

Mail on mail

Julia Lee on how the evolution of the postal system is depicted on UK stamps

THE STORY OF THE UK POSTAL SERVICE begins in 1635, when Charles I opened the use of his mail service to the general public in order to raise revenues. Oliver Cromwell followed by setting up a general post office in 1657, which Charles II replaced with the General Letter Office in 1660. At this time in the 17th century, before the move to stage coaches, mail was carried by post boys in relays, each carrying a horn to alert the next boy along the road.

Three hundred years later an image of such a post horn features in the first stamps to celebrate the postal service – the 1960 issue marking the 300th anniversary of the General Letter Office's foundation. On the 1s 3d stamp (1), the post horn sits next to a crown and among oak leaves – probably a reference to English royalty, following the story of Charles II hiding in an oak tree to avoid capture by Republicans after the Battle of Worcester. On the 3d (2), a post boy on a galloping horse blows a post horn. There is also an elaborate little Charles II cypher in the top left corner.

Movement by mailcoach By the late 18th century the postal system was considered inefficient and slow. In 1784 John Palmer, a Bath theatre owner, organised the first mail coach run, essentially to prove to postal officials that the timely delivery of post could be achieved. The first run from Bristol to London took 16 hours, a massive improvement on a journey that normally



Stamps celebrating the General Post Office (1, 2). Slania's 1984 Bicentenary of the First Mail Coach run (3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). The 150th anniversary of the Liverpool and Manchester railway commemorated in the 1980 issue (8). The 1988 Transport issue showing the *Mallard* (9)

took up to 38 hours. By the end of 1785, his coaches served Norwich, Liverpool, Leeds, Dover, Portsmouth, Poole, Exeter, Gloucester, Worcester, Holyhead and Carlisle.

In 1984, a beautiful set of stamps, engraved by Czeslaw Slania (3, 4, 5, 6 and 7), marked the anniversary of the first mail coach run with illustrations of significant incidents from the mail coach era. The events portrayed include a lioness from a travelling menagerie attacking the Exeter mail coach, the Norwich mail coach in a thunderstorm, Holyhead and Liverpool mails leaving London, and the Edinburgh mail coach trapped in a snow drift. A depiction of a mail coach in a more modern setting is featured in the 1989 stamp set of the Lord Mayor's show (10) – one of the five 20p stamps shows a coach taking part in the annual London parade. The railways eventually took the place of mail coach routes, with the last London-bound coach leaving Norwich in 1846.



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An original mail coach in London's annual Lord Mayor's Show, on this 1989 stamp

The age of steam Mail was first carried on the Liverpool and Manchester Railway shortly after it opened and, by 1838, mail coaches were being transported on railway wagons, to be taken off at the nearest appropriate station and continued to their end destination by road. The 1980 stamp set issued to mark the 150th anniversary of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway features such a mail coach on a wagon (8).

An apparatus for dropping mailbags into a net positioned at the side of the railway track was quickly developed and in 1839 a system was adopted that allowed mailbags to be collected from a moving train. The 20th century version of this system features in the Mike Dempsey set of 1988 Europa Transport and Mail Services, showcasing 1930s transport. The 18p value (9) shows the record-breaking Mallard and, uniquely among UK stamps, mailbags waiting on pick-up arms, ready to be caught by the speeding train.

By 1838, mail coaches were being transported on railway wagons

The man who changed it all The industrial revolution was accompanied by a social revolution that saw people flocking from rural communities to find work in cities. Burgeoning businesses needed to communicate and workers needed to write home. The old set-up, where the addressee paid for the post upon delivery – not knowing in advance how much that may be because it was dependent on the distance travelled – was inefficient and prohibitively expensive to the working classes. The postal reformer Rowland Hill ▶



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Left: one of the stamps from the 1990 150th Anniversary of the Penny Black issue (11); the Penny Red celebrated in the 1992 Memories issue (12); this year's House of Hanover special issue again featured the stamp that started it all (13)

petitioned for a Uniform Penny Postage and invented the Penny Black in 1840. The much-loved Penny Black has been celebrated on modern stamps, notably in the 1990 150th Anniversary of the Penny Black issue (11), while the Penny Red is featured in the 1992 Memories issue (12). The recent House of Hanover in the Kings and Queens series (13) and the Stamp World London 90 minisheet also feature the Penny Black.

In 1979, on the centenary of Rowland Hill's death, a set of four stamps was issued, with the sale of the accompanying miniature sheet helping fund the 1980 London International Stamp Exhibition. Designer Eric Stemp used an overall theme of people holding letters, beginning with Hill on the 10p stamp (14). The 11½p and 13p show the two different uniforms of 1839 postmen – of the General Post and the London Penny Post respectively (15 and 16).

The London Penny Post had been set up by William Dockwra and Robert Murray in 1680 alongside the General Post Office and in many ways – for example, pre-payment and letter boxes – anticipated the later developments we are so familiar with. However, the Duke of York (who had the General Post Office monopoly and profited from it greatly) took the London Post into his care two years later. The two distinct systems remained until 1844 and the uniforms hung on for another 11 years until, in 1855, a collective post office uniform of scarlet was issued to the mail carriers of both the London District and the General Post.

The bicentenary of Rowland Hill's birth was marked in 1995 in a stamp set commemorating Pioneers of Communication. Hill is shown on the 19p in front of the Uniform Penny Postage Petition (18) and on the 25p in front of the Penny Black (19). The other two stamps in the set feature Marconi but are relevant to Hill too – the Post Office allowed Hill to pioneer the use of

Stamps commemorating Rowland Hill: marking the 1979 centenary of his death (14, 15, 16 and 17); the 1995 Pioneers of Communications issue (18 and 19); the 2004 250th Anniversary of the RSA issue (20)



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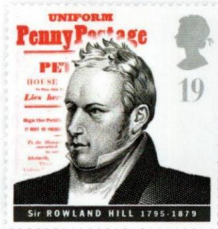
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POST BOXES

The earliest known surviving posting slot was placed in the wall of Wakefield Post Office in 1809. Britain's first roadside pillar boxes appeared in the early 1850s but, in more remote and less populated areas, a cheaper and more practical alternative was needed, resulting in the development of smaller post boxes. Initially, they were installed in walls, buildings or brick pillars; later designs were also attached to lamp posts.



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the wireless before the Italian government realised the invention's worth. He was honoured on the 2004 set which marked the 250th anniversary of the Royal Society of Arts. The 1st class value refers to his being awarded the first RSA Albert Medal in 1864 for his postal reforms (20). A Penny Black sits at the top right corner of the stamp, as if it were an envelope.

Central collection points In response to the explosion in the volume of mail that coincided with the Penny Black, the novelist and postal worker Anthony Trollope invented the pillar box. The first box was installed in Jersey in 1852 and its 150th anniversary was celebrated in a 2002 stamp set (21, 22, 23, 24 and 25). Its five stamps carry images of pillar boxes dating from 1857 to 1874, including the early (and rare) 1857 VR Science and Art Pillar Box and an Air Mail Post Box of 1933.

These familiar pieces of street furniture were further celebrated in 2009 with the first series of Post Boxes stamps (26), 1983's Christmas Post (27), and the Christmas 1995 stamps which included a robin in the mouth of a pillar box on the 19p value (28) ●

Next month Julia gathers together stamps celebrating the PO Savings Bank, Universal Postal Union, ship deliveries and airmail.



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Above: UK stamps that celebrate the post box – the 150th anniversary set of 2002, the Post Boxes miniature sheet of 2009, Christmas Post of 1983, and 1995's popular Christmas robin