

Machine cancelled covers Part 3 of Richard West's series



From left: Paris Postal Conference 1963 (machine 'first day of issue'); Lifeboat Conference slogan; Red Cross Centenary slogan; COMPAC first day of issue slogan (first 'Philatelic Bureau'); handstamped 'first day of issue' for Shakespeare Festival; and handstamps used at Harlech and Arbroath.

THE 1960s were times of great change for stamp collectors. It seems to have been a defining decade for, across much of the world, the potential of the stamp was being recognised – some might say exploited. The British PO was certainly active in the process: 1960 had brought Britain's first two-coloured commemorative. There were three commemorative sets in 1961. And in 1963, no fewer than six special issues.

Some believe this is when the rot set in, but it did not seem like it at the time. Put it down to naivety if you wish, but for me these were exciting days. I still remember a visit to the Philatelic Bureau, which was then in London, during the Easter school holiday of 1963, and seeing on display the designs of the commemoratives up to Red Cross Centenary. Unlike many British issues, the designs were colourful and innovative, and I looked forward to what the year would bring.

For the FDC collector, much was developing. From the start of 1963 the PO acknowledged the importance of covers to collectors, particularly the quality of cancellation. It started to provide special posting boxes at a few main post offices. It was a tentative beginning: just 11 post offices

were selected, but it was a start, with the covers posted receiving special handling. The first set so treated was the Freedom from Hunger issue, on 21 March 1963; covers received the 'Freedom from Hunger Week' slogan referred to last month.

Another change came with the next issue. For the Paris Postal Conference Centenary 6d stamp issued on 7 May, a new machine slogan was introduced, with the words 'first day of issue' within an envelope design. This slogan would remain available for several years, enjoying particular usage, as will be mentioned later. The number of philatelic posting boxes increased to 30.

For National Nature Week on 16 May, the Philatelic Bureau started to accept orders to service customers' own first day covers: the London EC.1 'envelope design' 'first day of issue' slogan was used for National Nature Week.

For the next two issues, covers serviced by the Bureau received a more appropriate slogan: the 'first day of issue' slogan was nevertheless still available from philatelic posting boxes. The slogan reading 'International Life Boat Conference Edinburgh 1963' was fitting for the Conference stamps, as was '1863 Red Cross Centenary A

on British first day covers



Century of Service 1963' used for the Red Cross Centenary set.

At the end of 1963 came a late announced 'surprise' issue, for the Opening of the Commonwealth Cable (COMPAC), issued on 3 December. (Readers may recall that 1963 was also the year in which the *Bulletin* began publication, and that issue NO 4 included an example of the COMPAC stamp overprinted in red 'CANCELLED'.) Covers serviced by the Bureau used the 'envelope' design, but this time inscribed 'Philatelic Bureau, London EC1'.

The following year was to be no less momentous. Just four new issues, but what a start was made. Putting aside the fact that what was commemorated had to be the Shakespeare Festival (rather than the birth anniversary), the issue comprised five stamps, and saw the introduction not only of the presentation pack, but also of the Post Office's own designed first day envelope. This meant that the Philatelic Bureau would not simply service covers, it could provide the entire package, including supplying and addressing the envelope, in addition to affixing and cancelling the stamps. Also, the general 'first day of issue'

cancellation, available through philatelic posting boxes, took a new form: a circular handstamp was brought into use. Of quite large diameter, this was used at many locations, the most appropriate for Shakespeare being Stratford-upon-Avon. Covers serviced by the Bureau received a Stratford handstamp. Subsequent covers serviced by the Philatelic Bureau had the handstamp so inscribed.

Incidentally, although the Post Office claimed that the posting boxes would mean special treatment for covers, the quality of impression of both the slogan and the handstamp in those days often left much to be desired.

The 'first day of issue' handstamp remained the standard for many years. During 1965 a smaller version was brought into use (not universally at first), resulting in an improvement in the quality of the impression. Occasionally, a further office was added to those providing this service, if the office concerned had a particular connection with the theme of the stamps. Two examples are Harlech for the British Landscapes issue of 1966 (the 1s 3d value showed Harlech Castle), and Arbroath for the 1970 Anniversaries series (the 5d value featured the Declaration of Arbroath).



From left: medical mailings for Shakespeare Festival, Joseph Lister, Botanical Congress, and Literary Anniversaries; slogan cancels for British Bridges and British Paintings issues; and handstamp for medical mailing on the 1967 British Flora issue.

Medical mailings However, the 'first day of issue' slogan was still available, and would have special uses. One of the most significant was for postings by Medical Mailing. For many years, if a commemorative set included a basic inland rate stamp, the opportunity would be taken to send a mailing to the medical profession using a new stamp on its day of issue. In the majority of cases, the stamp would be cancelled with the slogan 'first day of issue' machine cancellation. A variety of FDCs were used to contain the mailing.

Usually, the mailing came from Paddington (of St Mary's Hospital fame), which was particularly appropriate for the Joseph Lister Antiseptic Surgery 4d value of 1965 (a cover was produced by the National Fund for Research into Poliomyelitis and other crippling diseases).

The first such 'medical mailing' which I have seen bears the 3d Shakespeare stamp, including a postcard of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, sent by the manufacturers of Pentothal. The slogan was for Stratford-upon-Avon. Other appropriate places for the mailings include Greenwich for the Geographical Congress issue, Richmond and Twickenham (home of Kew Gardens) for the

Botanical Congress, and Edinburgh for the opening of the Forth Road Bridge, all of 1964; Wembley and Harrow for the 1966 World Cup 4d (not England Winners); and Broadstairs for the Literary Anniversary (Dickens) stamp of 1970.

Interestingly, in 1967, two mailings, British Wild Flowers and British Paintings had not the slogan but the circular handstamp 'first day of issue'. For the 1967 British Discoveries 4d the slogan was again used, but can be found for either Paddington w2 or London n1. In 1968, for two of the issues (British Bridges and Paintings), the dateslug is inscribed 'Great Britain London wc2'.

Charities Other charities have adopted a similar idea, sending a FDC, often of the Christmas issue, enclosing a request for a donation. The cover carries the basic inland rate value, cancelled with the slogan or handstamp 'first day of issue'. The most interesting of the machine cancellations was for Christmas 1980 and 1985, with the slogan merely the words 'first day of issue', but no envelope design. Handstamped versions have taken various styles over the years. Most of these covers seen have been cancelled at Liverpool.



Medical and charity mailings A list of covers seen from medical mailing and other charities, using a British commemorative and a machine cancellation 'first day of issue'. Any additions to this list would be welcome.

1964 Shakespeare Festival 3d

1964 Geographical Congress 4d

1964 Botanical Congress 3d

1964 Forth Road Bridge 3d

1965 Sir Winston Churchill 4d

1965 Joseph Lister 4d

1966 World Cup 4d

1967 British Wild Flowers ¹

1967 British Paintings 4d ¹

1967 British Discoveries 4d

1968 British Bridges 4d

1968 British Anniversaries 4d

1968 British Paintings 4d

1969 British Anniversaries 5d

1969 Post Office Technology 5d

1970 British Architecture 5d

1970 Literary Anniversaries 5d

1972 Christmas 2½p

1974 Christmas 3½p

1975 Christmas 6½p

1977 Silver Jubilee 8½p

1978 Coronation 25th anniversary 9p

1980 London Landmarks 10½p

1980 Christmas 10p ²

1981 Christmas 11½p

1984 Christmas 13p

1985 Christmas 12p ²

¹ These, unusually for the time, have a handstamped 'first day of issue', rather than the machine slogan.

² Not in the envelope design.

Similar mailings with a handstamped 'first day of issue'

1976 Christmas 6½p

1984 Urban Renewal 16p

1986 60th birthday of The Queen 17p

1987 Isaac Newton 18p

1988 Sports 18p

1989 Games and Toys 19p

1990 Export and Technology Award 20p

1991 Europe in Space 22p

1992 Accession 40th anniversary 24p

1995 Peace and Freedom 19p

1996 Children's Television 20p



From top: machine slogans for British Bridges issue at Menai Bridge, Bridge in Kent, and Aberfeldy; and slogan for Westminster Abbey's 900th anniversary.

Maximum cards In 1966, for the England Winners stamp, a dealer produced maximum cards using a World Cup Willie postcard. This idea was repeated for the 1966 Battle of Hastings and Christmas sets. However, the Post Office clearly had difficulty coming to terms with this concept of a postcard, with the stamp affixed and cancelled on the picture side. These items were regarded as 'embarrassing', and various restrictions were placed on their production, including confining the picture to just the left-hand half of the pictorial side (ie, not dissimilar to a first day cover). Another aspect which gave the Post Office grief was that, since each card bore just one stamp, it meant cancelling say four items for a set of four stamps, rather than just a single cancellation that might be needed for a first day cover.

A solution was tried for the British Bridges issue of 1968, whereby the stamps on 'maximum cards' would be cancelled using the machine slogan 'first day of issue'. In the envelope design, it was put in use at Bridge, Canterbury in Kent, and also at Aberfeldy (the 9d value shows Aberfeldy Bridge), and at Menai Bridge, Anglesey (the 1s 6d value depicted the Menai Bridge). In the

latter case, the words 'first day of issue' within the envelope design also appear in Welsh.

Other slogans Apart from those already mentioned for 1964, it did sometimes occur that a machine slogan in use would have a direct relevance to the theme of a new issue. Examples include: the various 'Commonwealth Arts Festival' slogans appropriate for the 1965 issue; 'International Co-operation Year' in use at Reading at the time of the United Nations/International Co-operation Year stamps of 1965; 'Westminster Abbey 900th Anniversary Year' in 1966; 'World Cup City Sheffield', and 'World Cup Competition Sunderland' for the 1966 World Cup issue.

Christmas has also provided applicable slogans on occasions. There was also a 'first day of issue Westminster' slogan, but not in the envelope design, in use for the 900th anniversary of Westminster Abbey stamps in 1966.

However, handstamps were increasingly to take the place of slogans on first day covers. From the Shakespeare Festival set, and increasingly over the years, privately sponsored handstamps would proliferate. More on these in the next article ●