

# Definitive first day covers Part 5 of Richard West's series



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Top row: 'first day of issue' slogan for 2½d 'Regionals' for Guernsey, Isle of Man and Jersey; and a similar slogan for the 4d Regionals.

Bottom row: a normal slogan for the change in colour of the 4d to red, as no special slogan was provided; and a first day cover with normal slogan and a cachet, for Scottish Regionals with phosphor bands.

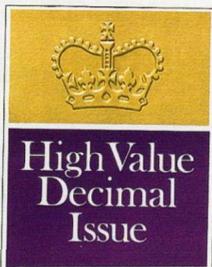
THE PUBLIC, persuaded that it is good to collect stamps, frequently embraces the first day cover as the only true collectable item, often referring to such covers as 'first day issue'. However, this interest usually only extends as far as the special issues, so definitives are less plentiful on cover. The early problems associated with producing covers were the same for definitives, so for the Wildings, plain envelopes often had to suffice, and whatever postmark was available.

However, the 'wind of change' that swept through the Post Office in the 1960s had its effect on definitives. For the 2½d 'Regional' values for Guernsey, Isle of Man and Jersey on 8 June 1964, envelope design 'first day of issue' slogans were in use in the three 'regions'. Examples exist for Guernsey and Jersey which interestingly did not include a date slug, but instead a triangle with the number 324 and 409 respectively. On 7 February 1966, the release of new 4d values for all six 'regions' (including Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) again resulted in the 'envelope' slogans at appropriate offices in the respective areas. The following year, for the 9d and 1s6d val-

ues for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the circular 'first day of issue' handstamp (small diameter) was provided, and again on 4 September 1968 for the new 4d (in blue) and 5d for all six 'regions'.

With the arrival of Machin definitives, greater provision would be made for FDCs, with the PO providing its own envelopes, plus the familiar handstamps through posting boxes and the Philatelic Bureau. The initial pre-decimal Machins (including high values) were issued in five batches. However, when the 4d Machin changed to red (and the 8d simultaneously became turquoise), and likewise for the release of 'Regional' 4d values in red, no 'first day' facilities were provided. As it happens, for the 'national' definitive colour change, Windsor used the circular handstamp, but omitting the inscription 'first day of issue'.

On 1 December 1969, when the £1 *Stamps for Cooks* booklet was released, no circular 'first day of issue' handstamps were provided, since there were no new basic stamps as such. However, a pictorial handstamp referring to the new booklet was in use at Thames Ditton in Surrey.



#### Some facts about Wedgwood

- A monument to Josiah Wedgwood, executed by the famous artist, John Flaxman, is in Stoke Parish Church. The inscription states he: 'converted a rude and inconsiderable Manufactory into an elegant Art and an important part of the National Commerce.'
- The foundation of Sydney was marked by the issue, in 1788, of the Sydney Cove medalion. This included some Australian clay brought back from Botany Bay by Captain James Cook in the *Endeavour*.
- Early Jasper vases were often made in sets, to form a *parure de chemise*. Such vases were particularly admired by late 18th century collectors, many of whom left their collections to museums.
- Canals interested Josiah Wedgwood, and he was a pioneer in promoting this form of transport in England.

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Posting delayed by the  
POST OFFICE strike 1971

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**Decimatisation** The change to decimal currency, which took place on 15 February 1971, was anticipated by the release of the 10p, 20p and 50p Machin high values on 17 June 1970: again 'first day of issue' facilities were provided. On 'D-Day' itself, the country was gripped by a Post Office strike. The many sub post offices were open, as were some head post offices, while collection and delivery was still taking place on a localised basis in a few areas. Consequently, the decimal low value definitives went on sale as planned, but posting and having delivered a first day cover was more difficult.

The strike ended on 7 March, and arrangements were made that on 12 and 13 March the philatelic posting boxes would be open to receive first day covers of the decimal low values. In addition, these would be handstamped 'first day of issue 15 February 1971'. At the last moment it was decided that all the covers so posted would receive a cachet reading 'Posting Delayed by The Post Office Strike 1971' (occasionally the word 'The' is omitted). As this was a late decision, the cachets were all produced on a localised basis. As a result, there have been some 94 different types identified. Interestingly, items such as booklet

panes and even postal stationery were eligible to receive the 'first day of issue' handstamp.

Indeed, since decimatisation, there has been a more 'liberal' approach taken as to what deserves full first day treatment, so clearly all new denominations of Machin definitives have been afforded full facilities, as have changes of colour, and the change of font on the £1 definitive. However, changes regarded by Royal Mail as being of specific interest to philatelists have generally not been afforded the full 'first day of issue' exercise, although there have been a few exceptions when local offices have used their own initiative.

The major exception as far as Royal Mail is concerned has been the prestige stamp booklets. The 1969 £1 *Stamps for Cooks* experiment was not followed up until 1972 with the £1 *Story of Wedgwood*. For that a 'first day of issue' pictorial handstamp was provided featuring the bust of Josiah Wedgwood. This practice has been continued for all the subsequent prestige books. This might be considered strange, since in the majority of cases no new basic stamps were involved, although such booklets invariably produce a variation for the collector. At times the Post Office has stated that the 'first day of issue' handstamp may only be



Top row: a cover for the change to decimal currency, with the new 50p stamp with a 'first day of issue' handstamp for Windsor, and the equivalent 10s with privately sponsored handstamp used on the day of issue; the Bureau handstamp for the £1 definitive with re-drawn value tablet; and the Bureau handstamp used for new 'Country' stamps at one time.

Bottom row: a cover for the release of the low value decimal definitives, with the 'posting delayed...' cachet; and a 'first day of issue' handstamp service provided for the £1 *Story of Wedgwood* prestige stamp book.

applied to the 'special panes' (often a se-tenant arrangement) in the booklets, but without exception covers exist with all panes so treated. In fact, first day cover collectors tend to reject covers which bear just the stamps from the prestige book panes, but require the entire item, including the attached 'label', on their covers.

These booklets saw a pictorial 'first day' handstamp applied to definitives from 1972, but it was not until 1977 that a pictorial 'first day of issue' handstamp was put into general use for new definitives. For the photogravure-printed high values issued on 2 February that year, a pictorial handstamp featuring a '£' sign was introduced at both the Bureau and Windsor. This remained the 'definitive' style for a few years, but with the £1.30 high value of 1983, and more generally from the Castle high values of 1988, there has been a wider range of designs used for the 'official' first day of issue handstamps.

There have, of course, been many other items of which collectors have wanted a first day cover, such as the booklets with commemorative labels, but for which the Post Office has not provided a handstamp. In such cases a privately sponsored handstamp has invariably fulfilled the need.

**Regionals** As decimalisation brought pictorial first day of issue handstamps for special issues, so the issue of 'Regionals' in new designs with decimal values on 7 July 1971 saw the provision of pictorial handstamps. These were used at various locations in the respective regions, and featured the distinguishing motif used on the stamps. (In 1969 Guernsey and Jersey had gained postal independence, and issued their own stamps, so were no longer included among the 'Regionals'.)

The next release of 'Regionals' was on 23 January 1974: by this time the Isle of Man has also become 'independent', so was no longer included. Consequently, the PO changed the designation of these to 'Country' stamps. New circular first day of issue handstamps were introduced for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, still featuring the principal motif of the Red Hand of Ulster, Scottish Lion and Welsh Dragon. The handstamp applied at the Philatelic Bureau featured a map of the UK, with the three countries shown in black. These handstamps remained in use until 1999, when the new pictorial definitives were introduced for Scotland and Wales.

Next time, this series will conclude with a selection of more unusual items ●