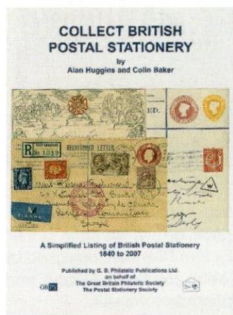


Developments in postal stationery Colin

Baker describes changes of the last 35 years



This catalogue is the product of four years of hard work by Alan Huggins and Colin Baker. It provides a comprehensive listing of everything issued for use in the UK up to the end of 2007.

PROBABLY MOST OF US have one or two items of postal stationery in our collections. After all, pre-paid stationery and adhesive stamps were both issued on 6 May 1840, and so it makes sense that we should include some of each in our albums. But for many years stamps have been much more popular with collectors. This probably stems from the days when pre-printed stamp albums first appeared, which encouraged people to fill up all the pages with postage stamps, rather than complete envelopes or postcards. This in turn led the catalogue producers to drop postal stationery from their listings, and thus it fell into the doldrums.

Although postal stationery collectors were given a boost in 1970 with the publication of a new and comprehensive catalogue by Dr Alan Huggins, it was still considered by many to be a secondary collecting area. With high inflation just around the corner, prices quoted in this catalogue went out of date far too quickly, and it is not surprising that postal stationery continued to be considered inferior to stamps. But after more than 35 years, a new catalogue has been published which, it is hoped, will bring the collecting of postal stationery into the philatelic mainstream. *Collect British Postal Stationery* is a joint venture between Alan Huggins and myself, and was published at the end of 2007. It includes all known issues of postal stationery, both Post Office and private, up to the end of that year.

Some of the sections in the new catalogue have varied little from the original publication of 1970, particularly those dealing with Post Office issues up to the time of decimalization in 1971. However, other sections have been radically revised to include new issues and varieties that have come to light in the intervening years.

There have also been significant changes to postal stationery since decimal currency was introduced in the UK in 1971. The increasing use of bulk mail and the business reply service offered to large companies brought about the demise of the stamped to order (STO) facility in 1974. You might be forgiven for thinking that this was the end of privately produced stationery. But that is not the case, and STO stationery continues to be used today, although the minimum order for these items has been increased from tens to thousands at a time. With modern printing methods it is no longer necessary to produce master dies for the stamps used in STO work today, with the result that there are minor variations in many of the stamps on these envelopes. All the major varieties are listed in the new catalogue.

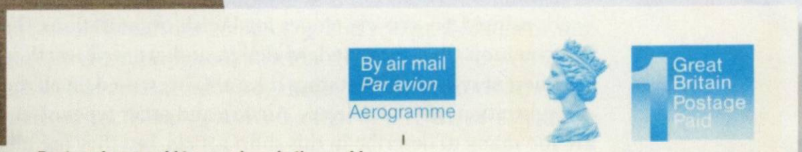
Inflation in the mid 1970s resulted in almost annual postage rate increases, leading in turn to the introduction of 'non value indicator stamps' in 1983, or NVIS for short. This move avoided the need to overprint or destroy old stocks of postal stationery held by the Post Office. Both 1st and 2nd class stamps have been impressed on Post Office and STO envelopes, and are also known on STO postcards. Three designs of NVI stamps have been used since their introduction, with variations in the latter two types. In a

12th CONVENTION 1972

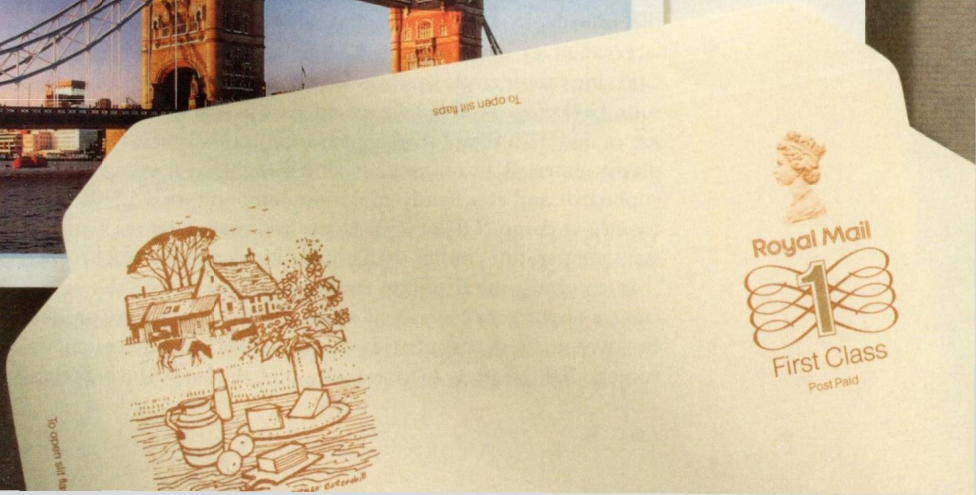
Wiltshire Philatelic Federation

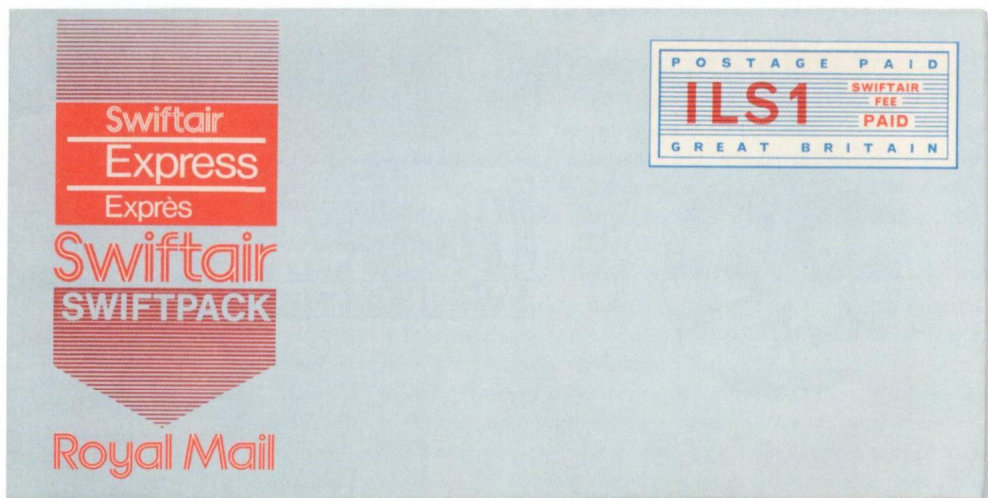


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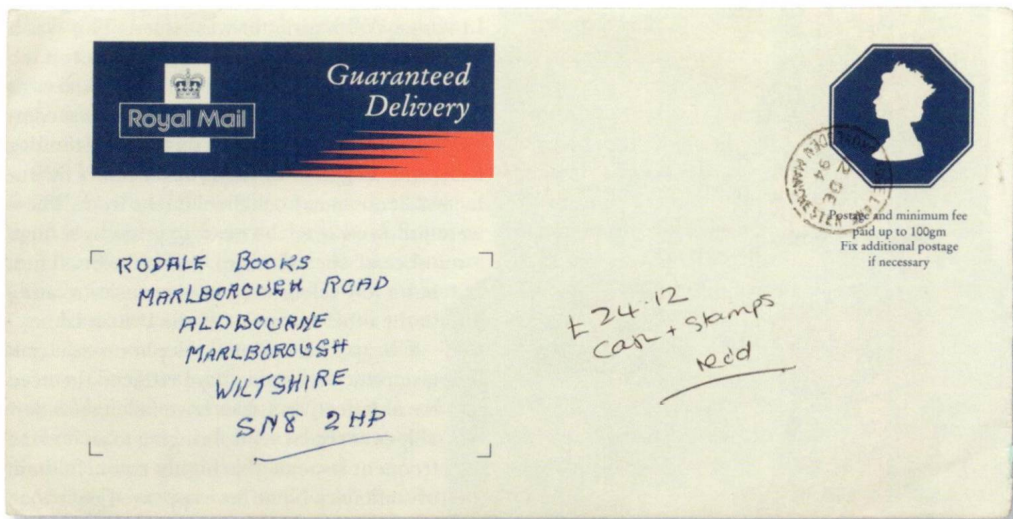
surprising move not announced in the press, the current design was altered to include 'Postage Paid – *Talwyd y Post*' in a circle around the Queen's head, printed on STO envelopes for Welsh organisations. These are much less common than the standard design and are well worth looking out for.

Different styles of NVI stamps have also been used on all the various issues of registration, special delivery, Airsure and other types of envelopes. There are too many to describe in this short article, but they are all listed in detail in the new catalogue.

Modern printing methods and materials have also had an effect on other stationery. In 1878, when registration envelopes were first put on sale, they were made from tough paper reinforced on the inside with an open weave of linen. This was to prevent coins carried in the post from being lost in transit. The material was so successful that it continued to be used until 1991, when plastic envelopes with self-sealing flaps were introduced. They serve exactly the same purpose, although they do not have quite the same appeal to the traditionalist collector. Another problem collectors face is the difficulty in storing or displaying them due to their size. Nearly all are larger than A4, and some are double that.

Plastic can degrade much more quickly than paper, with disastrous results. Collectors need to take special care in storing these envelopes if they are to maintain their 'new' appearance in the future. It is best to keep all plastic materials away from any kind of light, by keeping albums in closed cupboards and at a steady cool room temperature, with the humidity not too dry or damp. The new envelopes will survive better if stored at a constant temperature, rather than in conditions that fluctuate a great deal.

It is not just the listing of modern stationery that shows a significant change over recent years. New items of official stationery produced for use by government departments in the Victorian and Edwardian periods have come to light, leading to an expansion of the list in the new catalogue.



The Board of Agriculture has kept records of farms and livestock for centuries, and from 1866 letter sheets stamped with the outward and return postage were sent to all farmers for completion and return. Because of the confidential nature of the information, all letter sheets were destroyed once the information had been extracted. Only those that were not returned to the appropriate department have survived, often as a result of solicitors filing them with other correspondence.

It was not until recently that a letter sheet in Welsh was discovered for the year 1866, leading to speculation of how many other Welsh examples there might be. We may never know the answer to this. It took 140 years for the only known example to be identified. Because of the way in which these forms were used, and the relatively small numbers printed, it may now be unique. Vaccination certificates specially prepared for use in Scotland from 1893 have also come to light in recent years. All known official letter sheets are now listed by the user rather than strictly chronologically, to make it easier for collectors to identify individual items.

The introduction of the Official Paid symbol in 1904 brought an end to most official STO envelopes and letter sheets, although some envelopes are known to have been produced for the Privy Council up to 1919. It had always been believed that no more pre-paid official envelopes would be seen, but in 1993 an official envelope with a 1st class NV1 stamp came into use in connection with the national census. As far as is known, similar items are still being used today.

When the 1970 catalogue was published airletters were widely used, costing a fraction of the cost of sending a small envelope. The Olympic Games in 1948 saw the first commemorative airletter, followed by one for Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953. In 1964 two airletters for the Shakespeare Festival were issued, followed in 1965 by the first Christmas airletter, starting a tradition that has continued almost every year to the present day. ►



By Air Mail Air Letter
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TO OPEN SLIT HERE

In 1973 a Welsh airletter was issued. This was a definitive version with an additional panel on the front showing a Welsh woman in traditional costume. The following year saw Scotland's first commemorative airletter. Again, this was a definitive issue, with a vignette of the Prince Charles monument, Glenfinnan, Loch Shiel on the front. These were followed over the next 35 years by a huge number of special issues, many for Scotland, but a few celebrating anniversaries relating to the other countries of the British Isles.

Cheap international telephone calls and electronic messaging have reduced the need for airletters, and sales have fallen considerably over recent years, bringing to an end the frequent issue of this highly colourful item of stationery. None have appeared since 1999 except for the Christmas issues. Even these designs have continued for two years rather than one recently; who knows for how much longer these will be sold. The world is changing fast, and the way we communicate with it ●

Text © Colin Baker 2008

What makes Stampex tick? Richard West talks with Mike Czuczman, organizer of the twice-yearly Stampex exhibition



An auction for young collectors is a regular fixture at Stampex.

BRITAIN'S OLDEST established stamp exhibition, Stampex, is held twice a year, at the end of February and in September, at the Business Design Centre in Islington in London. It is staged by the Philatelic Traders' Society (PTS), with the organisation being handled by Mike Czuczman. Here, Mike answers a few questions about himself and the event.

Richard West: How long have you been involved with the organisation of Stampex?

Mike Czuczman: I joined the PTS in July 1997 and ran my first Stampex in September that year. It was a fairly steep learning curve.

RW: How did you get involved with Stampex, and its owners, the Philatelic Traders' Society?

MC: I had left my previous company and was on one year of 'gardening leave' when an interested friend told me the position of Secretary of