

The first British Europa stamp, issued in 1960 – four years after the beginning of the programme



Going Continental A retrospective view of Britain's Europa stamps by John Holman

THE RELEASE OF THE FORTHCOMING Royal Mail Europa issue of Children's Book stamps gives us a timely opportunity to look back over their half-century history. The first stamps were released by Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and Netherlands – the six members of the European Coal and Steel Community, which was the forerunner of the EU. Each country issued two stamps depicting a 'Europa Tower' surrounded by scaffolding. These are now very popular among collectors and some are becoming scarce, particularly the Luxembourg stamps.

Britain's role Since 1956 Europa stamps have been issued every year, but Britain didn't join until four years in to the scheme. Those stamps comprised 6d and 1s 6d values, both showing the Europa Conference emblem. They were Britain's first two-coloured special stamps, indeed the first two-coloured stamps since the reign of Edward VII. They were also the first to be printed on chalk-surfaced paper to give them a sharper image.

The 1961 set saw another innovation – it was printed in three colours. Special stamps of the 1960s are noted for their missing colour errors and the 1961 Europa issue is no exception. The 2d stamp with missing orange is catalogued by Stanley Gibbons at £17,500, as is the 10d without pale green. The 10d lacking the turquoise colour is a more modest £4,750.

The next British Europa issue in 1969 – a 9d value in an 'Anniversaries' set – featured the words EUROPA and CEPT (Conference of European Postal & Telecommunications) plus the post horn emblem. Although Britain joined the European Community in 1973, the next Europa issue was not until 1980 when we depicted authoresses Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot

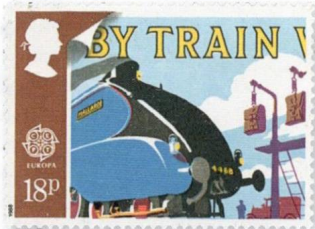
The 1961 three-colour issue and 1969 stamp, which also features the CEPT logo





(Mary Ann Evans), Jane Austen and Mrs Gaskell. Only the stamps covering UK and Europe letter rates carried the CEPT logo.

Issues of interest I do not have space here for all 30 Europas issued since 1980 so will concentrate on the more interesting and unusual. The 1984 set comprised se-tenant pairs, of 16p and 20½p stamps; one showed the CEPT 25th anniversary logo and the other marked the 2nd European Parliament Elections, with an image of the Abduction of Europa and the Parliament's emblem. The colourful 1985 designs, for European Music Year, represented the works of Handel, Holst, Delius, and Elgar and unusually showed the value in words rather than numerals. The charming 1986 issue showed endangered species and the 1987 set celebrated British architects in Europe. The popular 1988 set depicted mail transport of the 1930s. Two of the four 1990 stamps depicted Alexandra Palace, home to the international stamp exhibition that year, and the British Philatelic Bureau, then in Brandon Street, Edinburgh. The bizarre 1991 issue, depicting weird images of man looking at space and space looking at man, on se-tenant pairs, were widely criticised by collectors. The 1992 pair, in a set that included stamps for the Olympic and Paralympic Games and Expo 92, were the last to include the CEPT post horn emblem.



From top: the 1984 se-tenant pair; the 1987 issue celebrating British architects in Europe; the 1988 mail transport of the 1930s stamp; and the 1990 stamp featuring the old Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh

Working with a new logo Since 1993 the Europa issues have shown a new, stylised logo. This was first used on the Contemporary Art set honouring Henry Moore, Edward Bawden, Stanley Spencer and Ben Nicholson. Peace and Freedom was the theme for 1995 with two stamps of symbolic hands and dove designs marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. In 1996 the new logo featured on two of the Famous Women stamps portraying Dames Margot Fonteyn and Elizabeth Frink. The 1997 issue on Tales and Legends featured horror stories and was launched at London Dungeon.

For 1999 the 19p Farmers' Tale set stamp represented Nature Reserves and Parks, but there was no Europa stamp in 2000. A first in 2001 was the inclusion of an 'E' stamp in the Pond Life issue, the 'E' standing for European-rate stamp, not Europa. Circus was the theme in 2002 with five cartoon designs initially ▶



due for issue on 9 April but delayed by a day as a mark of respect for the Queen Mother's funeral. The 2003 issue featured Pub Signs, which tied in with the theme of Art. In 2004 the Europa symbol was rather lost in the scenery of the British Journey – Wales first-class and 40p stamps. The theme for 2006 was Integration – covered by first-class and 50p in the Sounds of Britain issue.

Nearing the end of our Europa journey, in 2007 the series celebrated the centenary of Scouting; Royal Mail incorporated the Europa logo on the first-class and 48p stamps. For the Letters theme in 2008, our first-class stamp showed a Labrador carrying a letter in his mouth. Last year's issue covered Astronomy. One of the Eminent Britons stamps portrayed Sir Martin Ryle, Astronomer Royal 1972-82, to which the Europa sign was added at top right. Which brings us to the present day and 2010's theme of Children's Books. Look out for the Europa logo included in the October issue, featuring the much-loved Winnie-the-Pooh ●

The 1993 stamp featuring the new Europa logo



For more information

- **Blogs** Several philatelists blog about their collections. Keijo Kortelainen, from Finland shares his finds at www.stampcollectingblog.com/topic/europa-cept-stamps and 'Euroswiss' writes at <http://europa-stamps.blogspot.com>.
- **Websites** <http://philatelynews.com> has up-to-date news stories on Europa issues throughout the continent. At www.europastudyunit.org, an association of American philatelists go into great detail on the stamps.