

# Dummy Stamps

Issue 2 "An Infrequent Look at the World of British Dummy Stamp Material" Autumn 2006

## Welcome to DS2

This issue contains an important new discovery. Royal Mail had planned to use unique symbols and bar codes on each of its definitive stamps and some of the dummy sheets printed by Harrison's for the trial have now surfaced in Australia. Read the full story here first.

I would like to offer a big 'thank you' to everyone who wrote giving feedback on DS1 and I hope that this second issue generates at least the same level of interest.

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## M'Caw, Stevenson & Orr

*Were they stamp printers in the making?*

I have recently obtained two sample labels with a stamp-like appearance, imperforate and printed on ungummed paper.

MSO origins lie in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when a Belfast family created Marcus Ward & Co., a successful colour-printing and publishing business renowned for quality work. They expanded into a massive new Belfast factory and opened-up at 29 Cannon Street in London, but by the mid-1890s were struggling and dissolved in 1899.

The rival Belfast firm of M'Caw, Stevenson & Orr agreed with the liquidator by the end of 1900 to purchase the business and goodwill of Marcus Ward & Co.

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M'Caw Stevenson & Orr Ltd and R R Browne Ltd were acquired in 1984 by The Baird Group and were re-formed as MSO Ltd. Then, in 2000, the John Cleland Group was acquired and amalgamated with MSO Ltd to form MSO Cleland Ltd, which is still trading following a management buy-out that occurred in 2002.

The label wording indicates that the producers were publishers and bookbinders and records their connection with the defunct Marcus Ward, putting the date of the items after 1900. Perhaps a reader can identify whether there is any special significance in the pictorial element of the design?

So, maybe this company had aspirations to print postage stamps and perhaps these publicity labels were part of that campaign. Or is there another rationalisation? 



The labels could be in better condition, but are the only examples seen.

Do other colours or designs exist?

## Dummy Definition Revisited

*A challenge to the definition within issue one*

A recipient of DS1 has written indicating that my Dummy stamps definition is flawed as it would include errors and proofs as I suggested, but also forgeries, perforated labels of any sort, poster stamps, Cinderella's, illegal issues, etc.

He suggests the following as a basis for discussion:

**'Dummy Stamps:** Items made to represent stamps, which are intended to be used in place of stamps in situations where the use of stamps could result in a loss to the Post Office revenues.'

Do other readers have a different view, or do you think that the new definition better covers what I was trying to get at? 

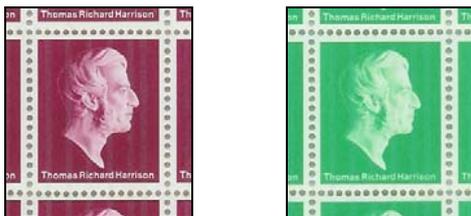
## Unrecorded Royal Mail Trial

It is not often that an opportunity comes along to acquire unusual and unrecorded items for my specialised British Machin-era dummy stamps, coils and booklets collection. However, one such opportunity happened in late 2006 when an Australian online auction site offered a sheet of the Thomas Richard Harrison label design in a pane of 100.

These labels are well known to some collectors in their basic form and are known in a few colours; indeed I already owned two such items in bright blue and magenta. What made this item special, though, was the fact that it included British phosphor tagging in four unknown formats.

My bid was placed and I sat back wondering whether I had offered enough money. I had, for within seconds of the closing time of the auction I was advised that I was the successful bidder. This set about a chain of events that quickly revealed most of the history of this fascinating item.

I contacted the vendor, assuring him that I would pay for the lot immediately – “Oh, and by the way, do you have anything else like this?” He did have and a second identically formatted sheet was offered at the same price as the first piece, but this one was in an attractive emerald green instead of the crimson colour of the first sheet.



I had already been made aware in the lot description that somehow both items were creased, affecting a few stamps slightly in the right margin. Maybe the previous owner had something sitting on them, or had caused the creasing when getting them into an envelope that was only just big enough for the sheets. Either way, this damage did not reduce my pleasure at becoming their new owner.

An enquiry as to why the sheets were located in Australia brought about a simple explanation. Seven sheets had been purchased in England (three crimson and four green), while the vendor was living in London, sometime between 1993 and 2000, where he was conducting a small auction house called *Club Philatelics*. He brought these sheets over to Australia and gave a pair to a Reverend friend of his, who was also a Harrison collector and competitor.

Sadly, this friend was terminally ill and, when he died, the vendor auctioned the pair in Australia and donated the proceeds to The Australian Cancer Foundation, as his wife had asked for donations to this cause rather than flowers at his funeral ... and the sheets generated an amazing A\$62,000+. (I realise that this is not their current commercial value in the philatelic market and the high price simply reflects the manner in which this deceased Reverend had been regarded by his family, friends and parishioners.) The purchaser of these two sheets is unknown.

## Major new discovery of phosphor tagging experiment

The vendor sold a further pair of sheets at auction in Australia in 2000, as a result of which he received a telephone call from the auctioneer on behalf of the overseas winner (understood to be living in Poland) asking if he also had the blue / turquoise blue sheet. As this colour has never been seen, there is no proof that such an item exists. I have accounted for six of the seven sheets known.

The panes that I purchased were clearly destined to survive because the vendor's entire stamp collection had been stolen in a burglary last August. The only items left behind were these two Harrison sheets, probably because they are not 'real' stamps and were not perceived to have any financial value. Little did the thieves realise that these were probably more valuable and interesting to a potential stamp dealer purchaser than the whole of the general collection put together!

So, that is the background to the find and what now follows is a record of the technical details of the labels.

By coincidence, I had lunch arranged with an ex-Harrison man the day following the auction and I was able to take along colour copies of the initial sheet in the hope that he would either be able to tell me their history, or make enquiries on my behalf. This request was promptly acted-on and the story unfolded.

The labels are from a trial run that was conducted by Harrison's for the Post Office R & D team at Swindon, probably during the mid-to-late 1980s. (An ex-employee who had been working in the Harrison laboratories at the time has been unable to establish the exact date.) The project was carried out under what is known as a 'Post Office Development Contract'.

The reason behind this trial was to find a means whereby Royal Mail's sorting equipment would be able to automatically detect the face value of each stamp on each piece of mail, including where more than one stamp had been used on the same letter. It would then be able to perform a calculation and check that the postage paid matched the rate for the item sent. Harrison's was asked to produce some non-accounting labels that carried phosphor in the form of bar-codes and symbols of a type specified by Post Office engineers, enabling them to undertake in-house phosphor response testing at Swindon.

The initial intention was to eventually give a different bar-code to each value of stamp, although following the testing it was decided that the project would not be implemented on the sorting machines. It is understood that the Post Office engineers probably kept the system on file in case there was ever a decision to implement this scheme.

From Harrison's point of view the proposal would have been difficult to manage reliably if each value was to have a different phosphor cylinder and would have had significant cost implications - particularly since at the time of the trial nearly everything was printed on phosphor coated paper, with only the second class stamps carrying a printed phosphor bar.

*Continued on page 3*



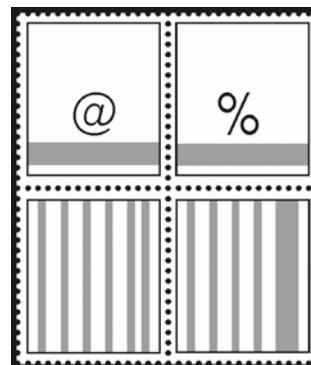
There is a diamond shaped phosphor area formed by the tips of the marginal cross hair. Also, the step wedge has a solid phosphor area in gutter.

The labels were printed by photogravure in sheets of 100 on an L&M7 machine, are the size of a normal Machin head definitive stamp and are perforated on a rotary sheet perforator. Sheets were delivered to the R & D laboratories in a quantity of around 100,000 labels.

There is a 'step wedge' at foot of each pane which, perhaps strangely, is in reverse-reading. Apparently, this might have been because the plate makers noted that the emulsion was on the wrong side for gravure. The Harrison head design was a test plate which they had in store and it was not thought to have been made especially for this trial. Only the phosphor plate was made specifically.

**Label Details**

<i>Value and design</i>	Undenominated Thomas Harrison head
<i>Issue date</i>	Circa mid- to late-1980s
<i>Producer</i>	Harrison and Sons Limited, High Wycombe
<i>Process</i>	Photogravure
<i>Paper</i>	Original Coated Paper (OCP)
<i>Gum</i>	PVA Dextrin (PVAD)
<i>Perforation gauge</i>	14.75 x 14
<i>Perforator used</i>	Rotary (possibly Kampf)
<i>Label colours</i>	Crimson or emerald green
<i>Marginal markings</i>	'cross hair' in both vertical margins between label rows 1+2 and 9+10. Perforated 'step wedge' below bottom row of labels
<i>Phosphor type</i>	B3 shortwave, with violet afterglow
<i>Phosphor layout</i>	Each quarter of the sheet bears a different phosphor design



Note how the phosphor does not extend beyond the design area (interrupted phosphor)

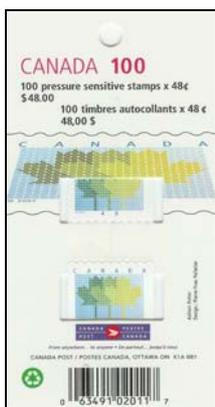
The vendor of the sheets concluded: "As a collector, I thrive on new acquisitions and I am thrilled that the item goes to someone who will treasure it. I have held on to it for these last few years because I rate it very highly, but when it is all boiled down, I will never have any use for it ... it is a very special item." I agree on all counts. 📧

*My special thanks are offered to the ex-Harrison staff and Tony St. John for their assistance in providing much of the background and technical information contained within this article. My thanks are also offered to Graham Eyre for drawing the illustrations of the unique phosphor layouts.*

## Sellotape™ Stamps

SOHO self-adhesive stamps proposed for UK

Back in 1999, Royal Mail was approached by MDC, the Canadian owners of the House of Questa stamp printers. They had a proposal that the UK should issue stamps in mini-coils of 100 self-adhesive stamps held on a backing card to be sold via hang-sell display units in Post Offices. These would primarily have been for use by the SOHO (Small Office, Home Office) business category, which can be from 1 to 10 workers.



Canadian coil mounted on similar card format but with stamps having a backing paper

What made this proposal unique in British philately was that, unlike normal self-adhesive stamps, they never had a silicone backing sheet but, instead, the stamps tucked to each other in the same way that Sellotape™ does.

A full mock-up was supplied for consideration, but was not progressed.

I was fortunate in being able to buy a strip of the sample labels produced by Ashton Potter from a foreign stamp dealer (the labels used were in no way unique to this proposal).

It was also possible to later acquire a poor quality black and white photostat copy of the intended backing card.

Royal Mail assures me that 1<sup>st</sup> class Machin stamps with imperf top/bottom margins (left) were never produced!

A similar label produced for MDC Stamp Group's Advantage System™ and branded jointly Ashton Potter and Questa is shown below.

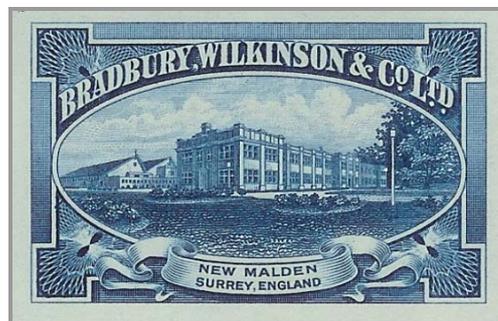
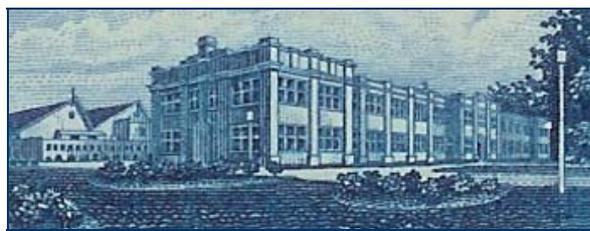
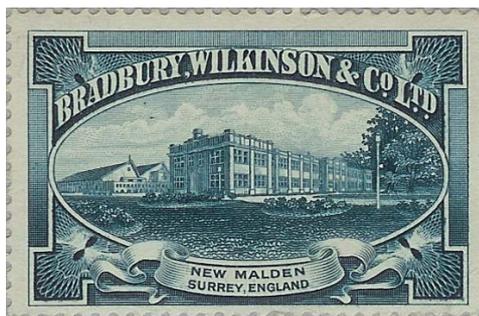
The label's purpose is not known, so any explanation as to the product advertised would be welcomed. 📧



## Bradbury Wilkinson Label

A favourite publicity label of DS compiler

This intaglio label was one of the first that I acquired and was without doubt responsible for encouraging me to collect this class of printers' philatelic material. I have never seen colours other than blue and so would welcome reports of any additional colours. The site is now a supermarket! 📧



(top) perforated, (middle) enlargement of vignette centre and (bottom) imperforate version

## ...and finally

I always welcome details of any new dummy finds from printers of British stamps, past and present, and so cordially invite you to drop me a line via the Guest Book facility provided on my website at [www.stampprinters.info/guestbook.htm](http://www.stampprinters.info/guestbook.htm)

Unfortunately, business, family and other commitments to the hobby mean that I am not in a position to guarantee that I can rigidly stick to a publishing programme and therefore suggest that you go to [www.stampprinters.info/dummystamps.htm](http://www.stampprinters.info/dummystamps.htm) every so often where PDF files of this and all future and previous issues of *Dummy Stamps* will be available to download and print-off.