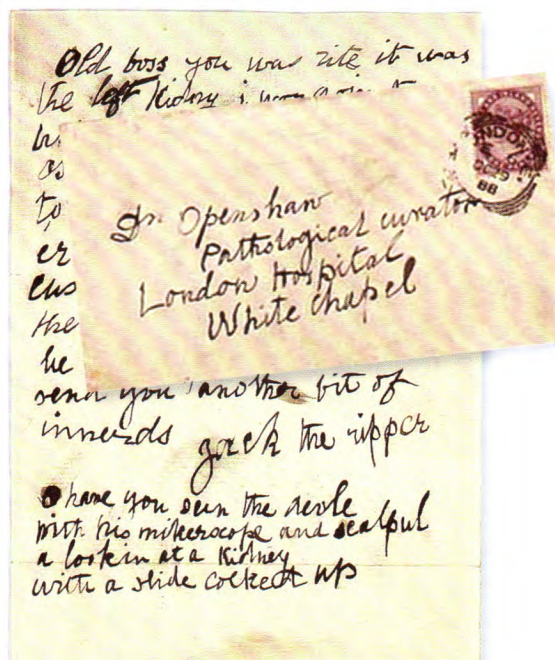
stamps; 3) 10 Laughing Policemen stamps; 4) 10 Dennis the Menace stamps; 5) 10 Mona Lisa stamps; 6) 10 Clown stamps.

Sheets should be ordered in multiples of two (ie units of 20 stamps) at £12.95 per two sheets. Sheets should be of the same type; not one sheet of one type and one of another. Order forms are available from: Royal Mail, Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB. Telephone enquiries: 0845 074 2000 (UK customers), or +44 (0)131 316 7489 (overseas).

A generic sheet containing one of each 'Smiles' stamps plus printed greetings labels will cost £2.95. All sheets – with personal photographs or greetings labels – will be printed in litho by Questa. There will be no first day facilities.

Also expected in July (date not confirmed at time of going to press) are packs containing 10 of each Occasions stamps, price £2.70 per pack •

Jack the Ripper letter Recently on show at the Public Record Office, Kew, is this intriguing envelope and letter said to have been written by the Victorian serial killer who murdered prostitutes in east London in 1888 •



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