

The Royal Philatelic Collection: Great Britain – The Present Reign

Comments on a display from the Royal Philatelic Collection given by gracious permission of Her Majesty The Queen to the Royal Philatelic Society London on 15th September 2011

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Introduction

The Collection's holdings of Great Britain material of the present Reign are very extensive and most is still to be mounted on album pages. Much of the mounted material was last shown to the Society 20 years ago but the opportunity was taken to show a selection as a precursor to The Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations next year.

Shown were essay, proof and colour trial material of both Wilding and Machin periods for definitive stamps together with extensive essay and issued material for "special" (commemorative) issues, including a number of varieties for both definitive and special issues purchased over the years.

Essays of designs of stamp issues have been donated to The Queen by the Post Office/Royal Mail. These very often are barely distinguishable from the issued stamps, especially these days, but during the 1960s, 70s and 80s, with which this display was mainly concerned, and at periods of high inflation, values shown on essays were often different from the issued stamps. Furthermore there can sometimes be significant change in design between first and subsequent essaying – the 1988 Christmas issue particularly comes to mind.

Except in one or two cases in the early frames, no attempt was made to cover Prestige Stamp books nor booklets generally. No work was done on coil material either.

Sir John Marriott was the mounter and "writer-up" of much of the present Reign Great Britain material as is currently mounted, having succeeded Sir John Wilson as Keeper of the Collection in 1969. The latter, however, had mounted none of the current Reign material. Subsequent Keepers have "tried their hands" at writing up but the handwriting (of the present writer in particular) is not of acceptable standard, so the opportunity has been taken to word process captions where necessary from now on.

The Collection should not be regarded as a definitive statement of current Reign issues; following past practice of confining in the main to visual differences, little or no regard is paid to paper differences and in particular to phosphor and gum differences, although phosphor bands are usually noted.

Periodic reorganisation of parts of the Collection has provided funds for the purchase of "varieties" – Sir John Marriott was particularly fond of these – and a number of very scarce missing colour and imperforate examples are held and most were shown in this display. However, it has not been possible to acquire all listed varieties!

My thanks are due to Ian Greig and Rod Vousden for their help in putting up the display in the frames and standing "guard" and to Ian Greig especially for his assistance in putting the display together and proof reading these Notes.

The Display:

Her Majesty The Queen

The first 14 frames were devoted to issues celebrating various events relating to Her Majesty. There was a long gap between the 1953 Coronation issue and that for the Silver Wedding in 1972. Since then, however, there have been relatively frequent issues and I included all of them – right up to the Diamond Wedding issue in 2007. Other than the issue for The Prince of Wales' Investiture, issues for other members of the Royal Family were not included in view of space limitations for this display.

Frame 1: 1953 – The Coronation. The essays in the Collection include unadopted designs. Leading off the display, however, was artwork by Edmund Dulac, presented to Her Majesty; this is not the final artwork which is in the British Postal Museum & Archive. It is said that The Queen was not happy at the full face portrayal essayed on the 2½d value so was pleased that in the event the design was to be used for the 1/3d value, of which many fewer would be in circulation!

This issue was the only one relating to The Queen in the pre-decimal period.

Frames 2 & 3: 1972 – The Silver Wedding. This issue was essayed in various designs extensively and all were shown. The 3p stamp was printed on two machines – Rembrandt and Jumelle – and examples from each were shown. As regards the 20p, the 1A, 1B, 6C cylinder combination was not issued and is not recorded in the last specialised SG catalogue (in 2002) covering cylinder blocks for decimal special issue stamps.

Frame 4: 1977 – The Silver Jubilee. Two sets of essays were shown, with some colour changes. Following a postal rate change in June, a new 9p denomination was necessary. Also shown were blocks or strips either wholly or partially imperforate for the 8½p, 10p, 11p & 13p values.

Frame 5: **1978 – 25th Anniversary of the Coronation.** A number of essays of designs were shown plus the issued stamps.

Frame 6: **1986 – The Queen's 60th Birthday.** Two facsimile images by Martin Newton, taken from photographs, were shown, but these were not pursued and the frame continued with essays and issued stamps of the selected design.

Frame 7: **1992 – 40th Anniversary of the Accession.** The design for this issue was taken from photographs. Several changes to shading and value background were considered, leading to values on a white background - this last modification was made after the issue had been approved. Essays and blocks of the issued stamps were shown; Six of the seven cylinder printings were included – space did not permit inclusion of the seventh.

Frame 8: **1997 – The Golden Wedding.** The date of issue was changed from 7th October to 13th November (a week before the actual anniversary) as a mark of respect to Diana, Princess of Wales' death in August. However, gold coloured 1st and 26p stamps had been issued on 21st April in sheets and booklets (not shown). Shown were essays, a cover sent to The Queen, the Presentation pack and blocks of the issued stamps.

Frame 9: **2002 – The Golden Jubilee of the Accession.** Initially it was considered that five painted portraits of Her Majesty would be used for the issue and facsimiles of two of those were shown. In the event the design for this issue was taken from photographs by five eminent photographers. In addition to the essay and two covers to The Queen, some contents of the Prestige Stamp Book issued at the same time were also shown. Space was not sufficient to include blocks of the issued stamps.

Frame 10: **2003 – 50th Anniversary of the Coronation.** Early essays of the issue were shown, experimenting with various frame colours, which in the event were not used. More seriously, the top left image initially essayed was reversed and had to be changed to the correct view in front of St Paul's. A block of the issued stamps in sheets was shown and also essays for the stamp panes to be included in the Prestige Stamp Book.

Frame 11: **2005 – Trooping the Colour.** Essays were shown, with slight variations in shade but with changes in phosphor signatures. A cover to The Queen was included, together with blocks of the issued stamps.

Frame 12: **2006 – The Queen's 80th Birthday.** Kate Stephens prepared a photograph montage featuring an 80 stamp set and shown was one of the copies of the suggestion. However, it was decided to go for a different option and a set of stamps was produced showing eight images of The Queen from each decade of her life to date. Shown were the approved essay, blocks of the issued stamps, a first day cover to The Queen and the Presentation pack, the interior of which also has a montage of 80 images of The Queen adopting the Kate Stephens concept, though with different images.

Frame 13: **2007 – The Diamond Wedding.** Essays were shown, with slight variations in shade but with changes in phosphor signatures. A cover to The Queen was included, together with blocks of the issued stamps.

Frame 14: It was not possible to show visuals of all the Diamond Jubilee stamps to be issued in a miniature sheet on 6th February 2012. However, an essay of one of them could be included – a first class stamp based on the portrait of The Queen by Annigoni. Other items in the frame included the miniature sheet issued the previous day commemorating the centenary of Arnold Machin. Also in the frame were examples of forgeries of Machin stamps. It should be pointed out that in the UK it is illegal to have forgeries of Great Britain postage stamps in one's possession without a lawful excuse. It was agreed some time ago that forgeries held in the Royal Philatelic Collection would be regarded as lawful. The remaining item in the frame was a 15p cylinder block printed by Enschede in 1990 but not issued.

The Pre Decimal Issues

Frames 15 to 38 covered the pre decimal period, starting with the "Wilding" head definitives (frames 15 to 20), followed by many of the special issues (frames 20 to 27) and then the "Machin" head pre decimal definitives (frames 28 & 29) and special issues to 1970 (frames 30 to 38). Much of this material was mounted and written up by Sir John Marriott.

Frame 15 to 17: Design essays for stamps utilising the Wilding head (from a photograph by Dorothy Wilding) were shown in chronological order of date of issue of the various values in 1953. the 2½d imperforate block of four printed on proofing paper in black is something of a mystery.

Initially the stamps appeared on a "Tudor Crown" watermarked paper: the Tudor Crown was purely representative and was not an actual crown, and for later printings of the Wildings the St Edward's Crown (which is an actual Crown) was used as the basis of the watermarks. The last two rows of frame 16 and the first two rows of frame 17 showed examples of various imperforate errors in the Collection, mostly from booklets. The last row of frame 17 showed the "Phantom R" variety on the 3d value and the "Phantom corner" on the 4½d.

Frames 18 to 20: These frames dealt with the “Castles” high value stamps (2/6, 5/-, 10/- & £1). The initial essays in various designs were shown as bromides and frame 18 also included approved essays and the first printing by Waterlow issued in 1955 on St Edward’s Crown watermarked paper. In 1958 De La Rue gained the contract with a printing by them on the St Edward’s Crown watermarked paper, a further printing in 1959, this time on Multiple Crown watermarked paper, with a final printing in 1962 on a whiter paper, also with Multiple Crown watermark. Frame 20 dealt with the Bradbury, Wilkinson printings from 1963.

Frames 21 to 27: These frames cover many of the special issues from 1957 to 1966, featuring the Wilding head. Of particular note, in frame 23, middle row, the two errors on the 1961 Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference issue were shown – missing gold on the 6d and missing blue on the 1/3d. In the bottom row of frame 23, the 1962 National Productivity Year issue, the “missing light blue” errors on the 3d & 1/3d were shown.

Frame 24 had the “missing green” error on an example of the 1963 Paris Postal Conference Centenary issue (top row) and in the bottom row the 1963 Red Cross Centenary Congress set had the red colour (the Cross) omitted on an example of the 3d on ordinary paper – i.e. to which no phosphor bands had been applied.

In the bottom row of frame 25, space limitation had prevented inclusion of cylinder blocks of the Forth Road bridge issue. However, the last page showed two errors: missing light blue on the 6d and imperforate between stamp and top margin on the 3d.

In frame 26, bottom row, the 1965 Centenary of the International Telecommunication Union had an example of the 1/6d with light pink colour omitted.

The 1965 25th Anniversary of the Battle of Britain set in frame 27 is taken slightly out of chronological order, but it was right to include it as its startling designs are a considerable contrast to previous special issues, if not to everybody’s taste! With the essays and issued stamps was a first day cover to The Queen.

Frames 28 & 29: The 1967 seminal change of Great Britain definitives to a simpler, plainer, design took place. The Collection is fortunate in having been presented with essays of the first Machin values to appear and these were shown together with the actual issued stamps in chronological order of issue. One or two of these essays may be unique, in that copies of essays of some values are not present in the British Postal Museum & Archive collections. Frame 29 showed varieties of those early printings, mostly occurring in booklets.

The frame concluded with essays of the recess printed large format high values and blocks of the issued stamps, printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson.

Frames 30 to 38: This group of frames covered many of the special issues between 1966 and 1970 and decimalisation early in 1971. The Queen’s head used for some of this group is of the profile silhouette taken from the coinage design by Mary Gillick, adapted by David Gentleman. Slightly later (after about 1969) an Arnold Machin version of the silhouette was used. Of note in frame 30 were examples from the 1966 British Technology issue of the 6d missing blue and the same value missing red. The 1968 British Bridges issue in frame 32 had a cylinder block example of gold omitted on the 9d value and on singles of the other values. There are widely held views that the gold can be got off stamps chemically or possibly even by careful application of an eraser (though the latter might cause some paper damage traces). No attempt has been made on the Collection’s examples to test these possibilities! Likewise, in frame 33 examples of gold omitted on the British Paintings issue also of 1968 was shown.

In the British Ships issue of 1969 in frame 34, an example of the well know black omitted error was shown – missing The Queen’s head, value, hull and inscription.

The 1969 Christmas issue in frame 36 had the approved essays. However, the values were changed subsequent to approval. The issue also had examples of missing gold on the 5d and 1/6d values and a copy of the deep slate omitted also on the 1/6d. However, not all errors on this issue have been acquired. In frame 37, the General Anniversaries issue also had examples of missing gold on 5d, 1/- and 1/6d values. In the same frame there was an imperforate block of the 5d value from the Literary Anniversaries issue.

The final pre decimal issue was the 1970 Christmas issue and included in frame 38 was an imperforate block of eight of the 5d value.

Frame 39: Although decimalisation did not arrive until February 1971, prior to that, in June 1970, high values from 10p (2/-) upwards were issued. These followed the pre decimal high values in large format and recess printing and were also printed by Bradbury, Wilkinson. The Collection has no essaying of these stamps and it is understood that BPMA has very few if any. These four values (10p, 20p, 50p and £1) were at press through to the mid/late 1970s and apart from the 10p appeared on different papers. The Collection received a plate number block of each value in 1970 (though sadly not plate 2 of the £1) and in 2001 purchased an almost complete collection of plate number blocks, and a selection from this lot was shown. The 10p merits little comment; all plate number blocks are held, all printings were on “Post Office paper” and four of the 11 blocks were in the frame.

As regards the 20p, single and double pane printings on Post Office paper took place but in 1973/4 “Bradbury’s paper” was used which is slightly whiter than the Post Office paper. For this value the printings on different papers can be distinguished by plate number, with no overlapping. Also, the 20p Bradbury’s paper printings were all from double pane plates. Of note was the page of double pane 20p printings – plates 41 and 44A, shown, are said to be scarce; the Collection was not able to acquire examples of the rare plates 41A and 44, however.

Turning to the 50p value, printings took place on Post Office paper and Post Office Phosphorised paper (both single pane plates) and for Bradbury’s paper, single and double pane plates were employed. Most plate number blocks are held by the Collection, but four (scarce) blocks were not acquired. Examples of plate number blocks from each paper type were in the frame but the Bradbury’s double pane printings were excluded for space reasons.

The £1 value is less complex as regards paper: only Post Office paper and Bradbury’s paper were used, though the Bradbury’s was also on double pane plates. However, the value was redrawn in 1972. In the frame were: the only plate number example in the Collection of the original design (looped £ sign) – as mentioned there is no example of plate 2 – plates 4 & 7 of the redrawn stamp on Post Office paper and examples from single and double pane plates on Bradbury’s paper.

Frames 40 & 41: These two frames covered the introduction of the low value Machins – all values shown appeared on “D-Day” – 15th February 1971. Frame 40 showed a first day cover sent to The Queen, together with blocks of all the values issued that day. However, the cachet on the cover showed what problems there were at that time – the Post Office strike in particular. As is the case for the high value Machins, there are no essays in the Collection and very few if any in the BPMA collections. Frame 41 had examples of Machin varieties, and not just on values issued in February 1971. These are mostly imperforate or partially imperforate multiples, but the 10p in 1971 was also to be noted – the orange-brown omitted cylinder block and a block of 10 (5 x 2) with imperforate between stamps and top margin error were included.

The Collection has a very extensive range of Machin low values; none other than were shown in the frames is mounted but they are all held chronologically in annotated packets, value by value.

Frames 42 & 43: In 1977 it was decided to go over to large format gravure printed high values. Initially £1, £2 & £5 values were issued but as time and inflation wore on other values were introduced. Frame 42’s first page had a lengthy description by Sir John Marriott of the development of this format and the frame continued with colour essays for the three values and blocks of the 1977 three issued values.

The first row in frame 43 showed 1982 essays for a £3 in the standard Machin low value size, but this was not proceeded with. The frame went on to show essays and issued stamps for the 1983 £1.30 value and issued stamps for the £1.33, £1.41, £1.50 & £1.60 values which were issued progressively between 1983 and 1987.

Frame 44: In 1988 the gravure high values came to be replaced by recess printed stamps in £1, £1.50, £2 & £5 values in landscape format featuring British castles and universally known as the “Castles” series, printed by Harrisons. They were engraved by Chris Matthews from a series of photographs taken by The Duke of York and in frame 44 was the approved final essay for the stamps and a first day cover to The Queen, signed by The Duke. Also shown in the frame were plate number blocks from the initial printings. The Collection holds a copy of every plate number block of all four values from the 1988 series.

On the last page in frame 44 was an essay card for the £1.50 value, prepared in April 1991. Clearly there was some dissatisfaction with the appearance of The Queen’s head, so it was decided to go over to an “optically variable” inked head.

Frame 45: In 1992 the optically variable inked head (where the appearance of the ink changes from gold to green as the stamp is angled) was introduced for all four original values – blocks of each value were shown. The Collection holds a copy of most plate number blocks from the series, including several of the scarce blocks from the £1 printings. The top row of the frame had the original printings through to 1994, but in that year all four values were re-etched and new plates produced. The middle row in the frame had blocks of these printings from each value. Finally, the bottom row had the £3 value introduced in 1995.

In 1997 Harrisons lost the contract for these values to Enschedé and blocks of four values printed by that firm were shown – the £1 value was not included in the contract because by then a standard gravure version of that value had been introduced in 1995, also printed by Enschedé, although in 1997 the contract for the £1 gravure version reverted to Harrison!

To complete the story of the “high values”, the Castles were replaced in 1999 by standard low value size recess printed stamps in £1.50, £2, £3 & £5 values, initially printed by Enschedé. However, the contract quickly passed to De La Rue in 2000, but are no longer produced, printing of these values going over to gravure printed stamps in “Iridin” ink in 2003. These values seem not to have been printed since 2005. Examples of all these printings are held in the Collection (though not all plate/cylinder number blocks) but are not mounted and thus not shown.

Frame 46: Ostensibly for use on parcels and overseas mail, a £10 value – “Britannia High Value” – was introduced in 1993. This large size stamp with a number of unique features, such as Braille impressions, was withdrawn in 2000. Shown were a number of essays proposed and the finally approved essay, together with a first day cover to The Queen, presentation pack and blocks of the issued stamp. Unfortunately, neither of the two major varieties are in the Collection.

Frames 47 to 52: This group of frames covered some of the special issues between 1973 and 1988, virtually all mounted and written up by Sir John Marriott.

Frame 47 showed the 1973 British Explorers issue; an unusual and fine design, but marred by missing colours and gold heads, some of which are in the Collection. Frame 48 dealt with the 1974 Sir Winston Churchill Centenary of Birth issue; the contrast between the unaccepted designs and the final is most marked. The frame concluded with the “experimental” Health and Handicap Charities surcharged stamps of 1975.

In frame 49 were two 1976 issues; the top row dealt with the Telephone Centenary, and included four examples of missing red on the 8½p in a block of 12. Also in that year the National Rose Society Centenary issue appeared; shown were essays and issued stamps including two examples (of three known), unused and used on cover of the missing value on 13p – said to be the result of the placing of a covering of copper on the plate over the value, which briefly was not spotted when printing.

The attractive British Butterflies set of 1981 in frame 50 had the essays showing changes in colour intensity and changes in face value. Included was an imperforate block of 10 of the 14p. The 1982 Maritime Heritage issue in the same frame had a partially imperforate block of 12 of the 15½p.

In frame 51 the 1985 350 Years of Royal Mail Public Postal Service issue had essays and issued stamps together with a partially imperforate block of nine of the 31p. In the same frame the 1985 Christmas set showed variations of design. As finally issued, seeing the values in the stars seems quite difficult. Included was a partially imperforate block of 12 of the 12p and an imperforate block of six of the 17p.

Finally, frame 52 initially showed the 1987 Europa issue featuring British Architects in Europe including a partially imperforate block of nine of the 31p. The frame concluded with the 1988 Christmas issue, with the complete change in design; shown were essays and issued stamps including a partially imperforate strip of four of the 14p and a “traffic light” imperforate corner block of 12 of the 19p.