

Philatelink, Important Customer Notice

From Monday 31st July 2023, our customers can no longer send mail using any of the old definitive stamps. This decision applies to **all definitive (every day) stamps** issued by the Royal Mail from 1970 to 2022. Most are simply the standard small size single colour stamps with the Queen's Head commonly known in the trade as Machin stamps. However, this also applies to regional stamp issues from Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, high value stamps £1 to £10, and most Europe and Worldwide rate stamps, which were classed definitive issues.



Above are a few typical examples of definitive stamps no longer valid, there are many hundreds of them. If you do use these stamps there is a risk your recipient will be given a minimum surcharge of £1.10.

Stamps classed as definitive stamp include:

- Machin definitive stamps e.g. 1st & 2nd Class and 1p to £10;
- Regional stamps from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- Small European & Worldwide stamps from sheets and booklets (Post & Go stamps are still valid.
- Basically, any small (Machin sized) stamps from Sets, Miniature sheets, Booklets and from Smiler Sheets, we are treating as definitive.
- HIGH VALUE STAMPS including all Machin's, Castle stamps and the £10 Britannia stamp from 1993.

There is a useful website called Collect British Stamps that Royal Mail have been referencing which clearly shows year by year which GB stamps were issued as definitive stamps and those which were issued as commemorative special stamps. Here is a link to the home page [Collect GB Stamps](#).

It can get a bit tricky though as many stamp booklets, especially those called Prestige or Retail booklets have both commemorative and definitive stamps inside. There are also sheets of stamps known as Smiler Sheets, some which contain 10 or 20 commemorative stamps and many others which contain 10 or 20 definitive,

mainly regional stamps. Again, any small size definitive stamps issued in such booklets, or in sheet form will no longer be valid for postal use. We have been swapping them out no problem.

As a business, for many months now, we have been returning all small Machin sized stamps to the Royal Mail regardless of design, making a simple assumption that all small size stamps are likely to be classed as definitive stamps whether they are or not. To date not a single stamp has been refused or returned by the Royal Mail Swap Out Team in Edinburgh, so we believe our assumption is likely to be proved correct. Time will tell us for sure but we think better to be safe than sorry.

WE ADVISE IF YOU HAVE ANY SMALL SIZE STAMPS, JUST GET THEM SWAPPED OR SELL THEM TO US AND WE WILL SWAP THEM.

However, do let us know if you have any issues.

Having said everything above there is still a good chance that some definitive stamps will have a collectable value which is greater than the old face value shown on the stamps. It will be interesting to see how the collecting market changes over the rest of 2023, and if catalogue prices go up or down as a result? Stamps like the £10 Britannia (see image) may turn out to have been over swapped or used and end up scarce for collectors, thus causing the price to rise.

The big question is what Royal Mail are going to do with the better stamps the public have sent back. Will they sell them back to collectors at a huge profit via Amazon?

We stopped selling definitive stamps many months ago but there is still a chance a few could pop up unawares from time to time, especially in some of the mixed bags of stamps that have been in stock a while. **If any customer finds definitive stamps in their order tell us straightaway – PLEASE DO NOT USE THEM - they can be returned to us for exchange (at our cost).** Alternatively, you can swap them yourself via the Royal Mail's Swap Out scheme (see below for details). There is no end date set for the Swap Out initiative.

The Good News

The good news is that all commemorative and non-barcoded Christmas stamps will still be valid for postal use. We were also told early on by Royal Mail that Post & Go stamps would remain valid for postal use.

We will continue to buy and sell the above stamps just as we have done for more than 20 years. We estimate that commemorative and Christmas stamps still account for around 80% of the stamps in circulation across the world.

You can swap your old stamps for barcoded stamps through Royal Mail's Swap Out scheme, currently no deadline has been set for exchange. If you think this is too much hassle, we will buy your unwanted definitive stamps at 40% face value and we

will simply add them to our own exchange consignments. We have been swapping out approximately £10,000 face value every week for nearly a year now.

If anyone is unsure about the postal validity of their stamps please email images to us at thebestdeals@aol.com or philatelink@btinternet.com and we will be pleased to help you in any way we can.



Above examples of **VALID** commemorative and Christmas stamps issued in 1997.

What Royal May Say

Royal Mail have said: "A leaflet with a form [for the Swap Out scheme] was delivered to every household recently, but customers can also print out a form from our website; call our Customer Experience team to order one; or pick one up at a local Royal Mail delivery office or Post Office."

The deadline for using the old stamps was extended from 31 January as more time was required for users, Royal Mail said.

After Monday 31st July, Royal Mail says a £1.10 surcharge fee will be applied to mail sent using non-barcoded definitive stamps. Those receiving mail sent using non-barcoded stamps will be given a "Fee to Pay" card telling them they must pay a surcharge before the item can be delivered.

Barcoded stamps were introduced in February 2022 in an attempt to make deliveries more efficient and improve security.

The move is part of the company's ongoing modernisation drive and will enable "added security features" and "pave the way for innovative services for customers in the future," said Matthew Parkes, managing director of Stamps and Collectibles at Royal Mail.

Those stamps eligible for swapping are the regular 1st and 2nd Class "everyday" stamps, featuring the profile of the late Queen Elizabeth.

As non-barcoded Christmas and other special stamps with pictures on continue to be valid for postage, they should not be submitted for swapping.

Stamps that have already been used for postage will not be accepted for the swap out scheme.

Customers who print off a **Swap Out scheme form** can address an envelope to: Freepost SWAP OUT. No other address details are needed, the firm said.

Royal Mail's long-term plan is for people to scan the QR code, which can be scanned with the Royal Mail app, allowing them to watch videos and send birthday messages to each other.

"The barcodes will enable exciting new services by connecting physical stamps to the digital world through the Royal Mail app," the company said on its website.

What are the Risks?

As professional stamp dealers and members of the Philatelic Traders Society we know British stamps very well having seen, handled and sold most GB stamps that have ever been issued from the 1840 Penny Black to the very last Queen Elizabeth II stamp issues in 2022.

For me the biggest risk is how does Royal Mail communicate to staff, the many thousands of decimal stamps they have issued since 1970, that remain valid for postal use and therefore should not be refused use, or worse surcharged after they have been used to mail a letter or parcel.

Presently it very much feels that a suck it and see approach might be adopted.

Our biggest fear as reliable and trusted stamp dealers with thousands of valued customers is that valid commemorative stamps simply fail to be identified correctly and either get refused at the Post Office or worse get surcharged further down the line, primarily due to lack of communication, knowledge and training.

I can already feel the rumble of hundreds of frustrated emails being generated as I write this advisory paper. Hopefully, for everyone's sake I am wrong, and the transition goes smoothly else it could be foreseen that Royal Mail's Customer Service Department will take an absolute battering from customer complaints.

The Royal Mail and Post Office are very much separate businesses and both to me seem very fragmented regarding communicating change and providing consistent training to all staff affected. Most Post Offices today are small franchises situated in retail shops, garages etc, or in our case a local Chemist. Our experience is that training in stamps is almost non-existent, and we often have to step in and advise staff when stamps are being used on mail.

The Outcome

We very much want customers to keep using the lovely commemorative and Christmas stamps. We know that recipients appreciate the pretty designs and letters look more interesting when stamps are used.

Most of the commemorative stamps due to age only have the standard lick and stick gum but it only takes a second to lick or dab a stamp. Often quicker than trying to peel a self-adhesive stamp. Also some of the self-adhesive stamps start to lose their stick after a few years.

You can call us for advice on 01896 759703 or 07510 312271.

All the best.

David A Waldie

Managing Director Philatelink Ltd