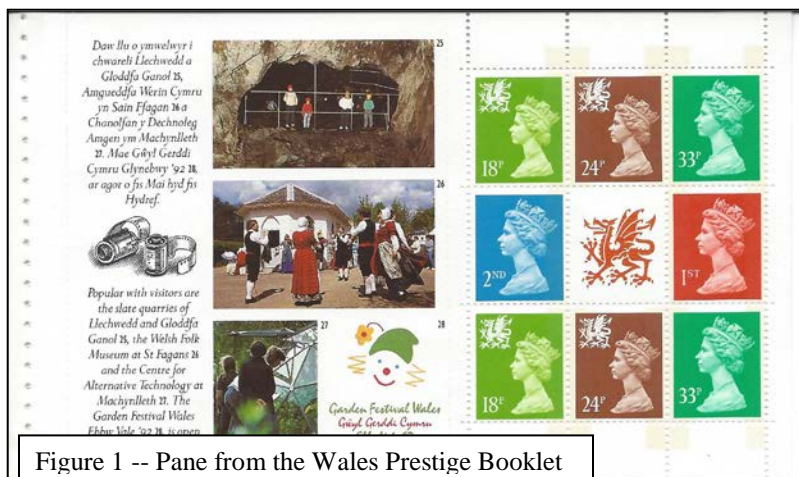


ATTENTION! - MACHIN MANIACS! by John Latter



INTRODUCTION

We are pretty fortunate to have two “maniacs” among our membership – two and a half if you count me as well. I say ‘fortunate’ not directly because of their particular (read ‘peculiar’) collecting passion, but because they both have the desire (not to mention time, patience & knowledge) to take on such a challenging collecting area as the Great Britain definitives. This tells me that we have two very serious philatelists who we can use as “go to guys” not only with regard to Machins but to get advice on many other aspects of the hobby and our own personal collecting interests. This is not to say that CFSC is not blessed with a number of other

very knowledgeable collectors who specialize in other areas of this wonderful hobby and who are more than happy to share their knowledge as well. However my subject for this article is **Machins** ----or rather a little known piece of Machin history. I write this with some trepidation that Dave or Francis will feel forced to correct me here or there but, on the other hand, their intervention will likely add something new to my knowledge at the same time.

Anyway here goes.....

The story I am about to embark on is about a variety which is not mentioned in any Scott catalogue. More surprisingly it is not listed in Gibbons Great Britain Concise either.

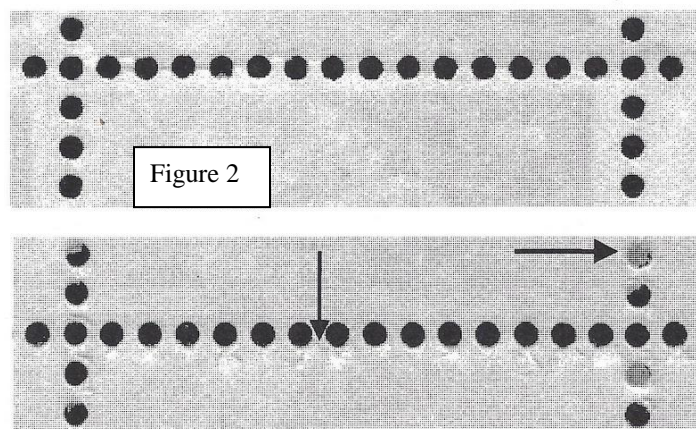
BACKGROUND

The first Machins were issued back in 1967 with a palette of just fourteen colors. Machin definitive stamps have been in continuous use ever since in various denominations and non-denominations and with differing colors, gums, papers, perforations, phosphors, printing methods involving at least seven different printing companies, not to mention the postal forgeries produced by persons unknown!

More recently we saw self-adhesives come onto the scene plus many new security devices that have been introduced and which create further new varieties – yes collecting Machins is not for the faint hearted! The first Machins were issued during the pre-decimal period when 240 pennies equaled one Pound Sterling. Great Britain changed to decimal currency in March, 1971. The Post Office (now re-named Royal Mail) had to issue stamps with new (decimal) values and this is when Machin studies really took off! To date well over 1000 different varieties are out there to be discovered, including many issued in regular or Prestige booklets, coils, souvenir and mini sheets. Then of course there are the errors –oh yes the **ERRORS!** – I can only say “GOOD LUCK!!” to Francis & Dave!

HISTORY

Right from the beginning the demand for these definitive stamps for postal use was constant and heavy – more for some values, not so much for others. Harrison’s, the principal printers, had at least three production lines running continuously to keep up with demand. New innovations were introduced to increase productivity, including new perforating equipment. Between 1973 and 1982 Harrisons employed Kampf (Germany) perforating technology.

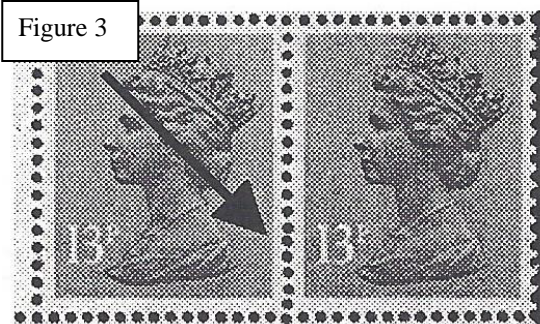


In 1982 Harrisons started to replace Kampf machines with APS produced equipment. **APS** is an acronym of the name of the Swedish company (Ab Produktion Svenska) that manufactured the perforating equipment and has nothing to do with our national stamp collectors' organization. The APS machine did not actually penetrate the stamp paper as we might expect. Instead the process used pins to dimple the paper; the raised dimple would then be ground off to create the hole. It left a hole that appeared a bit ragged and the operation also produced very fine paper dust. You can see the dust on the gum side of the stamp below freshly ground holes in Figure 2.

THE PLOT THICKENS!

Back in 1984, an APS machine on one of the three production lines, malfunctioned and as a result had to be repaired. No one seems to know whether the technician had eaten 'magic mushrooms' or was dreaming of a fresh elicit love affair that might be in the offing, but for some reason he (maybe she) made a mistake. In attempting to repair a broken pin, a hole was drilled on either side of it. Somehow, inadvertently, a pin was added into both new holes thus creating a 17 pin compound Machin variety. Why this was done is a complete mystery! See Figure 3

Figure 3



RESULT

Even for the stamps manufactured on this particular production line, the variety does not appear on every sheet because only a single perforating (dimpling) drum was 'repaired'. The error only appears on "dot" cylinder panes between stamp columns 1 and 2 (this is where the extra pin was inserted) and then only once every 26 rows. This means that the position of the error varies up and down from sheet to sheet. Every so often the error occurs in a cylinder block. In the know collectors, hunt for cylinder blocks with this variety and failing that a marginal block of six with the variety is desirable. Obviously there are a lot more opportunities to find regular blocks with the variety than similarly affected cylinder blocks but both add spice to any collection. The drum was removed from service in 1986. This helps explain why these anomalies are quite scarce.



There is no official reason why some values feature this variety and others don't. It is likely that as orders came in from the post office, production was allocated to the various manufacturing lines to optimize production change over and set up time. Harrisons would have had an eye on their bottom line and shareholder profit! Thus by happenstance only some values became scheduled to be produced on the affected manufacturing line. It seems that the scarcest cylinder block with the 17 hole variety is the 16p brownish-gray – Sc # MH94, with the 50p bister-brown – Sc# MH159 a close 2nd. See Figure 4.

COLLECTOR WATCH

The variety is not easy to spot. I find the easiest way is to look for the dot control. If it is a block without a cylinder control mark, it is best to scan down the row of perforations between the first two stamps at the left of the sheet – look for a misalignment of holes in line with the lower left corner of the stamp in column two; this is fairly easy to spot even for these old eyes. When such a misalignment is found we need to look back up the row of holes immediately above. The holes typically form a shallow arc & the fourth stamp up from the corner is very close to the one above it. I am always interested in hearing of, and acquiring these discoveries. **Good hunting!**

[Editor's Note: Thank you to John Latter for this great piece on the Machins – and no I am not an authority (or even close) on these beguiling stamps!]