

1967: Testing Labels for Type G SVM

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This paper commences with background information text about Type G stamp vending machines (SVM's) taken from the *History of Stamp Vending* article by Graham Eyre and myself, as published in *Cross Post*, the magazine of the Friends of the British Postal Museum & Archive (BPMA), in 2007. There seemed little point in rewriting this aspect of the subject as it provides the full background story to what was in 1969 a new type of SVM. The balance of the article is based around research at the BPMA.

Machine Background

This SVM was designed by Elliott Automation to cater for a wide range of postage rates and was developed in readiness for decimal coinage, initially dispensing five multi-value stamps for one shilling (5p) and a unique facility was that the machines could (but never did) dispense commemorative stamp issues in coils. An order for 10,000 machines costing around £350,000 was intended to be manufactured to replace roughly that number of the rapidly ageing earlier book and coil machines then in service. However, production difficulties and delivery delays resulted in a rethink, as the so-called D-Day (Decimalisation Day) was approaching and Type B4 would become obsolete from that date. A plan to convert 2700 B4s to 1p working was therefore instituted.

The Type G SVM should have been a greater success (they were expected to last at least 20 years), but it was shown that around half of the machine malfunctions were caused by petty vandalism, with even more problems caused by dampness in the equipment. The ravages of 1970s inflation also resulted in the demise of a machine that the public never really took to because they disliked having to store the spare small value stamps that were invariably left over from the strip and they took a long while to come to terms with the novel method of needing to lift a large flap to effect a dispense.

Machine Variants

Type G1 1969 Mechanical, Coin-freed 1s Strip of 5 x coil stamps Associated Automation

Dispensing stamps in strips of 2d, 2d, 3d, 1d and 4d, this arrangement cleverly gave any combination of any amount from one penny to one shilling and provided for easy separating into three divisions of 4d (2d and 2d, 3d and 1d, or 4d) and two divisions of 5d (2d and 3d, or 1d and 4d). It accepted both 1s and 5p coins (which were the same size and weight as the pre-decimal coinage).

Type G could be adjusted to dispense strips of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 stamps and although only strips of five were nationally available, a machine at Cannon Street in London was once set to dispense three red Machin 4d stamps for a one shilling coin, possibly a unique situation. There were initially 22 pre-production-run Type G machines installed in August 1969, nine in London and the rest elsewhere in the UK, with the balance of the production version appearing over the next two years.

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Type G2 1971 Mechanical, Coin-freed 5p Strip of 5 x coil stamps Associated Automation

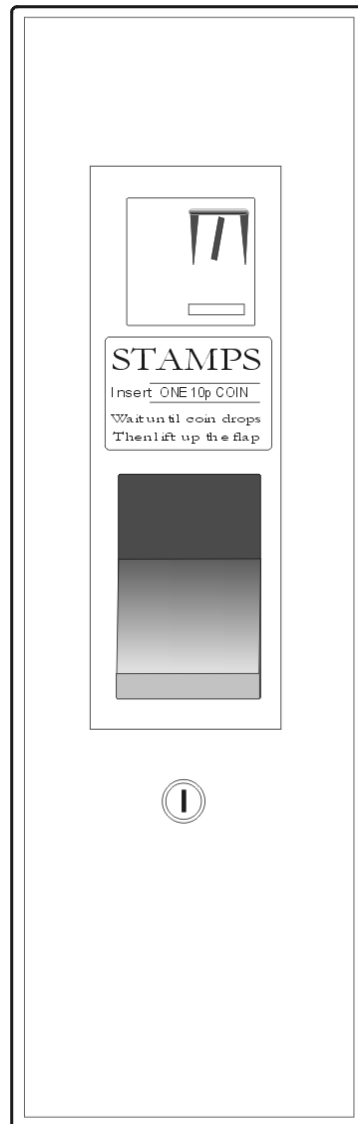
A post-decimal version of Type G1, the Type G2 machine dispensed five multi-value stamps for 5p initially in strips of 2p, 1½p, 1½p, 1p and 1p. 6000 Type G1 machines were converted. (Whatever happened to the other 4000 that had been intended to exist before decimalisation? Presumably the production difficulties resulted in a smaller total order?)

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Type G3 1975 Mechanical, Coin-freed 10p Strip of 5 x coil stamps Associated Automation
From 3 December 1975, the Type G2 was progressively converted to accept ten pence coins instead of five pence and to initially dispense five multi-value stamps in strips of 6p, 2p, 1p, $\frac{1}{2}$ p and $\frac{1}{2}$ p to cover the $8\frac{1}{2}$ p (first class) and $6\frac{1}{2}$ p (second class) basic postage rates for insertion of one coin.

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Type G3 SVM
(Image courtesy of Graham Eyre)

Testing Labels

As with any new SVM, the Post Office and its manufacturer (Associated Automation) was keen to test the mechanism by using dummy testing labels that would closely resemble the issued stamp strip. The Post Office commissioned Harrison to produce rolls that would be sideways, or horizontal, delivery i.e. each stamp would be alongside its neighbour, rather than above or below it.

The initial order utilised blank, unprinted perforated label stock.

PICTURE OF UNPRINTED STRIP GOES HERE, ONCE SCANNED

Unprinted testing label strip

The second and subsequent orders were known as “Test Roll, No. 2” and reproduced the familiar FTPO design that came about after the green poached eggs. The original FTPO “Test Roll, No. 1” version contained vertical delivery stamps that were unsuitable for use with Type G.

An internal note dated 29 May (no year shown, but clearly 1969 based on the order of documents within the file), states: “Test rolls *do not have perforated edges* and are reeled inside out” (*my italics*).

PICTURE OF FTPO STRIP GOES HERE, ONCE SCANNED

Straight-edged testing stamp strip

This is the first official mention of straight-edged testing labels, as initially discovered and recorded by me in the *Dummy Stamps* newsletter some time ago. An early June 1969 file note states: “Dummy Rolls – Those delivered by Harrison not acceptable”. It is little wonder, therefore, that so few straight-edged dummy stamps have ever surfaced, as most will have been destroyed when returned to Harrison for replacement, with just a few having escaped destruction.

A memorandum of a meeting between the Post Office, Associated Automation and Harrison held on 27 August 1969 (the official launch date for Type G stamps/machines) records how making a suitable cylinder for the Swedish perforator “had been unsuccessful” and had “delayed delivery of the test rolls by three months. A second cylinder had been produced and Harrison would now print and commence delivery of the test stamps (the colour of which would be **green***) in two weeks (i.e. by 10 September).”

**This colour has never been mentioned before and examples remain unrecorded. Could “green” be an error of hearing or misinterpretation of scribbled notes by the meeting secretary, who should have written “grey” in the Minutes?*

(Note: Since this article was first drafted, examples of a plain pale green all-over wash label in sheet format have been found in the files at BPMA, although none in a coil format appear to be known, nor are any preserved in the archives. These could be the type of label being referred to in the Minutes above. See an illustration in my *1970 Decimal Training Labels* article, where an example has been rubber stamped 3 1/2p to serve as a specimen design for a training label.)



Fully perforated testing stamp strip attached to its leader

Eventually, the desired rolls were supplied to the required standard and specification with fully perforated labels and the following orders for Type G testing rolls have been traced.

Test Roll Orders in BPMA Files

Blank unprinted paper stock

POST 52/610	Local orders other than school specimens <i>The five sections in this file are all requests from the PMG [Postmaster General] for items in connection with stamp production. They are coated PVA gummed stamp paper, dummy rolls, unwatermarked paper, and paper gummed with Polyvinyl Alcohol Adhesive, and a request to overprint with B3 phosphor lines various named sheets of stamps.</i>	1965-1968
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<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
1. October 1967	1,000 rolls	PO Supplies Dept	circa 2s5d (12p) each	£120

C E Sharwood of Stamp Duty contacted the Supplies Department on 23 October 1967 to place an order for testing labels. Unusually, the order stated: "...if at all possible unprinted. This would remove difficulties with regard to security. They are required by the Engineering Department (ED / PE 6 / 1)."

On the 25 October 1967, the order was placed with Harrison for 1,000 rolls of 3,000 blank horizontal delivery labels. Stock was required by 9 November 1967 and was "to be made from unprinted Post Office coated, unwatermarked paper". The cores were to be ¾", and the labels to be reeled with the gum on the outside.

On 17 November 1967 Harrison delivered 120 "good" rolls to The Controller, Post Office Supplies Department. Three days later on the 20th, a further 240 rolls were received, with 250 more on the 23rd. This totals 610 rolls and details of the balance of 390 rolls are not recorded in the files.

A delivery note from Harrison dated 21 December 1967 showed "900 panels of 100 set" waste, which was incinerated by the Post Office on 16 January 1968.

FTPO printed paper stock

POST 52/590	Test Rolls for the Engineering department <i>This is a correspondence file regarding the various tests of rolls, mostly 'G' rolls, for vending machines.</i>	1968-1970
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Note: For those with an interest in the issued stamp strips, be aware that the file also contains much information about problems experienced with the phosphor reading (where a file note states: "as most [of the initial supplies] will probably go into stamp albums, it probably does not matter"!), loose reeling, bad cutting (and "untidy edges") and core sizes, but this is outside of the scope.

<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
1. March 1968	1,000 rolls	PO Supplies Dept	circa 2/- (10p) each	circa £100
<i>Imperforate top and bottom edges, with (unacceptable) wavy edges. Possibly replaced, either with fully perforated stamps, or with imperforate top/bottom edges.</i>				

An internal memorandum dated 29 August 1968 stated: "...a modification to the prototype of the G type SVM now necessitates a change in the construction of the cores of the test rolls. The first 100 supplied are to be 1¾ inches diameter and of cardboard; the remaining 900 rolls are to be of plastic to the dimensions of a specimen and drawing supplied to Harrison." The memo also talks about the "...Minute of 15 March 1968 concerning the purchase of 1000 rolls of test stamps..." making it clear that no stock prior to this date had been received.

100 initial rolls were supplied to PO Supplies on 23 September 1968, presumably of the cardboard core type.

On 17 October, GE Haine of Harrison supplied "five dummy "G" type rolls for testing" to PO Supplies. Could this have been an early attempt at correcting a problem with the defective stock supplied?

Supplies Division wrote in November 1968: "The latest information received from PMD/DD (Cutmore) is that the test rolls have proved to be unsatisfactory. The slitting of the rolls on the unperforated short side of the stamps has produced a wavy edge which causes the machine to jam." There is nothing on file to indicate that these were replaced with acceptable stamps, but presumably had to have been.

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<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
2. April 1969	5,000 rolls	Associated Automation and Post Office	circa 2/ each	circa £500
<i>Imperforate top and bottom edges, with non- wavy edge. Still unacceptable. Replaced with fully perforated stamps.</i>				

The order paperwork states: "The rolls...to be packed in units of 50. The boxes to be labelled "50 rolls – For Testing Purposes Only"". It also states that the testing stamps should be "left side first" delivery and in rolls of 3000 stamps. Delivery: Associated Automation - 300 rolls by 31 May 1969, 300 per month thereafter. Post Office – 100 per month from 1 July 1969.

JM Veal wrote to a Miss Mantz on 1 April 1969: "As a matter of some urgency now PMD/DD2.2.1 require 35 large "G" Rolls for test purposes. They will have to be "live" rolls. Test rolls are also required for testing on the factory production line, and by our engineers in the field. DD2.2.1 estimate that 5,000 large rolls will suffice."

MJ Mantz wrote on 1 May to Mr R Sansom of PO Supplies: "For test purposes, PMD/PP1 would like the ends of the GL rolls to be "free wound" – as per specification – and have therefore asked us to arrange for those you hold to be re-reeled."

PO Contracts Division wrote on 5 May: "Since the first order was placed for this item [5,000 large rolls], the specification has been changed to provide "free tails" on the rolls instead of tails fixed to the core."

An internal note dated 3 June states that: "York phoned 29/5: Test rolls do not have perforated edges and are reeled inside out – looking into it."

JM Veal wrote a memo on 2 June responding: "Specimens of the first batch of dummy rolls produced by Harrison's have been examined. They have no side perforations and it seems they were not "produced" on the Swedish perforator. Mr Turner of DD2.2.1 says that they are unacceptable. The provision of dummy rolls will soon be as important as the provision of "live" rolls – without dummy rolls, bulk production of the machines will be held up. Mr Hutton is aware that we will need large supplies of the dummy rolls by the end of this month. (June 1969)"

FR Murray of Purchasing and Supply advised RF York of Harrison in a letter dated 11 June: "We are returning 499 test rolls since they have not been produced in accordance with the specifications which accompanied our letter of 28 April 1969. It will be appreciated if these rolls could be replaced by good rolls."

On 19 June, an internal memo stated that: "...the test rolls that we have lately received...are acceptable", while on 25 June it is recorded that: "...test rolls ...are ready with Supplies Birmingham. Please send 100 rolls per month to Associated Automation". These are presumably the corrected version of the roll with full perforations.

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<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
3. March 1970	20,000 rolls	Associated Automation and regions	2/- each	£2,000
<i>Fully perforated and of acceptable quality.</i>				

Delivery: "10,000 for the year 1970/71, 10,000 for the year 1971/72. 200 rolls per week to Associated Automation, which may be increased to 400 per week after 2/3 months. Other 10,000 rolls to be held at our depots in Bridgewater and Crayford." Special instructions: "Now the rolls are rolled in such a way that gum portion is inside and printed portion showing outside. This has to be reversed."

On 11 March 1970, a Mr Subramanian of PHQ wrote to PO Supplies stating: "Test Roll No. 2: Now that the contractor manufacturing the Type G SVM has promised to increase the production rate, please send Associated Automation 200 rolls per week."

JT Brookes wrote to Brian Janes of Harrison on 7 April 1970: "If you will kindly examine the enclosed test rolls you will find that the spools have different internal diameters, the roll marked "X" has the correct size and fits the bobbin easily, whereas the other is undersized..." Mr Janes responded that: "...one of the cores is of no use at all...and comes from a different supplier, these have now been destroyed and there is no question of you receiving any more rolls with the suspect cores." Associated Automation returned 100 rolls to PO Supplies on 8 April with a pre-printed rejection form.

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Silicon Coated paper stock

POST 52/1044	Gum Identification on Stamp Roll	1974-1977
<i>This is a small correspondence file. There are samples of a Ben Johnson stamp, on the back of which is a reminder that everyone's house now has a postcode.</i>		

The question of dampness in stamp vending machines had been around for years and seemed never to go away. In fairness, it appears from the contents of this particular file that a lot of behind the scenes work was being undertaken in 1974 to highlight what stamps were currently in use and the adhesive that they used. It all really seemed to centre on the Type G coil machines and the stamps that they dispensed. The file records the proposed change of gum to PVA/Dextrin “but with no silicon coating” for Type G rolls – perhaps the view was that this would finally end the dampness problem. It did not.

This is the first mention of silicon coating on roll stamps traced in any of the appropriate files held by BPMA, but the use of silicon on issued coils is well known. A handwritten file note dated 10 May 1977 and initialled by an unidentifiable person goes into great length about the types of gum in order that a philatelic dealer customer complaint about lack of proper gum details on coil leaders could be responded to. This notes: “In 1972 the G Rolls in the machines were “blocking” in damp weather and, in an attempt to solve the problem, a silicon resin coating was put on the surface of the stamps. The leader bands were noted accordingly.”

There appears to be nothing on file about the dummy silicon coated For Testing Purposes Only horizontal Type G dummy rolls. It is possible to purchase silicon spray for culinary purposes and it is just feasible that collectors / dealers created this particular variety and that it does not exist officially. A testing label leader is believed to remain unrecorded. It is understood that with an aerosol can it would be impossible not to affect the reverse of the labels and careful examination of any examples held may reveal the “forgery” or could substantiate the belief that a genuine version exists if it looks right.

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Self-Adhesive paper stock

POST 52/1044	Gum Identification on Stamp Roll	1974-1977
<i>This is a small correspondence file. There are samples of a Ben Johnson stamp, on the back of which is a reminder that everyone's house now has a postcode.</i>		

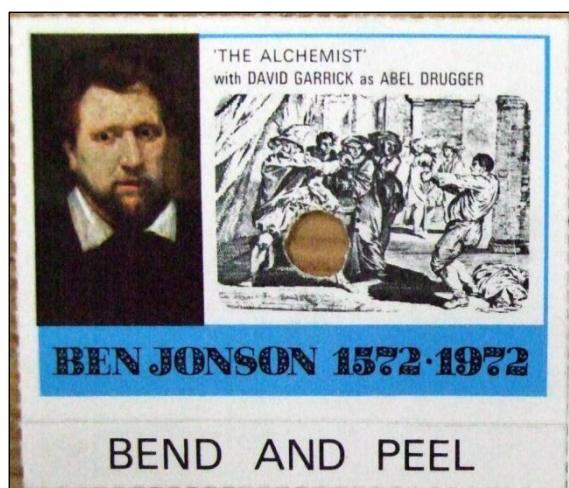
In January 1974, the question of the unreliability of stamp vending machines was raised in a letter from John E Symonds, the Honorary Secretary to the Post Office Advisory Committee, Newcastle-under-Lyme and District branch to the Post Office Users National Council. “Would it not be feasible for the Post Office to investigate the possibility of producing stamps especially for the machines with a pressure-sensitive adhesive with the appropriate backing strip?” (The letter makes no mention as to whether he alluded to stamps in booklets, coils or both, but the Post Office when looking into providing an answer chose to assume that it was Type G machinery, possibly after consultation with the enquirer.)

Mr Symonds letter was forwarded to the Managing Director’s Office within the Post Office for a response, noting that a market research project into stamp vending facilities had been conducted in 1972 and asking whether self-adhesive stamps had been considered at that time and what the conclusions were.

Sadly, a reply from the MD is not held in the file, but there are a few loose examples of dummy self-adhesive stamps featuring Ben Johnson from, it appears, 1972, some with hole punching and with one of two types of advertising on the reverse. These are understood to have been produced by Walsall Security Printers, as a fellow enthusiast has these same labels in a sample stamp booklet known to have been printed by WSP.

“P&SD” within the Supplies Division at Hemel Hempstead noted on 11 February 1974: “Apart from the obvious point that self-adhesive stamps with a peelable backing would be more expensive than the present stamps, we have no comments on the proposal.” There is nothing to indicate that anything further came of the self-adhesive idea at that time, but the problems with Type G machines continued until they were finally all removed.

1967: Testing Labels for Type G SVM



The Ben Johnson label, presumably prepared at the time of the anniversary of his death in 1972
(Image courtesy BPMA)



Two (grubby) types of reverse label advertising, one postal and one telephonic
(Image courtesy BPMA)

Thanks to a reader of *DS*, I can illustrate both sides of a quarter sheet (bottom right position) of the Ben Johnson labels.



Note how the labels depicted on this page include four adverts not shown on page 7 and that one advert above is not included below.



Other orders may have been placed for Type G testing rolls, but they are not recorded in the BPMA file consulted. I suspect that the Post Office probably had sufficient stocks for later use, as the demand for testing would have rapidly diminished after the initial production runs of the SVM had bedded down and it had become somewhat more operationally reliable.

Collectable Variations of FTPO Roll Types

Assuming that the above listing records all orders, and further assuming that all types have reached the collector market (except for the mystery green colour and with the doubt surrounding the silicon coated printing), several distinct printings probably exist, namely:

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<u>Order 1</u>	Type 1a	1968	Imperforate top / bottom edges with wavy edges. These are possibly not detectable in just a single strip.
	Type 1b	1968	Replacement stock for Type 1a might (should) have been produced, but is not mentioned in the BPMA file.
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<u>Order 2</u>	Type 2a	1969	Imperforate top / bottom edges with non-wavy edges. Possibly indistinguishable from Type 1a when viewed in a single strip?
	Type 2b	1969	Fully perforated. Replacement stock for Type 2a.
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<u>Order 3</u>	Type 3	1970	Fully perforated. Perhaps with distinct differences to Type 2b?
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It will be worth collectors checking multiple copies held of the fully perforated stamps and leaders to ascertain whether there are any obvious differences between orders. For example, the leader paper may be different on Type 2b and Type 3, or the stamps may be attached to the leader “back to front” when viewed due to the instruction to reverse-reel the stamps. Reports of differences welcomed.

Bibliography

No specific articles relating to the Type G machine testing labels have been traced.