

Worldwide Postal Vending Machine Trials to 1914

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Much has been written about the development of British postal vending and affixing machines, but most information is scattered in countless publications and, in any event, it was felt that the UK was invariably looked at in isolation, despite similar development work going on around the world at the same time; indeed overseas countries often led the way. This article brings together key information from some of the main countries involved and tells an interesting story, where success and failure are invariably shared in equal measure.

The first thing to note is that all countries were experiencing exactly the same problems, such as attempts at fraud, theft and vandalism. Similarly, it was not at all uncommon for no stamp – or too many stamps – to be dispensed, or for a lack of refund of all – or part of – your money, the latter helping to prove the old adage that change is inevitable, except from a vending machine!

There have been a surprising number of articles written within contemporary stamp periodicals of the early 1900's about all manner of worldwide vending trials, especially in *Gibbons Stamp Weekly*, and these have been heavily drawn on when compiling this article. The author makes no apology for copying, with permission, exactly the text used in the original articles, for they give a real flavour of the views on automated machinery and the language and tone of the time. Some of the stories make for amusing reading, while others clearly show that most inventions were very much a 'work in progress' that either required a lot more development to be undertaken on them before they could cease to be termed experimental, or were destined only to receive a footnote in vending history.

This feature starts with New Zealand, where the world's first truly successful stamp vending machine was devised, continues with other countries that most influenced early development, and concludes with trials and observations being made in the British press about UK vending machines, or, more often than not, the lack of them.

Readers should note that the full range of automated vending machine trials up to the first world war are covered here because, as with the famous VHS v Betamax home tape recording format wars, the same thing was happening with coils v booklets v machine markings applied directly on to an envelope. However, unlike the entertainment industry struggles which resulted in just one winner, all three postal formats learned to live alongside each other and this is still the case to this day.

New Zealand

Before the well-known Dickie and Brown machines, New Zealand experimented in 1904 with two public meter machines that were coin-operated.

1904 The 'Moss' machine

The Moss machine, named after the patentee Ernest Moss of Christchurch, was only used for a couple of weeks in 1904 at Christchurch post office, with 3,425 letters mailed. The manufacturing was undertaken by the Automatic Franking Machine Co. Ltd of New Zealand. The machine did service later that year in two separate trials at Wellington, where 4,321 and 8,545 strikes were made. Despite these volumes, perhaps only a couple of dozen strikes from the total of all letters mailed are known.

1904 The 'Wales' machine

The Wales machine, named after the engineer inventor Robert Wales, was used for a few months in Dunedin. Fewer than 50 strikes are known out of the total of 47,024 items mailed.



Example of the Moss (l) and Wales strike(r).

1905 The ‘Dickie and Brown’ machines

It is impossible to think of stamp vending machine history without considering the name Dickie, and to a lesser degree Brown. Disparate information about this pioneering individual has been brought together here, but, for a more detailed study of his life and works, readers should consult the bibliography of available sources, to be found at the end of this section.

Full name:	Robert James Dickie.
Born:	30 December 1876 in the Poplar district of London.
Parents:	Father: William, a shipwright born in Scotland, c1817. Mother: Jenifer (<i>sic</i>) C, born in Cornwall, c1835.
Resident:	In 1881, the Census shows him to be living at Greens Dock, Trinity Rowe, Poplar with his parents and siblings Jessie (aged 14) and John (12).
Emigrated:	In 1888 he moved to Wellington, New Zealand with his family.
Occupation:	Joined New Zealand Post Office in 1891 at the Customs Street Chief Post Office in the foreign mails section. Later he became Mechanical Supervisor of Stamp Vending Machines.
Retired:	1931 at the age of 55.
Died:	1958 in Wellington, New Zealand, aged 82.

Dickie can rightly be credited with the invention of the world’s first practical stamp vending machine that actually worked successfully, unlike many predecessors introduced elsewhere in the world. It appears that he had been working on his “Eureka!” moment for well over a decade before he felt able to present it in 1905 as a viable alternative to queuing in a post office.

The genesis of an idea

While selling stamps from sheets to customers in Wellington, he concluded that this was a time-wasting method and that surely a machine could do the job just as well. He mulled over the idea for some time and then saw his first cinema film, which used sprockets to feed the film through the projection mechanism. He realised that stamps had ‘sprockets’ too (albeit that they were called perforations), so why not use this same method?

Dickie is quoted as saying that the idea became an obsession and that it had even prevented him from sleeping at night. He therefore eventually set the production of a prototype, if for no other reason than to ensure that he got some sleep!

The first trial model

Dickie realised that he could not do all the development and production work on his own, so he enlisted the assistance of two fellow Wellingtonians. The first was John Henry Brown, a local photographer and draughtsman, who set-about translating Dickie’s ideas into workable drawings. The second assistance came from an engineer called W Andrews, who built the prototype for him. Whether Dickie already knew these people or sought them out is unclear.

No. 18548.—5th October, 1904.—ROBERT JAMES DICKIE, Postal Clerk, and JOHN HENRY BROWN, Photographer, both of Wellington, New Zealand. An improved machine for vending postage-stamps, tickets, or the like.

Patent registration entry from the New Zealand Gazette, 1904

Dickie and Brown (but not Andrews) jointly registered the design with the Patent Office, thus protecting the concept from what today would be called intellectual property theft.

Not without its problems

Anything groundbreaking is generally not without its problems along the way and the coil stamp vending machine development was no exception. The main difficulty centred on how to produce stamps in long rolls, one stamp wide, instead of in sheets of, say, 240. He lobbied Parliament to try and get the government stamp printer to create the rolls for him, but without success due to the costs involved. Undaunted, Dickie set about creating a spooling machine that would join severed sheet stamps and, despite its crudeness, it apparently worked.

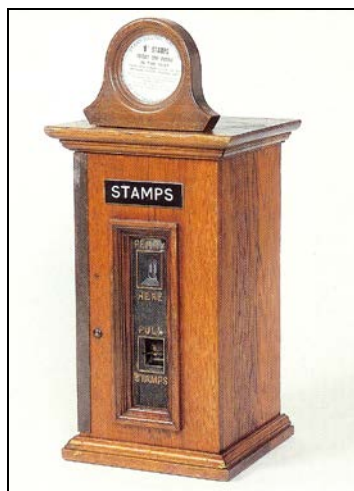
The stamps used were imperforate with a pair of 2mm sprocket holes located in the horizontal margin between each stamp to enable them to pass through the mechanism. At the point of dispensing, a piece of metal bearing jagged teeth would grip the roll and the action of the customer pulling on the stamp would effect a dispense. If multiples were purchased, the serrated edge would only appear at the top of the first stamp and at the foot of the last. Later developments resulted in the use of normally perforated stamps.



The sprocket holes approach is still used a century later, albeit that individual stamps are separated by a straight cutter blade instead of a serrated one.

Launch day finally arrives

The nzedge website quotes *The Advocate* newspaper of 28 February 1905: “*The mechanism is simplicity itself, a fluted sprocket wheel with weights attached being set in motion by the descending coin, so as to make a single stamp project from a second slot. The action of the front slot is such that immediately it is opened it closes the second slot. The whole mechanism is only 9 inches by 4 inches in extent and the instrument may be charged to carry from one to one hundred pounds worth of [one penny] coins.*”



A Stamp-Selling Machine.

THE INVENTION OF A WELLINGTON
POSTAL OFFICER.

Mr. Dickie, of the Wellington Post Office staff, is to be congratulated upon the success of the trials given of his stamp-selling machine. During the fortnight of trial it sold 3,901 penny stamps, and the public found it a great convenience, especially upon Sundays. The machine is a compact device, simple in mechanism, and, what is most important, uncheatable. It has been submitted to patent agents in America who declare that there is “money in it” for other purposes than the sale of stamps. It is intended to adapt it to the sale of tram, train tickets, etc., and a company is being formed to exploit it. We wish the venture success.

(l) Early Dickie machine shown on trade card. (r) *The Advocate*, 28 July 1905 praised the machine.

By June 1905 the first machine was made available for inspection by the New Zealand postal authorities, who generally warmed to the idea, but expressed concern about the amount of money that would be left unattended overnight in the machine. Dickie was allegedly crestfallen at the news, but soon came up with the idea of arranging to pay for the stamps and to remove the money at his own expense, thus removing the only hurdle to a public trial. Later that month on the 15th June, an unrecorded Wellington individual became the first person to buy 1d Universal stamps from the machine.

Teething problems

The machine was well received, but some people saw the opportunity to defraud Dickie of revenue by inserting foreign coins, metal disks, etc into the mechanism, thus causing damage and so it was removed after a couple of weeks in service while Dickie made adjustments that would remove the problem. It was available for use again by the next month for a second trial period. An impressive 3,901 1d stamps had been sold in the first two weeks of use and the machine continued in use after its initial and subsequent

adjustments. A second model of machine was produced by January 1906, with a third tryout taking place for one week in March that year.

The Kermode connection

Dickie had cause to travel to America as part of his Post Office job. In 1906 while on board the *SS Sierra* bound for San Francisco, he was tinkering with his vending machine when he caught the eye of a well-to-do fellow passenger from Tasmania called Mrs Georgine Elizabeth Kermode. She was a businesswoman (surely a rarity for those times?), who saw the potential of the machine, seeking from Dickie the rights outside of the US and countries of the British Empire. Dickie therefore sold machines to Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and the USA (at least), while Mrs Kermode had the continental market.

A partnership deal was eventually struck and the name 'Kermode' was set to enter the consciousness and nomenclature of collectors of British stamps. Mrs Kermode set-up a company called The British Stamp and Ticket Delivery Co. Ltd. to market the stamp vending machines, utilising George Salter & Co to undertake the manufacturing, which they did until World War One.

In 1980, the influential Kermode family of Tasmania was commemorated by the Isle of Man Post Office on a set of stamps. Sadly, Georgina and her achievements are not depicted.

Award winner

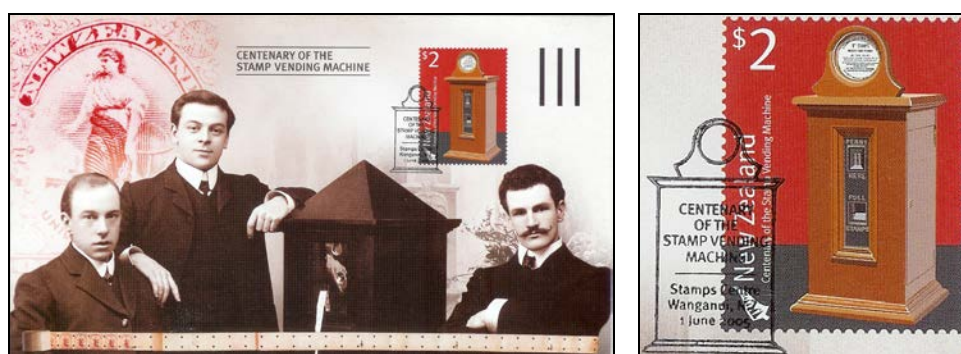
Dickie's invention won a gold medal (which was actually made of silver, but inscribed 'gold' to indicate medal level achieved), the Grand Prize and a Diploma-Against-All-Comers at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition that was held in Seattle, USA that year. This recognition must have spurred Dickie on, helping to prove that his idea had a future.

A long survivor

It is hard to believe that the basic 'Dickie' stamp vending machine continued in use in New Zealand with only minor changes to the mechanism along the way until 1960, a couple of years after he had passed away. At that point in their history they needed to be adapted to dispense three-penny stamps, but this proved impossible and so they were reluctantly withdrawn from service.

For more than half-a-century, tens of thousands of machines had been produced for use around the world, with approaching 20,000 in use in Great Britain alone at one time. New Zealand had been importing these machines from Britain, but when demand was sufficient, the NZ government purchased the manufacturing rights in 1918. In 1938 when Dickie visited the factory in England that was manufacturing his machines, there were 800 workers solely there to produce his stamp machines.

Had inflation not got the better of the machines, it is interesting to speculate how much longer these work-horses would have continued to serve their New Zealand public. Certainly, they continued to last at least another decade or two elsewhere, but it is doubtful that any are still in use, although there might just be some remote part of the old Empire where they are still quietly dispensing stamps. What a lovely thought.



A New Zealand Post Office commemorative cover from 2005 marking the centenary of stamp vending machines. A strip of stamps from an original roll runs along the bottom of cover. Pictured are (l to r) Dickie, Brown and Andrews.

New Zealand Sources

- Newspapers and Journals

Automatic stamp seller, *The Advocate [NZ]*, 28 February 1906, by unaccredited writer.

Slot stamp machine, *Melbourne Argus [Australia]*, 6 March 1908, by unaccredited writer.

He invented the stamp machine, *Auckland Star [NZ]*, 28 August 1958, by unaccredited writer.

Selling stamps without the jam, *Auckland Weekly News [NZ]*, 2 March 1960, by a special correspondent.

New Zealand led world with machine to sell stamps, *Dominion [NZ]*, 14 May 1960, by C Seaman.

The “small pin” Dickie machine test coils, *The Kiwi [GB]*, January 2001, by Stan Kundin.

Serendipity or luck?, *The Kiwi [GB]*, July 2003, by Stan Kundin.

Coils and stamp vending machines in the 1970s, *The Kiwi [GB]*, July 2003, by Stan Kundin.

Centenary of Robert Dickie’s stamp vending machine, *New Zealand Stamp Collector [NZ]*, September 2005, by Tony Thackery FRPSNZ.

Centenary of the stamp vending machine, *New Zealand Stamp Collector [NZ]*, September 2005, by Alan Tunnicliffe.

Foreign public self-service meter machines, *Linn’s Stamp News [USA]*, 15 January, 1996, by Doug Kelsey.

Rare and unusual, public, self-service meters, *Meter Stamp Society Quarterly Bulletin [USA]*, Fall 2003, by Richard Stambaugh.

- Websites

www.ancestry.co.uk

Census and birth records of Dickie.

www.nzedge.com/heroes A detailed history of Dickie and his invention.

Australia

1903-1908 ~ Postage Paid Impressions

As with New Zealand, a range of trials were undertaken before the Dickie machine. These comprised postage paid impressions (PPI) on postal items and were, until recently, virtually unknown. Richard Breckon produced a fascinating four page article about them (see Sources) and interested readers are encouraged to seek-out a copy from a philatelic library.

Put simply, there were at least seven trials between 1903 and 1908 in Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart where, in exchange for a penny coin, the public would receive a PPI. Richard terms them: “a kind of Edwardian Frama” and advises that: “these PPIs are extremely desirable items, if only there were surviving examples to collect!”. The fact that we cannot enhance our collections with this material is why further details are not included here.

1907 Dickie and Brown coil testing labels

In October 1907, the Postmaster General’s Department in Australia got the Stamp Printer in Melbourne, Victoria, to overprint 500 sheets of the Victoria 1d “Naish” design stamp with two horizontal 4.5mm black lines to deface them and thus prevent use on live mail items.



*A strip and block of the Victoria overprinted stamps,
as used for testing purposes*

They were formed into rolls by the aforementioned British Stamp & Ticket Automatic Vending Company and forwarded to Wellington, New Zealand, for extensive testing by Robert Dickie.

On at least one of these overprinted sheets, Dickie signed his name and dated the lower selvedge '1908'. We know this because the annotated strip of four was offered for sale by Stanley Gibbons (Australia) Pty. Ltd in or around 1989.

Two different watermark types of this testing stamp exist, namely those stamps previously printed on "V over Crown" paper, line perforated 12.5, and those overprinted on "Crown over A" paper, perforated 11. The exact split of quantities between the two paper types appears to have gone unrecorded, for it would have been of no relevance to anyone other than a stamp collector.

1908 Melbourne's 'Dickie and Brown' Trial

In conjunction with the above-mentioned coil testing labels, the PMG was supplied with a New Zealand free-standing wooden dispenser developed by Dickie and Brown. This was installed outside the Melbourne GPO where 1d (undefaced) coil stamps were dispensed from 9-14 March 1908. In practical terms, these Queen Victorian Victoria stamps are not distinguishable as such.

Australian Sources

- Newspapers and Journals

Australia's early experiments with postage vending machines, 1903-1908, *Gibbons Stamp Monthly [UK]*, April 2006, by Richard Breckon.

France

1908 'Automatic Machine for Stamps'

To add to the fairly frequent inventions of the last few years of machines for distributing stamps automatically, there is yet another at work in a Parisian post office. The machine in use only distributes stamps of 10 centimes, which are placed in the machine in rolls of 500. A 10 centime piece is placed in a slot, and a lever depressed, when a single stamp is delivered from another slot. When the machine is empty, a bell rings to call an employee to refill it.

I should think that a machine of this description would be rather more trouble than it is worth. Stamps would have to be specially printed in rolls, and if it only held 500 it would probably suffer from chronic emptiness; in London, at least, the bell would not make a great difference. Post office employees are getting too accustomed to the telephone to take any notice of such a mundane occurrence as the ringing of a bell!

Gibbons Stamp Weekly, 2 May 1908

1909 'Automatic Registration of Letters'

Le Journal des Philatelistes (8.09) contains an interesting account of a machine to automatically deliver receipts for registered letters, and to "take delivery" of them.

The machine was invented by a Mr. Antal Fodor, a Hungarian engineer, and two machines have been working in Buda Pesh for some little time. In July last Mr. Fodor approached the French Post Office authorities, with the result that a trial machine was installed in a post office in the rue Ste.-Anne, close to the Avenue de 'Opera.

The machine was "unveiled" – Save the expression – on the 29th July, and up to the present has proved a great success, as the operation of registering a letter is performed in less than five seconds. The machine is made of metal, and is rather large, as it includes a letter box, and in it are four distinct openings, which respectively receive the money, receive the letter, deliver the receipt, and reject bad coins.

The actual working of the machine is as follows: - The letter which it is desired to register must first of all be duly stamped according to its weight and destination (as an *unregistered* letter); a nickel 25 centimes piece is placed into the slot of the machine, and a handle is then raised, which uncovers the opening into the letter box, which is otherwise firmly dosed. The letter is held in the opening, address side up, while a second handle is turned, which causes the letter to drop into the box, closes the opening, and delivers a receipt. The receipt is dated and numbered by the machine, and the letter is also stamped with a corresponding number and the letter "R."

The extraordinary part of the invention lies in the fact that it is absolutely impossible for the machine to be tampered with, or to give receipts when letters are not posted. First of all the opening to the letter box remains closed until the necessary coin is dropped into the slot. If one endeavours to obtain a receipt without inserting a letter, the box closes, and the machine *keeps the money*. Bad money is rejected by means of a magnet, which is placed in the slip-way along which the coin passes. It is well known that of the commoner metals iron alone is strongly attracted by a magnet, and that nickel is feebly attracted; the 25 centimes coins are made of nickel, and the feeble pull of the magnet causes the coin to be deflected into its proper course. If an iron disc be inserted, the pull is too strong, and the disc is deflected into the wrong direction; similarly, a disc of any other metal does not feel any pull from the magnet, and; as is the case with iron discs, is rejected by the machine.

In short, the machine is so well constructed that it will very likely come into use in most countries. Nowadays great inconvenience is often caused by finding a post office closed when one wants to register a letter. What with automatic stamp-vending machines, registration machines, and telephones, the major

portion of the post office staff will soon be composed of “automatic machine repairers”!

Gibbons Stamp Weekly, 9 October 1909

Germany

1908 ‘Automatic Stamp-vending Machine’

THE sale of postage stamps by automatic machines has been a problem which has offered more difficulties than one would believe for very many years past. The postal authorities of all countries are naturally very interested in any means of distributing stamps to the public in a simpler and cheaper way than by sale over the counter.

Numberless automatic machines have been installed on trial, but have proved unsatisfactory owing to the fact that in all machines the user was obliged to help them to perform their work.(e.g. pull a handle, etc.). It followed that the part of the machine operated by the user was very liable to get out of order if improperly used.

A few months ago two engineers, Messrs. Abel and Oehring, succeeded in overcoming this defect: the same gentlemen had already made another pattern of an automatic stamp-vending machine in 1905. Their new machine requires absolutely no co-operation of the user to make it do its work. The apparatus is being marketed by a syndicate, under the name of “Internationale Abelschen – Briefmarken – Automaten – Vertriebsgesellschaft” of Berlin and works simply by dropping the particular coin for which the machine is made into a slot.

Bad money is delivered back by the machine, as also are pieces of other than the proper value. Should several coins be put in at once, the machine operates as though one coin only had been used; it supplies the stamp desired and returns the rest of the coins. As soon as the supply of stamps (500 or 1000) is exhausted, a bell is rung automatically in the nearest post office.

The German postal authorities have had three of these machines working in each of thirty-five post offices for some time, and up to April 1, 1908, no less than 15,300,000 stamps had been sold by them. It speaks well for the machines that the loss due to bad money and other causes is only one in 20,000, while the average loss when stamps are sold over the counter is one in 1250.

It is stated that the Abel machines are to be installed in all German post offices, and that many of the machines have been supplied on trial to the British and French Governments. – *Philatelisten-Zeitung*

Gibbons Stamp Weekly, 9 January 1909

Hungary

1906 The ‘Fodor, Büky and Szabò’ machine

The first experimental registered letter receiving machine appeared in Decree No. 17 of 1906 and was worded as follows: “At the Budapest 4 (central) and Budapest 6 (Gyar-utca) post and telegraph offices starting from 1st May of the present year automatic receiving machines will be situated experimentally for inland registered letters and to Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Germany.”

It was patented in 1901 by mechanical engineers Antal Fodor and Aurèl Büky and clerical worker Emil Szabò.

The machine was coin operated and enabled the customer to buy a 10f Turul from the 1905 series which was perforated with the initials AUT (meaning AUTomatic). This was the registration fee and had to be added to the letter plus the normal cost of posting. It is assumed that you could then post the letter without having to wait at the counter.

This experiment was not deemed a success and was not progressed, being withdrawn in 1907. The machine has twice featured on Hungarian postage stamps, in 1989 (sheets and coils) and again in 1997 (Stamp Day).



1989 imperforate presentation stamp from top right corner of the sheet. 200% of actual size

[item not to hand]

1997 press sample stamp
150% of actual size

Hungarian Sources

- Newspapers and Journals

The AUT. perforated 10-Fillèr stamp of 1906, *Stamps of Hungary [UK]*, by Gábor Voloncs, Number 164, March 2006.

The Netherlands

1909 ‘That Automatic Stamp-vending Machine Again!’

AN amusing story is recounted by the Hague correspondent of *Le Collectionneur de Timbres-Poste*:

“The automatic machine for distributing postage stamps, which was invented by M. Eggink, of Haarlem, was given a trial of some weeks’ duration by the Minister of Posts, in The Hague. The machine emerged triumphant, and was promptly sent back to Haarlem, its native place, to do duty in the chief post office of that town.

“Yesterday the machine was allowed to be used by the public; a curious crowd examined it closely, and at last one, more courageous than the rest, ventured to insert a 5 cent piece in the slot. Nothing happened! No stamp was forthcoming; neither did the machine return the coin!

“Great demonstration by the crowd in front of the post office! The inventor is quickly on the scene and quickly he repairs the damaged mechanism.

“An hour or so later two more hardy spirits essay the new invention. Success this time! In exchange for a 5 cent piece the machine gives out *two* 5 cent stamps! Great rejoicing on the part of the populace! The machine is voted a magnificent institution, and crowds rush to use it!



1. De Eggink postzegelauto-
maat, 1908 (foto: Het Neder-
landse PTT Museum).

“A postal employee; dreaming sweetly over his easy task, at last wakes up and sees that something is wrong with the wonderful machine. Unwilling to sully the beauty of such mechanism he rushes off to find the inventor.

“During this time the machine, now totally out of gear, is hard at work selling 5 cent stamps to all comers at the rate of *two* for 5 cents, and, beating its own record, *also returns the coin inserted every time!*

“The whole populace of the town seem to be surging round the machine; a queue is formed, each person with a nickel coin, ready to hand.

“But all good things come to an end some time. The order goes forth to restrain the frenzied generosity of the machine, and as by this time it is giving out stamps at the rate of twenty a minute, without any money at all, the authorities adopt stern measures! A stalwart employee takes hold of a great mail bag, and draws it completely over the machine; but the bag is unable to deaden the sound of the machinery inside, which still continues to work as though imbued with life.”

Gibbons Stamp Weekly, 6 February, 1909

Norway

1900 The ‘Kahrs’ machine

Christiania’s (now Oslo) General Post Office lobby saw the introduction of a public-access self-service, coin-operated franking machine in 1900. Invented by Charles A Kahrs, two denominations were available, namely a 5ore in green or a 10ore in red, which was dependent on what coin slot was used.



Example of the "Kahrs" strike

It was in use only for a short period and most covers are understood to have been disposed of, as a stamp was generally affixed over the marking, which was then cancelled by a separate handstamp.

1903 The 'Uchermann Krag' machine

Example of the "Krag" strike

A second trial with a different machine that had been invented by Nils A Krag was used at the same post office from 1903 to 1905, when it came to an end due to an unknown dispute and poor quality impressions on mail.

Norwegian Sources

- Newspapers and Journals

Foreign public self-service meter machines, *Linn's Stamp News [USA]*, 15 January, 1996, by Doug Kelsey.

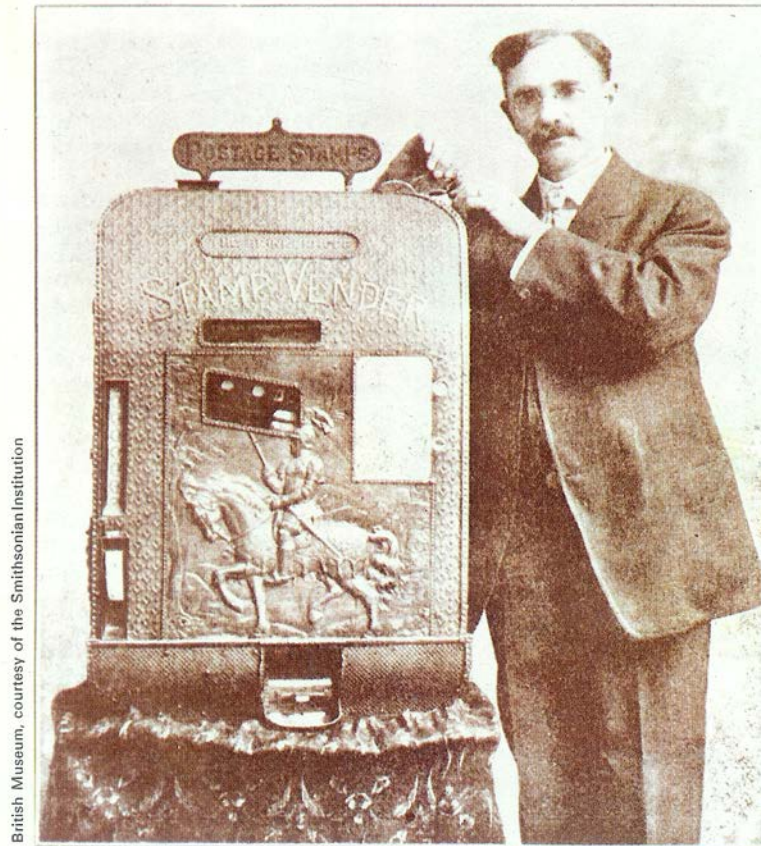
The important dates in meter stamp history, *Linn's Stamp News [USA]*, 19 January, 1998, by Doug Kelsey.

Rare and unusual, public, self-service meters, *Meter Stamp Society Quarterly Bulletin [USA]*, Fall 2003, by Richard Stambaugh.

United States of America

It should come as no surprise to find out that America was also experimenting with stamp machines during this period.

18__ The 'Brinkerhoff' machine



British Museum, courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution

Brinkerhoff of Sedalia, Missouri, whose company manufactured stamp vending machines in the period 1906 to 1912.

1897 The 'di Brazza' machine

This machine claims to be the earliest known meter franked cover. Known as a "Di Brazza Letter Registering Machine", three were used for a six week period in New York City during 1897 and one solitary cover is known in an American collection.

The previous year, Count Detalmo di Brazza Savorgnan of Rome, Italy, had been granted two patents for a coin-freed letter posting or stamping machine. It does not appear to have been used beyond the period of the trial.

AUTOMATIC LETTER BOXES.

**Three of Them Installed in This City
on Trial.**

Three of the new automatic letter-registering mail boxes, invented by Count Castello di Brazzà, have been installed in this city by order of Postmaster General Gary for a six weeks' trial. One is in the Registry Bureau of the General Post Office, another in the arcade of the Equitable Building, and the third is at the sub-station at Park Avenue and Forty-second Street.

The machines weigh 500 pounds each, and are four feet high. They have slots into which the letter is thrust by the sender, who receives in return a receipt bearing a Post Office date mark, a serial number, and the signature of the Postmaster. The machines are designed to be used after hours at Post Offices as well as at other important mailing points.

Twenty letters were registered by the machine at the Post Office yesterday, and it worked without a hitch.

7 October 1897 New York Times article on the di Brazza machines

NEW YORK N. Y.
0401 MR 1 87
M 4
REGISTERED

Example of the Di Brazza strike

1907 What Manufacturer? DICKIE??



*Edwardian Gentlemen try out the new-fangled stamp-selling machines installed in New York's main post office c. 1907
From Dominion 14 May 1960*

American Sources

- Newspapers and Journals

Foreign public self-service meter machines, *Linn's Stamp News*, 15 January, 1996, by Doug Kelsey.

The important dates in meter stamp history, *Linn's Stamp News*, 19 January, 1998, by Doug Kelsey.

Rare and unusual, public, self-service meters, *Meter Stamp Society Quarterly Bulletin [USA]*, Fall 2003, by Richard Stambaugh.

Great Britain

The first postal vending machines sited in Britain away from Post Office premises were privately made and owned, appearing initially in the 1880s, although it was as early as 1857 that the first patent for a stamp-selling machine was applied for.

A piece in *The Times* for 8 May 1858 recorded that a postage stamp distributor had been invented by a Mr Derham of Wakefield. "*The instrument was intended for the delivery of postage or other stamps singly to purchasers, so as to dispense with the attendance of an official for this purpose at post-offices. A penny being put into a hole near the top unlocks the instrument, and allows a handle to be used to such an extent as to protrude from between two rollers a single stamp, which the purchaser tears off. One stamp only can be had at a time, and a halfpenny or a smaller coin is rejected.*"

All of the original machines were extremely crude and/or complicated to use, mainly being manual with some of a clockwork or motor type. The General Post Office (GPO) was conducting trials of various machines by the early 1900s. Just like today, the philatelic press editors and contributors were not backward in conveying their views on the matter of stamp vending to the readership at large.

These journalists seem to have either glossed over, or been ignorant of the fact, that during 1906 a machine was trialled in the Threadneedle Street Post Office and within the House of Commons lobby. The following year saw Dickie permanently installing the latter machine, which, according to a 1960 *Dominion* newspaper feature, was a popular curiosity: "Frock-coated members stopped and stared as they passed through the lobby... like children at the fair; the venerable Edwardians could not resist the temptation to try out the world's first practical stamp-selling machine." The following two years saw a dozen extra machines going into different locations across Britain and philatelic comment followed...

1908 "Stamp Chatter by I.M. Perf" *The West-End Philatelist*, July, 1908

Nowadays, all sorts of articles including cigarettes, sweets, scent, and railway tickets can be obtained from automatic machines, and it is a matter for surprise to many people that these machines have not been adapted for the sale of postage stamps.

There is no doubt that they would be exceedingly useful, especially if placed in such public places as railway stations. Experiments have been made with these machines by the British postal authorities, but so far they have failed to act satisfactorily. The Postmaster-General, in referring to these experiments, remarked that though the pennies go in all right, stamps are not always forthcoming, though, on the other hand, one machine dispensed 3s6d worth of stamps before anyone put in a 1d at all!

Machines of the former type would, doubtless, result in a profit to the revenue, though they would hardly be appreciated by the public, while those of the latter type would be a boon to the impecunious, but would not give unbounded satisfaction to the postal authorities.

What is wanted is a machine that will please post and public, and one of these will be perfected before long, we have no doubt. Automatic machines have been in use in New Zealand for some time, and apparently work quite satisfactorily, and the United States authorities are now experimenting in this direction.

1909 "Editorial" *The West-End Philatelist*, August 1909

ALTHOUGH the use of automatic stamp-vending machines in this country has made little headway during the past ten years, they are extensively used in New Zealand and the United States. In the latter country various machines have been patented, and the Post Office issues stamps imperforate, so that they may be cut into strips for use in these. There is little doubt that the general adoption of automatic machines

for the sale of $\frac{1}{2}d$ and $1d$ stamps in this country cannot be long deferred. These will certainly save an enormous amount of time in the despatch of business in our larger post offices, as anyone who has watched the unending stream of people who enter an office to purchase one stamp only, can testify. If these machines were in use, it would tend to lighten the work of the postal clerks and considerably relieve the congestion that is now the usual state of things at the counter of every busy office. To meet the requirements of these stamp-vending machines, the sheets of stamps have to be cut into vertical strips, which are then pasted together to form a continuous band.

As the number of automatic machines grows, some new way of printing the stamps will have to be devised, so as to obviate the necessity of cutting the sheets into strips. Indeed, a gentleman occupying a high position in the United States Government Bureau of Engraving and Printing predicts that in two years' time *sheets* of stamps will be entirely done away with, and all values will be sold in rolls, or on reels. From their introduction, in 1840, to the present day, stamps have always been printed in sheets, and the very idea of printing or selling them in rolls is revolutionary in the extreme. And yet, from the point of view of utility, it would be a step in the right direction, for only those who use a number of stamps know the time wasted in endeavouring to tear up a sheet into suitable strips, so that the stamps can be affixed quickly.

There are, of course, difficulties in the way of manufacture, but already the United States postal authorities are experimenting with certain machines that have been designed to print stamps in rolls. Or, rather, the stamps are printed in sheets, and these are automatically cut into strips, gummed, and rolled on to reels, all ready for use.

Thus, it will probably not be so very long before we shall have to purchase our stamps at so much per reel, or by the yard! And then, what will the collector of blocks of four do?

1912 The “Wilkinson” machine

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(6,000 words)