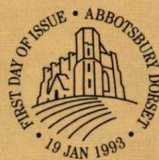


Swans

19 January 1993



Five stamps commemorating the 600th anniversary of Abbotsbury Swannery go on sale at post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau, Collections, and philatelic counters on 19 January. The values, postal usage and designs are as follows:

18p (inland 2nd class basic rate) – mute swan cob, with St Catherine's chapel at Abbotsbury;

24p (inland 1st class and EC basic rate) – Cygnet, with duck decoy;



28p (Europe, non-EC basic rate) – mute swan breeding pair and cygnet at the nesting site;

33p (worldwide postcard rate) – mute swan's eggs and nest, with the Tithe Barn at Abbotsbury;

39p (basic airmail letter rate) – mute swan, by the side of the Fleet at Abbotsbury.

The designs are the work of David Gentleman, one of Britain's best-known stamp designers. Mr Gentleman has been designing British stamps for over 30 years; his first stamps, marking National Productivity Year, were issued in November 1962.

Abbotsbury Swannery

The Swannery was first mentioned in 1393, in the Court Rolls of the Manor of Abbotsbury, which was at the time in the possession of the Monastery.

After the dissolution of the monastery in 1541, Henry VIII granted the Estate to Sir Giles Strangways and it has been in the hands of the same family ever since. The head of the family



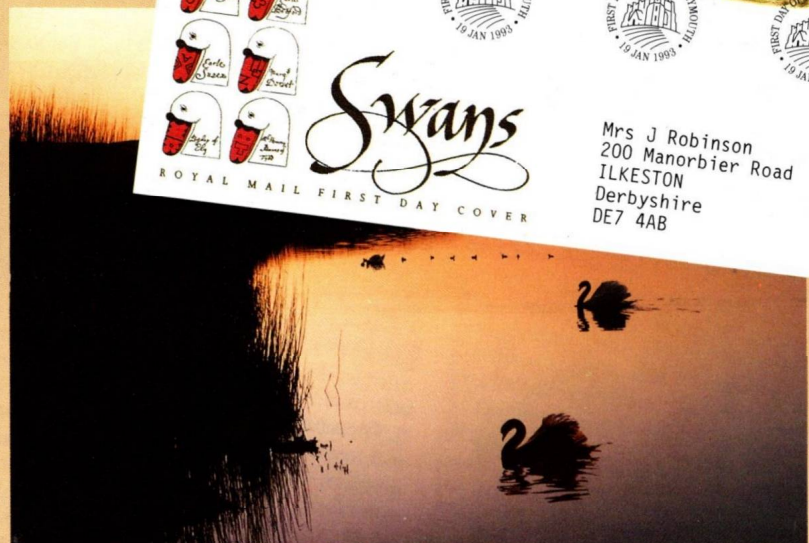
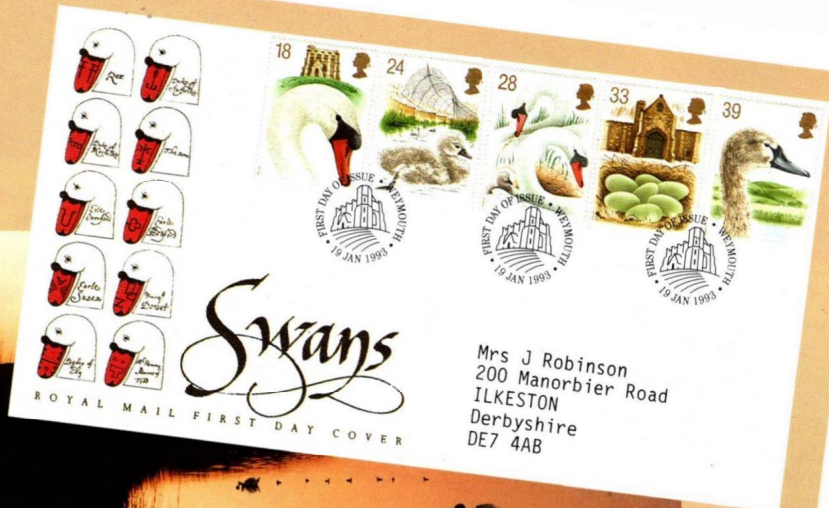
was made Earl of Ilchester in 1756.

The number of swans fluctuates from 300 or 400, to as many as 1,500. There are about 800 now. In 1591, when the earliest known count was taken, there were 500 swans at Abbotsbury. Most swans belong to the Crown but the Abbotsbury swans belong to the heirs of the Seventh Earl of Ilchester.

The swans are Mute swans. The male (the cob) is distinguished from the female (the pen) by the black knob at the base of his beak, which is larger than the pen's.

The swans stay at Abbotsbury largely because there are abundant supplies of their favourite food growing on the bed of the Fleet – the narrow strip of water between the Chesil Beach and the Mainland. This food is seaweed known as *Zostera Marina* and *Zostera Nana*.





ABBOTSBURY, a small village near the Dorset coast, has a history stretching back over 1,500 years. In the Middle Ages it was the site of the Benedictine Abbey of St Peter's, which had originally been founded in Anglo-Saxon times. The swannery, which has remained there to this day, would have been an important resource for the medieval monks.

In 1893, six hundred years ago, William Squalor, the swanherd, was accused of allowing the birds under his care to be flooded out. Fortunately no lasting damage was done and Abbotsbury still has its colony of swans which look after them.

£20 REWARD.
WILDEAS.
 Feloniously shoot or kill a SWAN.

their nesting sites. Later the adult birds may have with them fluffy, greyish brown cygnets (Hans Andersen's ugly duckling).

Most pairs of mate swans build solitary nests among reed beds or beside water. However, the species sometimes forms nesting colonies, and Abbotsbury has the only large colony in the UK which

about a hundred pairs will build nests and breed on the flat, open area beside the Fleet. The female lays an average of five eggs here. Both the male and female help to incubate them and look after the young. In the adult birds the sexes are similar to each other, but males are longer overall and have a slightly larger beak. The black protuberance at the base of the bill.

To enable the owners to identify their birds, an elaborate system of marking developed which involved nicking swans' feet or bills. Today, all swans on open or common water in the UK belong to the Crown, except some on the Thames and most at Abbotsbury. Those on the Thames still technically belong to either the Wintners' or the Dyers' Company and a traditional marking ceremony, swan-upping, takes place on the river every summer.



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Technical Details

Printers: Harrison and Sons Ltd

Process: Photogravure

Size: 30 x 41mm, vertical

Sheets: 100

Perforation: 14 x 15

Phosphor: One band (18p); Phosphor
Coated Paper (24p-39p)

Gum: PVA Dextrin

Presentation Pack: No. 233, price £1.75

Stamp Cards: Nos 149A-E, price 21p each

First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the Bureau, Collections, and philatelic counters approximately two weeks before 19 January, price 21p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the five stamps cancelled with a pictorial “First Day of Issue” postmark of the Bureau or Abbotsbury, price £2.03 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £1.73 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for first day covers must be received at the Bureau by 19 January.



Collectors may send their own stamped covers, on the day of issue, for the Bureau or Abbotsbury cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail Windsor, Peascod Street, WINDSOR SL4 1AA. The outer envelope should be endorsed “Pictorial First Day of Issue postmark”.

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, non-pictorial “First Day of Issue” handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored

by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – the Royal Mail’s magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe, £21.75 Rest of World (Airmail).

There will be no souvenir covers; these have now been discontinued.

Swans 18p stamp

Collectors are advised that it will be in order to affix just the 18p Swans stamp to covers to receive all special cancels (“First Day of Issue”, sponsored, and philatelic counter) in use on 19 January. The minimum 1st class rate rule is suspended on this day as the Swans set includes a 2nd class rate stamp. It should be noted that this concession applies only to the 18p Swans stamp; covers bearing other than Swans stamps must bear at least 24p postage.

Stamp Book News

Two new series of machine books will be issued next year featuring Postal History (50p) and Educational Institutions (£1). These will start on 9 February, with further issues on 6 April, 6 July and 28 September.

The 1993 prestige book, to be issued on 10 August, will commemorate Beatrix Potter. 1993 is the 50th Anniversary of her death and the centenary of the creation of Peter Rabbit.

Bureau Christmas Closure

The British Philatelic Bureau will be closed for Christmas/New Year from 25 December-3 January inclusive.

Postal Memorabilia Displays

Last month we gave details of David Harrop’s permanent display of postal memorabilia at the Crewe Railway Age (formerly Crewe Heritage Centre). In connection with “Santa Special” steam train weekends, Mr Harrop will be providing additional displays on 5-6, 12-13 and 19-20 December. He will also be appearing at the Winter Garden, Blackpool (*not in panto*, he assures us) with a display of Postal Artefacts at the Giant Antique & Collectors Fair on 26 & 27 December (10am to 5pm). For further information contact Mr Harrop at: 15 Hawthorn Road, Heaton Mersey, STOCKPORT, Cheshire, SK4 3DQ. Tel: 061-442 1089.