Crown Jewels Next month's special issue marks the 350th anniversary of these historic national treasures

IN 1661, FOR THE CORONATION of Charles II, a completely new set of Crown Jewels was commissioned to replicate those disposed of at the order of Oliver Cromwell. The new Crown Jewels were mostly modelled on the lost medieval originals and played a highly symbolic role at the momentous coronation ceremony that heralded a new chapter in the history of the British monarchy. Today, 350 years later, those same jewels are exhibited at the Tower of London and are viewed every day by visitors from all over the world. They remain the most treasured pieces of the Royal Collection.

What sets the Crown Jewels apart from the royal jewels of other countries is the continuity of their use, chiefly in the Coronation ceremony, which in Britain has changed little in a thousand years.
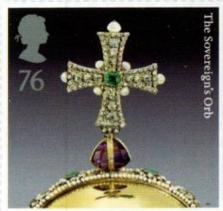
Stamp by stamp The two 1st Class stamps show the Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross and the St Edward's Crown of gold. Both were made in 1661, and the sceptre was redesigned in 1905 to incorporate the Cullinan I Great Star of Africa, which, at more than 530 carats, is the second largest cut diamond in the world. During the coronation, the monarch bears the Sceptre with Cross in the right hand. The detail of St Edward's Crown shows the jewelled cross patée. Encrusted with 444 precious stones, this is the crown that monarchs receive when they ascend the throne and is reputed to have been made of gold recovered from the crown of Alfred the Great.

Above: the Tallents House pictorial postmark depicts the Sovereign's Orb
Below: the Crown Jewels Presentation Pack, written by Anna Keay

Crown Jewels prices	
Set of stamps	£6.00
Presentation Pack 459	£6.50
Stamp Cards (8 in set)	£3.60
First Day Envelope	30p
First Day Cover	£7.68
Restoration of the Monarchy Coin Cover	£15.95

One of the 68p stamps shows the Rod and Sceptre with Doves. The Rod with the dove with closed wings was made for the joint coronation of William and Mary (the only co-regency in British history) in 1689. The second 68p stamp carries an image of a section of the crown made for Mary of Teck when she became Queen Consort at the coronation of King George V in 1911. Since Queen Mary's death in 1953, her consort crown has remained unworn and it is rarely seen.

The two 76p stamps feature the Sovereign's Orb and the Jewelled Sword of Offering. The golden Orb weighs 42 ounces and symbolises the monarch's role as Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England. The Monarch holds the Orb in the left hand as he or she leaves Westminster Abbey. The Jewelled Sword of Offering was made for the Coronation of King George IV in 1821. It is presented to the Sovereign during the Coronation by the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Above: pictorial postmark with the post code of the Tower of London

Finally, there are two £1.10 stamps. The first gives a close-up of the Imperial State Crown, which was made in 1937 for King George VI and incorporates several world-famous stones, including the Black Prince's Ruby and the Cullinan II diamond known as the Lesser Star of Africa. It is worn at the annual State Opening of Parliament and after the conclusion of the Coronation ceremony when the monarch leaves Westminster Abbey. The second £1.10 stamp shows the Coronation Spoon, used to anoint the monarch with holy oil in the Coronation ceremony. Dating from the 12th century, this Spoon is the oldest item of the regalia and the only medieval piece to have escaped destruction by Cromwell •

Crown Jewels Stamps Specifications

Issue date	23 August
Number of stamps	Eight
Design	Purpose
Illustration	The Sovereign's Sceptre with Cross, St Edward's Crown, Rod and Sceptre with Doves, Queen Mary's Crown, The Sovereign's Orb, Jewelled Sword of Offering, Imperial State Crown and Coronation Spoon
Stamp format	Landscape
Stamp size	37mm x 35mm
Printer	Cartor Security Printing
Print process	Lithography
Number per sheet	25/50
Perforations	14 x 14.5
Phosphor	Background screen
Gum	PVA