

Machin Debate

For Royal Mail's *Stamps and Collecting* Website

Forty years ago, the Queen's head depicted on British definitives first appeared with a design sculpted by Arnold Machin. Having remained virtually unaltered, has the time finally come for change?

The first definitive series of Queen Elizabeth II's reign was a photographic treatment by Dorothy Wilding. In 1967 the second definitive series started to appear, this time by the renowned sculptor the late Arnold Machin RA. The design has remained almost unaltered in the intervening forty years and has become a timeless image that is now officially an Icon and which is probably the most reproduced work of art in history.

When Machin won the contract to create the new stamps, he intended that his image should be a 'symbolic representation' of Her Majesty that would not be regularly updated and that would stand the test of time. This year will see anniversary celebrations of the design in the form of a new ruby coloured £1 stamp, miniature sheet, prestige stamp book, exhibitions and publications to mark this important milestone in miniscule art that has seen at least 180 billion stamps printed so far.

Her Majesty was only 40 when the head was sculpted. Now that she is in her 80s, has the time come to change the National Definitives? Coins and banknotes have kept-up with the Queen's gradual ageing process, so do you agree with Machin's original concept that the image should not be modified?

Maybe you would prefer a Pictorial Definitive approach, as used on the Country, SmilersTM and recent Christmas stamps, with just a small silhouetted head of the Queen in the corner? Or, now that the stamps are officially an Icon (see www.icons.org.uk), should matters be left well alone for the rest of Her Majesty's reign and be allowed to remain representative of our nation around the world?

[30 words in teaser and 300 in article] [Compiled by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL, 20 January 2007]