

1984: 'Frama' Stamps

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The story of the Frama stamp concept has been told many times, but details in the form of FAQs appear below. Full information about the issued GB material is outside of the scope of this paper.

A Frama FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

What are Frama postage stamps?

The Universal Postal Union defines them in a postal regulation established at the UPU Congress in Hamburg, 1984, as: "Postage stamps that are printed by electronic stamp vending machines". They are not defined as labels!

"Frama" has become a generic word for all brands of computerised postage stamps that have followed, being the name of the company that pioneered them back in 1976, Frama AG of Switzerland.

How do the stamps get dispensed?

After inserting the necessary amount of money (coins, or pre-payment card option in the case of some machines abroad), the customer would receive a stamp, or stamps, in a covered hopper.

What is the difference between Mark One and Mark Two stamps?

Mark One machine stamp impressions comprise a background design and denomination that is directly and entirely printed in red ink onto a coil of water-activated security paper by the machine. Britain only ever issued this type of Frama stamp. However....

A pre-printed full-colour design was achievable with Mark Two machines used in other countries thanks to a bar at the left and right vertical margins central to the stamp. "Reading" these bars enabled the registration of the design to the centrally printed denomination (making this the only stamp element printed on-site).

In both Marks, the stamps would automatically be cut into singles using an internal cutter that was not always straight, but could be ever so slightly V shaped.

How do they differ from normal stamps?

In most respects (denomination of value and country, symbol of the postal administration, etc.) the stamp corresponds to a conventional postage stamp. The UPU regulations require that they are cancelled by the Post Office, as they invariably bear no indication of place, are undated and may be used at any time after purchase. Some of the stamps bear a machine number, Post Office name or location number, especially during tests and introduction periods.

What are engineering zero (00.00) test labels?

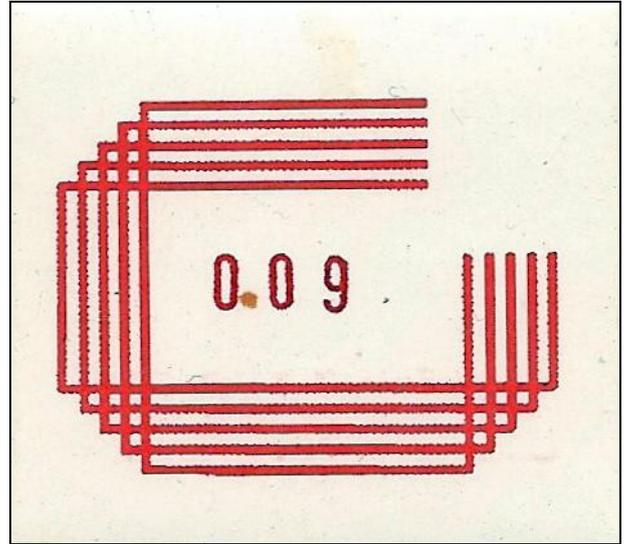
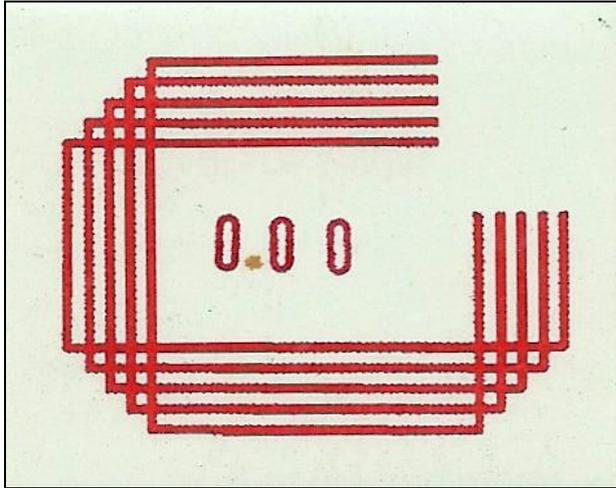
When setting-up the machines for use, it was normal for engineers to press a button within the machine that would print a valueless label that shows that it is either ready for use or in need of further adjustment. These labels should have been discarded and not be made available to the public, so they are invariably difficult to obtain and are occasionally unknown in collectors' hands. They are not errors, despite dealer descriptions.

Many countries have discontinued Frama's because computerised postal technology has advanced.

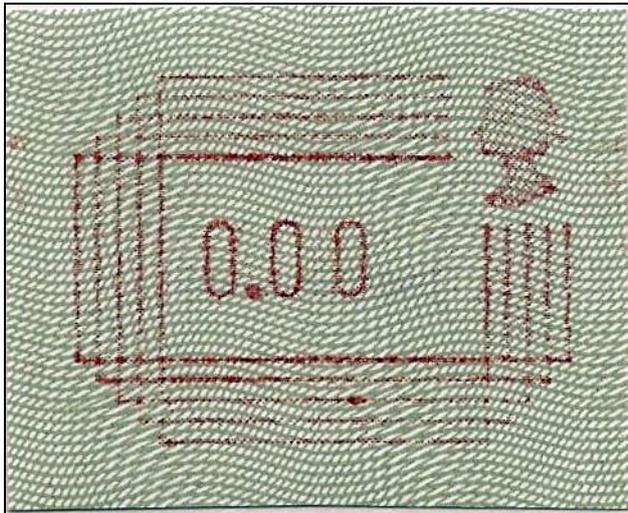
British Trial and Publicity Labels

Trials and testing of Frama machines invariably involved the use of dummy rolls of paper (either unprinted or with a pre-printed design), and/or unique clichés (with/without text and imagery). These items rarely left the secure environment of the manufacturer or postal administration.

These labels (for they cannot be called stamps, as they were not for use on the mail) exist for the British trial, but are very hard to obtain.



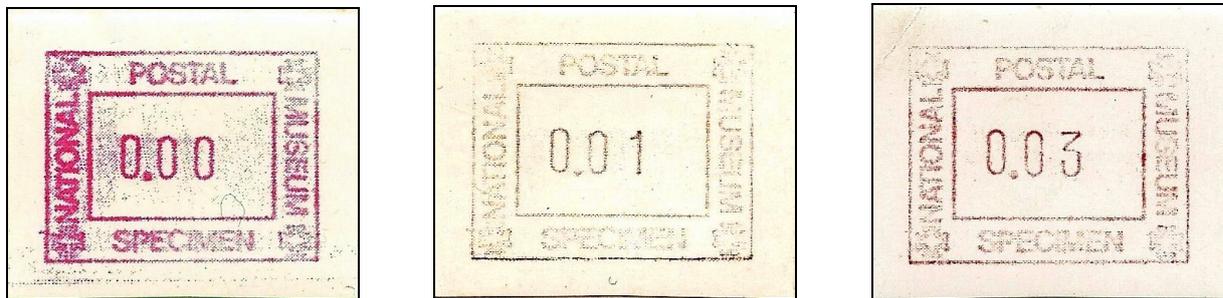
1984 British trial design labels printed on PVA Dextrin stamp paper, minus Her Majesty the Queen's head at top right. Engineering zero value and 0.09p face value labels. (Both shown at 200% of life size. Note different heights of the labels)



First label design was issued on 1 May 1984. Engineering zero value, plus white paper version that was left in the machine in error (Both shown at 200% of life size.)

National Postal Museum Design

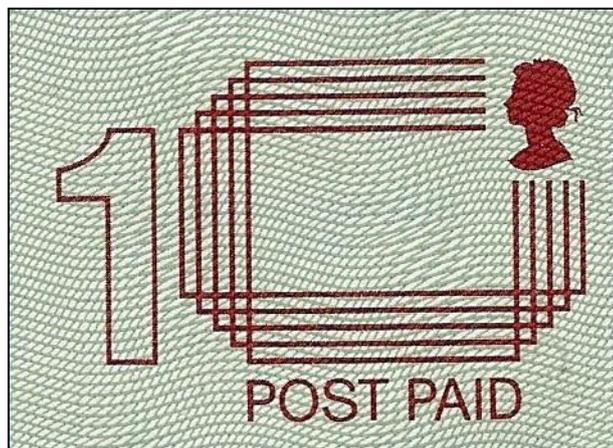
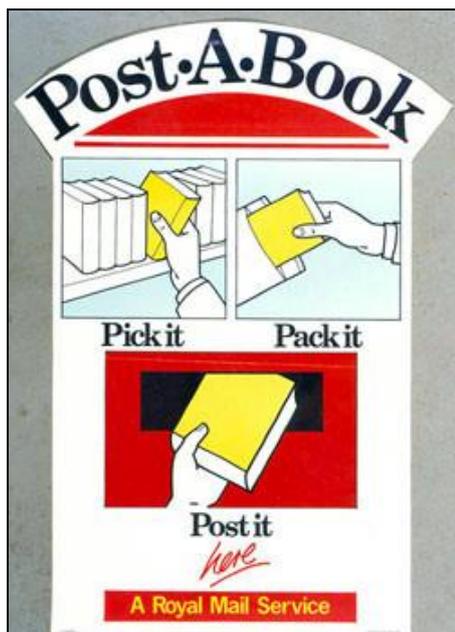
When the public machines were withdrawn from service, one was relocated to the National Postal Museum, where it served visitors until it finally broke-down irreparably.



First use of National Postal Museum label design was on 6 May 1988.
Not valid for use on mail items, serving only as a souvenir of visit.
The zero value was given away in the 1988 Review of the NPM publication.
The 0.01 is printed in a black/red mix, while the 0.03 value is all red ink



The model of Frama machine used in Britain



The design of the Frama stamps was based on the Post a Book scheme labels, which was also used on the Letter Cassette offer, both in a 1st class pre-printed design (shown here at 200%).

BPMA Files

Any relevant material that may exist comes under the thirty year rule, so was unavailable at the time of compiling this paper in 2010.

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