

# Britain Goes Decimal

## Background:

Passed in May 1969, *The Decimal Act* provided for a decimalised pound, in place of the ancient system of shillings and pence, effectively changing Britain's currency. The change over was scheduled for 15 February 1971, Decimal- or D Day.

Issued in June 1970, Britain's first decimal stamps were a group of three large-format Machins: 10p, 20p and 50p. Easing the transition, each of these was directly equivalent in shilling terms: 10p/2 shillings; 20p/4 shillings & 50p/10 shillings. During this initial period, the UK remained on the pre-decimal standard.

On 15 February 1971, a complete set of 12 decimal values were issued, all small-format Machins, in denominations ranging from ½p to 9p.

Pre-decimals issued after the reign of King George V remained valid and both decimal and pre-decimal stamps could be used simultaneously. However, following D Day, all rates were moved to a decimal basis.

Barely a year later, on 29 February 1972, all pre-decimal stamps were demonetized. Thereafter, Britain was fully decimalised.

## Exhibit Plan—

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- » Mixed franking prior to D Day 2-4
- » D Day 5-7
- » Mixed franking after D Day 8-9
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Key items are marked with ●

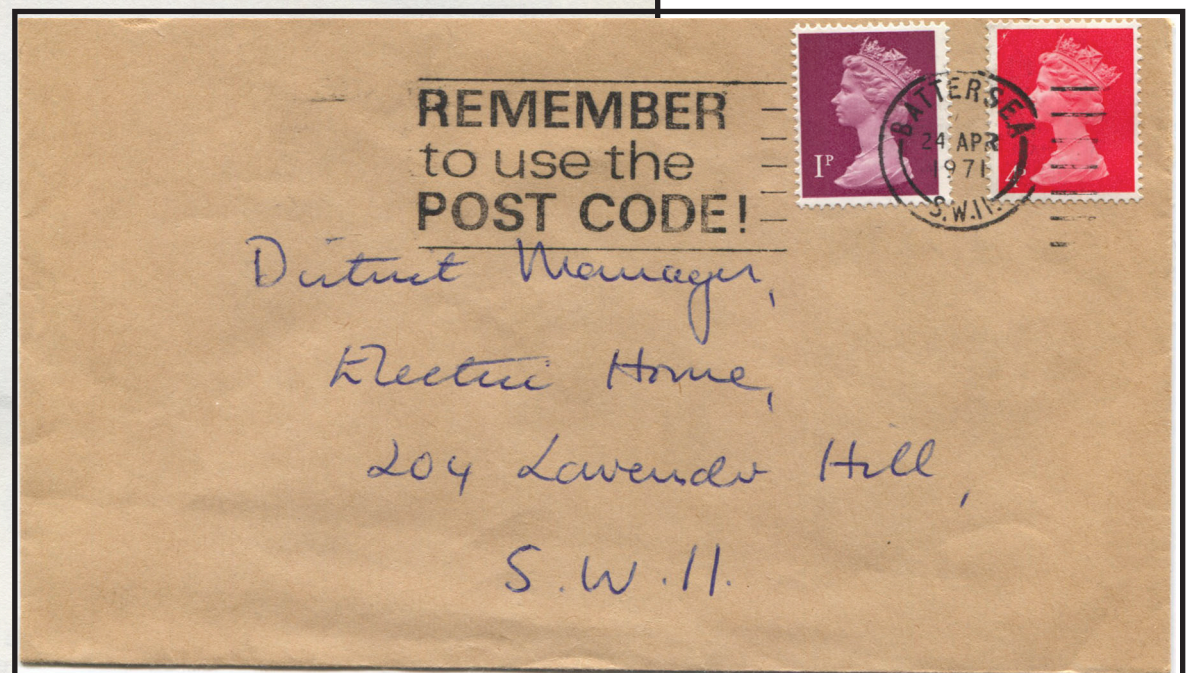
## Your guide to decimal currency in the Post Office.

## Objective:

To show how Britain coped with the change to its currency with covers from transitional period, before, during and after 15 February 1971.

## Why:

Decimalisation was a momentous change. This exhibit is a study of how the postal system coped and postal clients reacted.



## Organization:

Chronologically-beginning with the first decimals, showing pre-D Day mixed frankings utilising the first decimal issues combined with pre-decimals.

On the first day of decimalisation, there was a “minor” complication—a postal strike.

Next, are typical examples of mixed frankings after D Day, as well as some examples of “confusion”.

We then culminate with the end of pre-decimal validity and attempts to “illegally” use pre-decimal stamps.

# Preparing for D Day

## Inland Parcels & Special Delivery

Three decimal Machins were issued prior to 15 February, as part of the effort preparing the British public for the new currency. The intent was to acustom to public to decimal currency. These were the first decimal stamps issued by the UK. Each value issued was directly, with no fractional remainder, convertible into £sd.

But, being high values, their intended use was effectively limited to parcels, special services and overseas destinations.



### 17 June 1970 FDC

The relative value of 80p or 16 shillings (16/-) today would approximate £27.40. Hence these truly were "high values".

### A Brief Note on Values:

In February 1971, a pint of beer bought in Central London pub, would have cost 2/-, or 10p. Today, that same pint would cost £4.50.



### 13 January 1971 Inland parcel

Postage for parcel weighing between 6lb & 10lbs was 4/6.

decimal		£ s/d
20p	equal to	4/-
		-/4
		-/2
	total franking	4/6



### 14 January 1971 Inland Special Delivery

Special delivery fee was 3/- & 4/6 for parcels weighing between 6lbs & 10lbs yielding total franking required of 7/6.

decimal		£ s/d
30p	equal to	6/-
		1/-
		-/6
	total franking	7/6

# Preparing for D Day

## European Express Delivery

Express delivery service to the Continent provided overnight service to Europe. The basic fee for the service was 2 shillings, exactly equal in the value to the new 10p stamp. Both examples on this page reached their destinations the next day.

### 8 July 1970 Express Delivery to Europe

Express fee was 2/- & airmail to Europe was 9d. Total required franking was 2/9.

decimal		£ s/d
10p	equal to	2/-
		-/9
	total franking	2/9



### 30 July 1970 Express Delivery, via registry to Europe

Special delivery fee was 2/-, Registry was 3/- & airmail to Europe was 9d, Total required franking was 5/9

decimal		£ s/d
10p	equal to	2/-
20p	equal to	4/-
50p	equal to	10/-
		1/9
	4 x 5d	1/-
	total franking	18/9

This cover has a complete set of the large format Machins, 10p, 20p & 50p, plus the high value 1/9 commemorative from the 1970 Anniversaries set (3<sup>rd</sup> series) and a short set from the 1970 Literary Anniversaries set (1<sup>st</sup> series), lacking the 1/6 high value. The total franking on this cover comes to 18/9. This cover was over-franked by 13/-. Despite having been written on hotel stationery, with an tourist-oriented enclosure, this cover was clearly philatelically contrived. (and a challenge to my math skills)

# Preparing for D Day

Overseas

Airmail to the Western Hemisphere was 1/6. Only in cases of double rated covers or those sent registered would any of the new decimals make "proper" sense.

→  
**8 July 1970 Airmail, via registry to the USA**

Registry fee was 3/- & airmail to US was 1/6. Required postage was 4/6

<u>decimal</u>		<u>£ s/d</u>
20p	equal to	4/-
		<u>-16</u>
	total franking	4/6



↑ **10 August 1970 Airmail to Bolivia** ●  
 Airmail to Bolivia was 1/6. Doubled rated would then be 3/-.

<u>decimal</u>		<u>£ s/d</u>
10p	equal to	2/-
		<u>1/-</u>
	total franking	3/-

15 February 1971

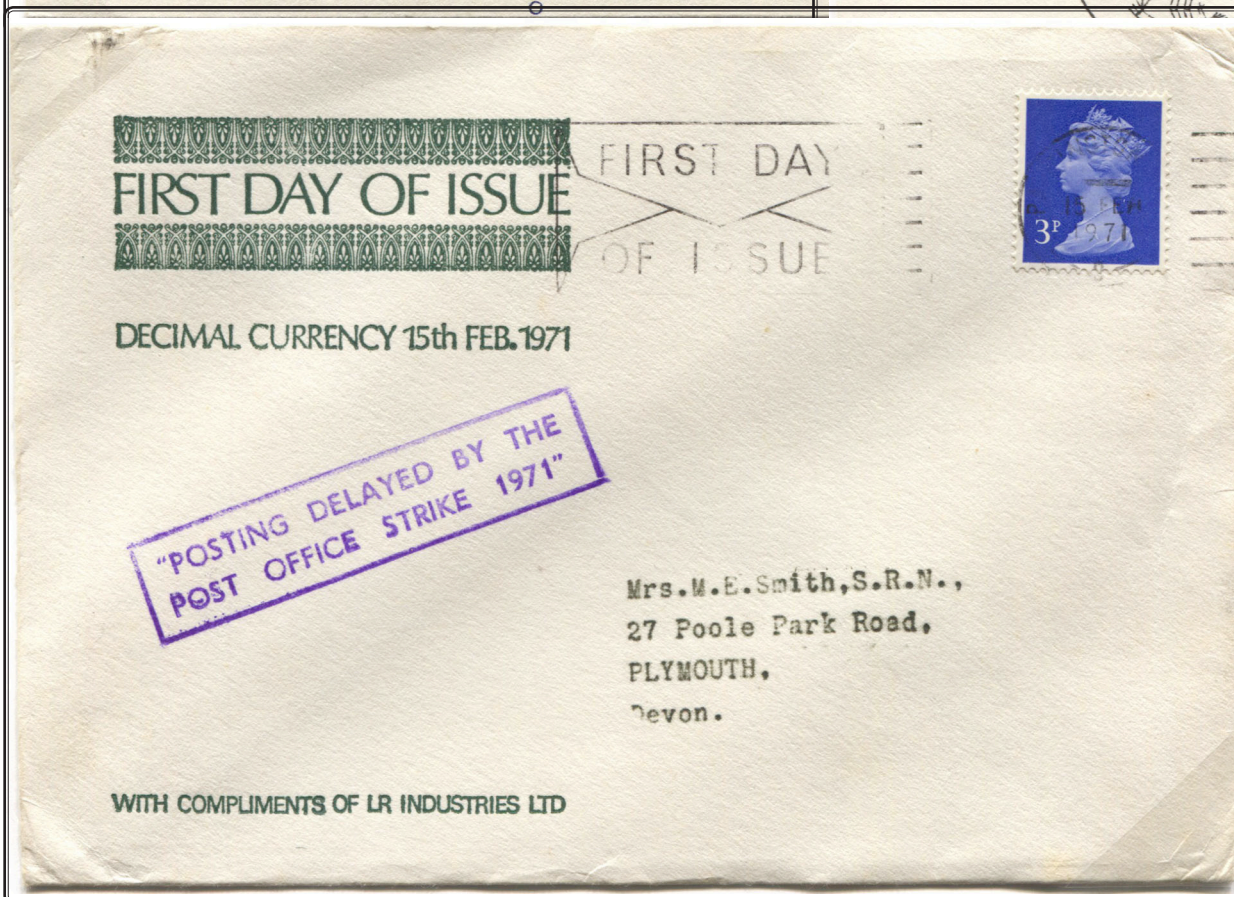
## D Day

A Postal Strike on the day



The first full national strike in the history of the British Post Office took place from 20 January 1971 to 7 March 1971. Although local mail deliveries were possible in some areas, the bulk of the country's postal services came to a complete halt.

For the first time since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the Post Office's monopoly on carrying letters was suspended for the duration. Several hundred private posts were set up throughout the country; some of these were of course "philatelic", but many operated with efficiency and transported significant quantities of mail, although normally at a much higher price than the normal first class rate.



Three covers:

- I. A FDC for the first day of decimalisation, using all the emissions of the Randall Postal Service
- II. A commercial cover to Germany on the first day of decimalisation via private carrier to Belgium, then onward to Germany.
- III. A prepared FDC cover, stamped after the actual date - "POSTING DELAYED BY THE POST OFFICE STRIKE 1971".

15 February 1971

D Day

Officially prepared FDCs



← This first day cover was officially prepared by the British Post Office and shows all the new Machin definitives issued on 15 February 1971.

However, due to the postal strike, cancellation was delayed until after the strike concluded, as noted in the hand stamp applied.

→ This first day cover was officially prepared for the British Forces Postal Service.

Since the military post office did not go out on strike, this officially prepared FDC was canceled on the day and does not bear officially strike related hand stamp.



15 February 1971

## D Day

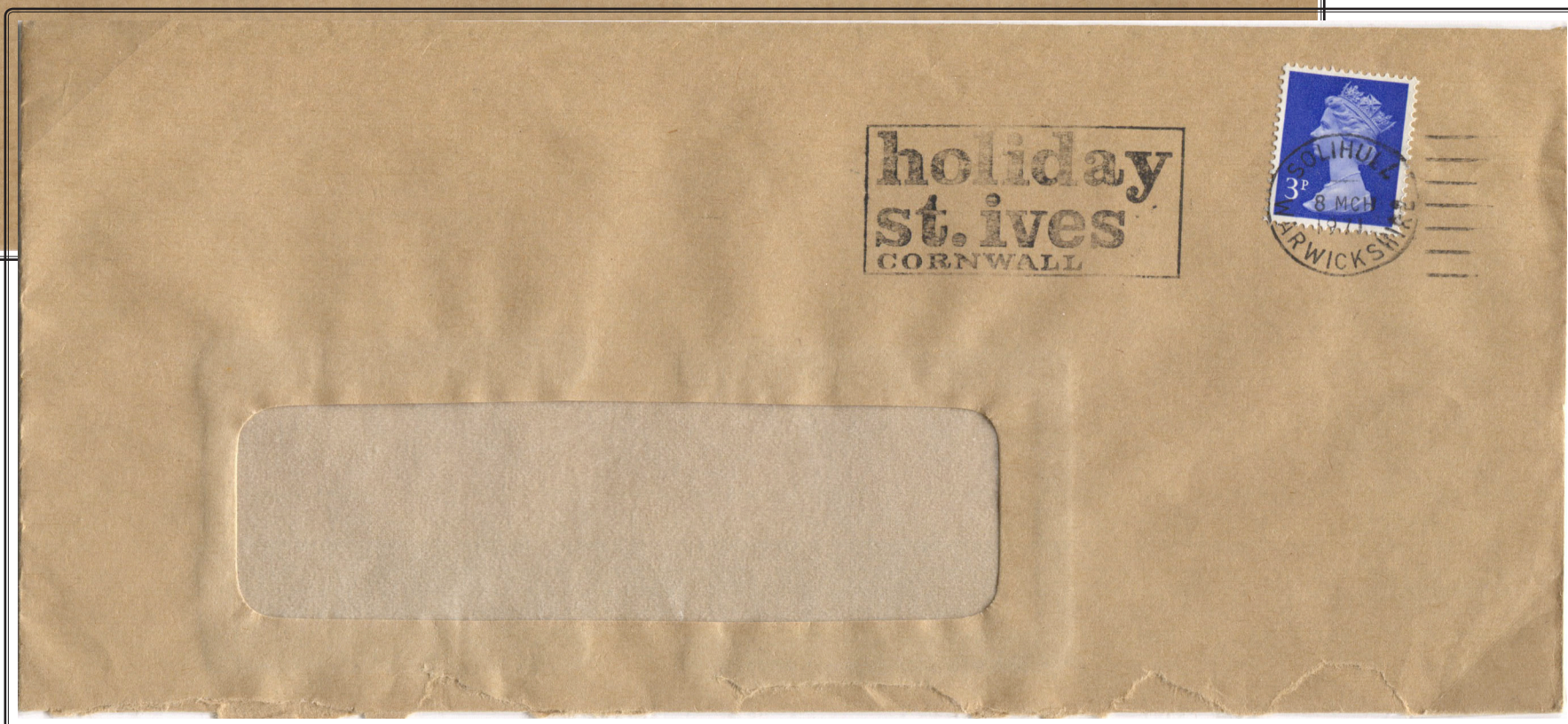
“Actual” first day covers



Although, D Day, 15 February, was during the middle of the 1971 Postal Strike, a number of small sub-offices remained open. These were generally tied to small local retail establishments and hence non-unionised.

← 15 February 1971, Tayport, Fife, Scotland, local. ●

A complete set of new decimal small format Machins issued and canceled on the actual D Day



The 1971 postal strike was settled on Sunday, 7 March 1971. The postal workers returned to work on Monday, 8 March. This cover is postmarked 8 March.

Is this a truly genuine FDC?

↑ 8 March 1971 Sent from Solihull in Warwickshire, inland 1<sup>st</sup> class

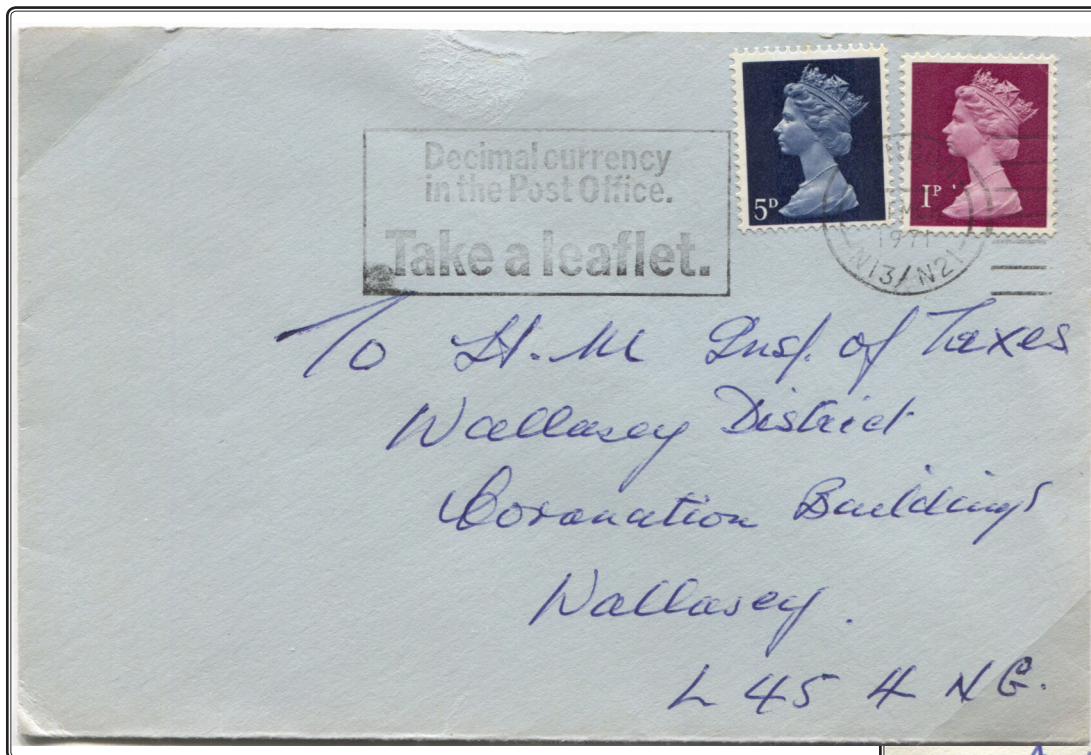
3p Machin fulfilling the new post D Day 1<sup>st</sup> class inland rate for a letter, <2 oz.

# Post D Day transition

## Mixed currency

## Inland uses

With D Day, postal rates are now denominated in decimal form, pre-decimals are still nevertheless valid as the transition continues. The old pre-decimal 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class stamps require the addition of the new 1p for the same service as before.



### 21 March 1971 Inland 1<sup>st</sup> class

3p rate < 2oz.

An example of a classic transition period mixed currency franking. Use of the old pre-decimal 5d, which had previously sufficed for 1<sup>st</sup> class, now equivalent to 2p uprated, with a 1p Machin to fulfill the new 3p rate.

<u>£ s/d</u>		<u>decimal</u>
5d	equal to	2p
		1p
	total franking	<hr/> 3p



### 28 April 1971 Inland 2<sup>nd</sup> class

2½p rate < 2oz.

An other example of a classic transition period mixed currency franking, this time, for 2<sup>nd</sup> class. Use of the old pre-decimal 4d, which had previously sufficed for 2<sup>nd</sup> class, now equivalent to 1½p, uprated with a 1p Machin to fulfill the new 2½ rate.

<u>£ s/d</u>		<u>decimal</u>
4d	equal to	1½p
		1p
	total franking	<hr/> 2½p



### 15 March 1971 Recorded delivery sent inland 2<sup>nd</sup> class

Recorded delivery fee of 4p combines with 2<sup>nd</sup> class rate of 2½p for required franking of 6½p.

<u>£ s/d</u>		<u>decimal</u>
4d	equal to	1½p
		4p
	2 x 1½p	1p
	total franking	<hr/> 6½p



# Post D Day transition

Mixed currency

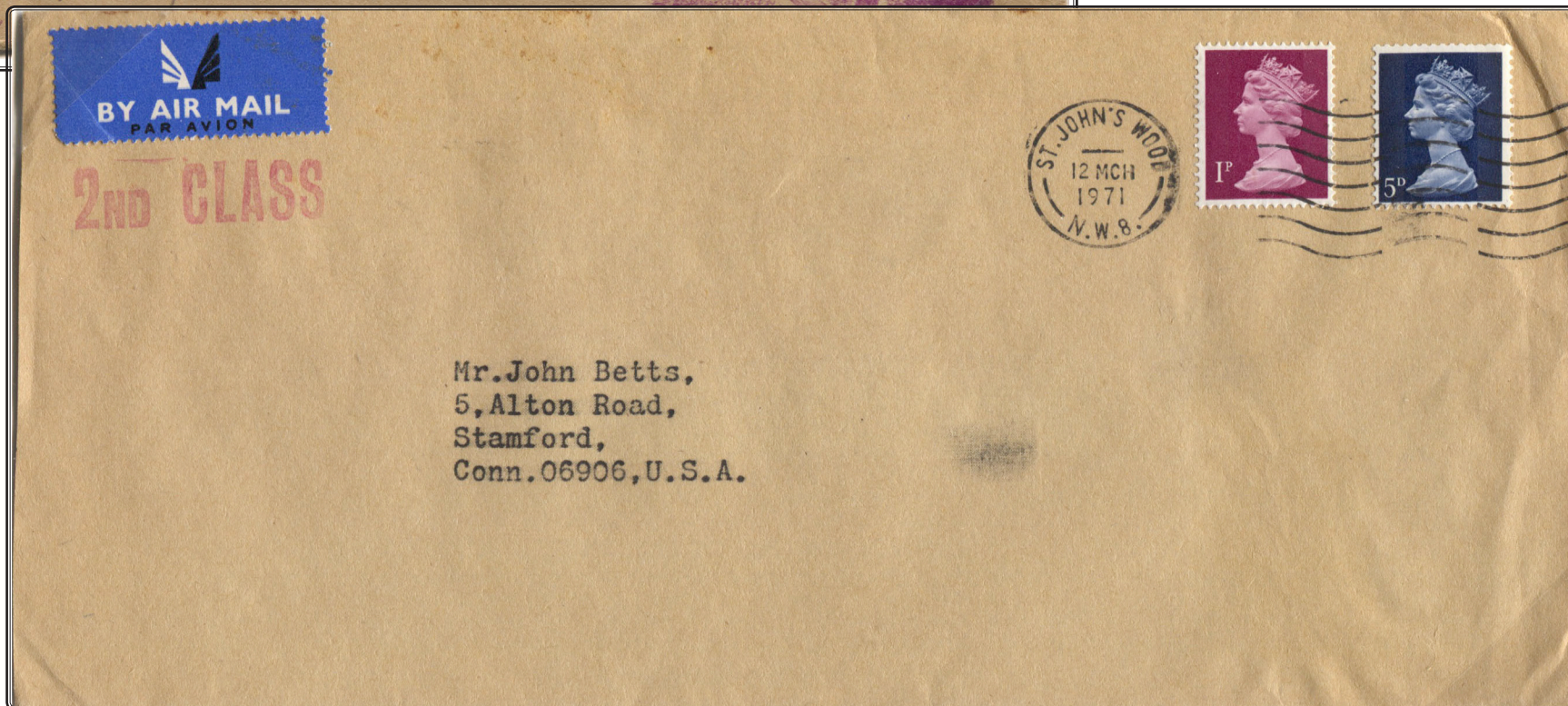
Overseas uses



←  
**8 August 1971 Overseas surface to the USA**  
 >2oz <3oz - 6p

Overseas double-rated surface letter to the US. The two 6d Machins combine to equal 1/- or 5p which, in combination with the 1p Machin, brings the total franking to 6p.

<u>£ s/d</u>		<u>decimal</u>
2 x 6d	equal to	5p
		1p
	total franking	<hr/> 6p



↑ **12 March 1971 2<sup>nd</sup> class airmail or "printed papers" rate to the USA** ●

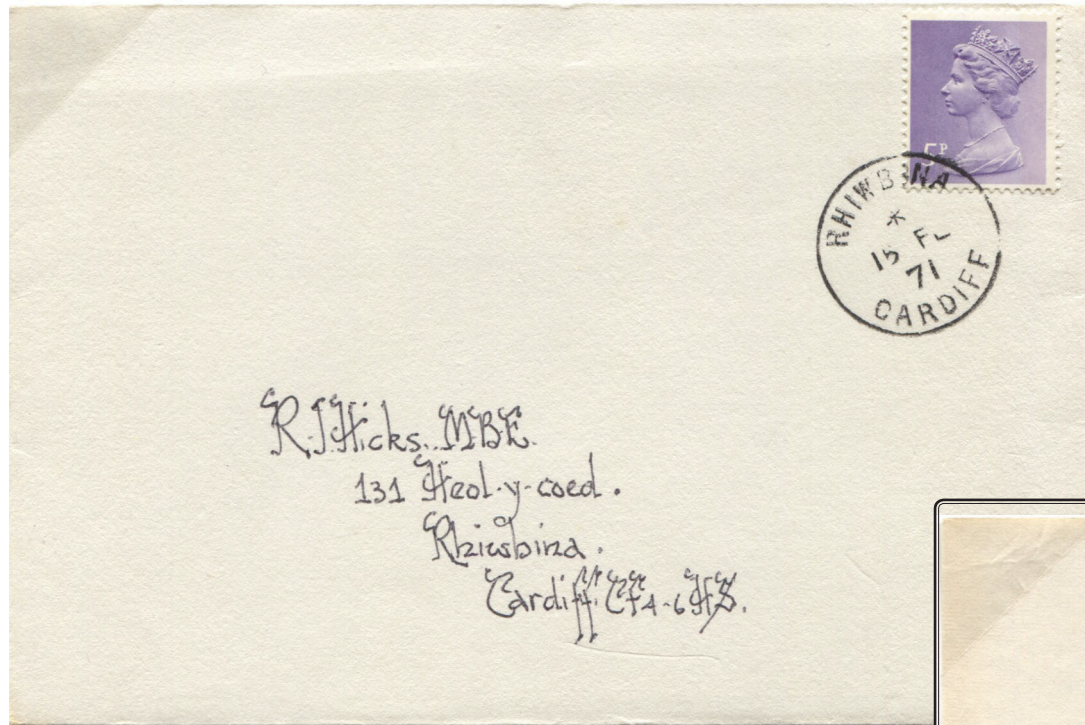
Printed papers airmail rate to the US: 3p, <1/2oz.

<u>£ s/d</u>		<u>decimal</u>
5d	equal to	2p
		1p
	total franking	<hr/> 3p

# Post D Day transition

## Confusion

In general, the entire transition went reasonably smoothly, but there were instances where, evidently, this was confusion by both postal patrons and the Post Office regarding both rates and the treatment of the older pre-decimal stamps.

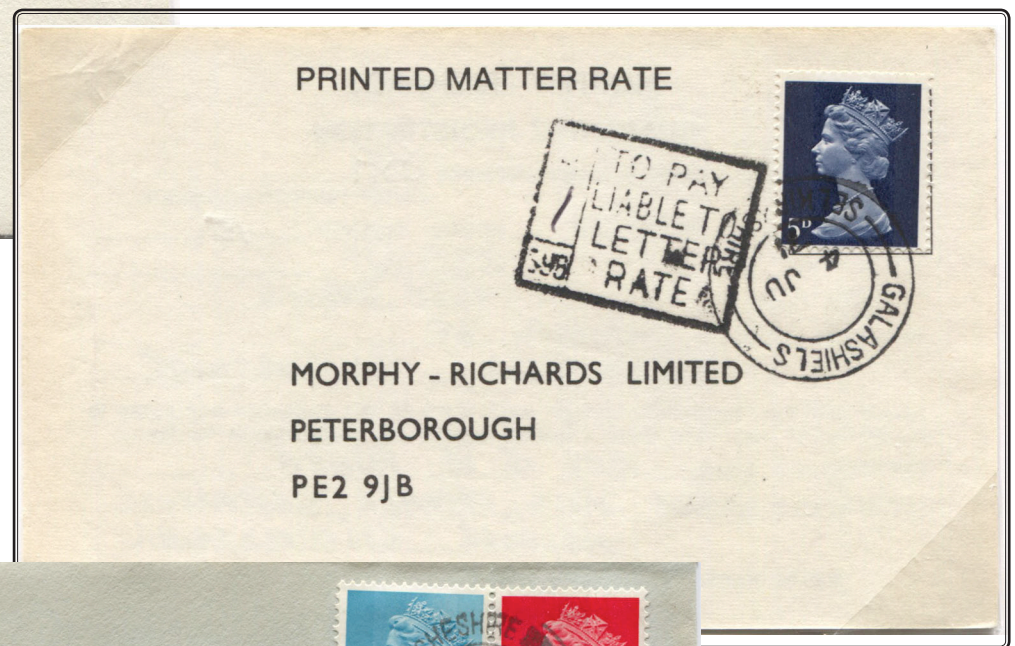


←  
**15 February 1971 A FDC but.....?**

A first day cover sent from a small sub-office in Cardiff, but franked with a new 5p Machin. Over franked by 2p. Could the sender have been confused with the old pre-decimal rate of 5d and used a new decimal 5p stamp mistakenly?

↓  
**4 June 1971 Intended to be sent "printed papers" rate but.....**

At this date, there was no *inland* printed papers rate, just 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> class. This old 5d Machin was good for only 2p with no valid rate pertaining domestically. Assessed 1/2p for 2<sup>nd</sup> class and doubled for the penalty.

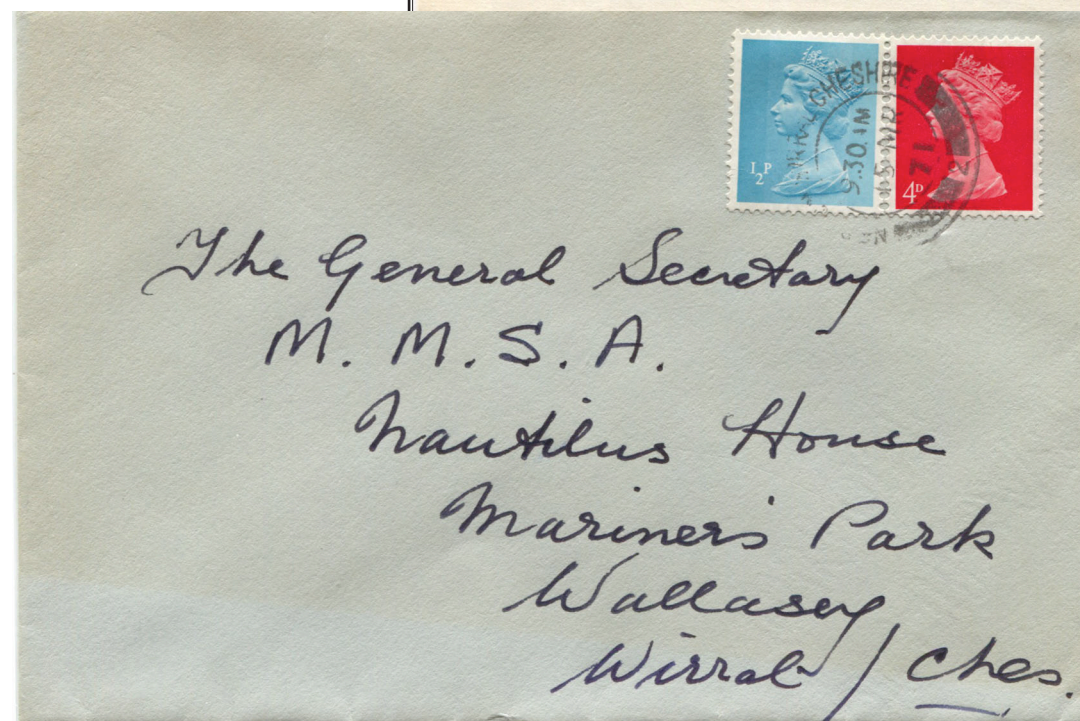


→  
**15 March 1971 Inland**

Being franked with a 4d Machin, the addition of a 1/2p, brings the total decimal value to 2p, which satisfies no known inland rate.

It is possible the sender thought that the addition of the 1/2p would bring the old 2<sup>nd</sup> class stamp up to decimal 2<sup>nd</sup> class service. But it did not.

And, evidentially the Post Office did not pick up on the error.



# End of the Transition

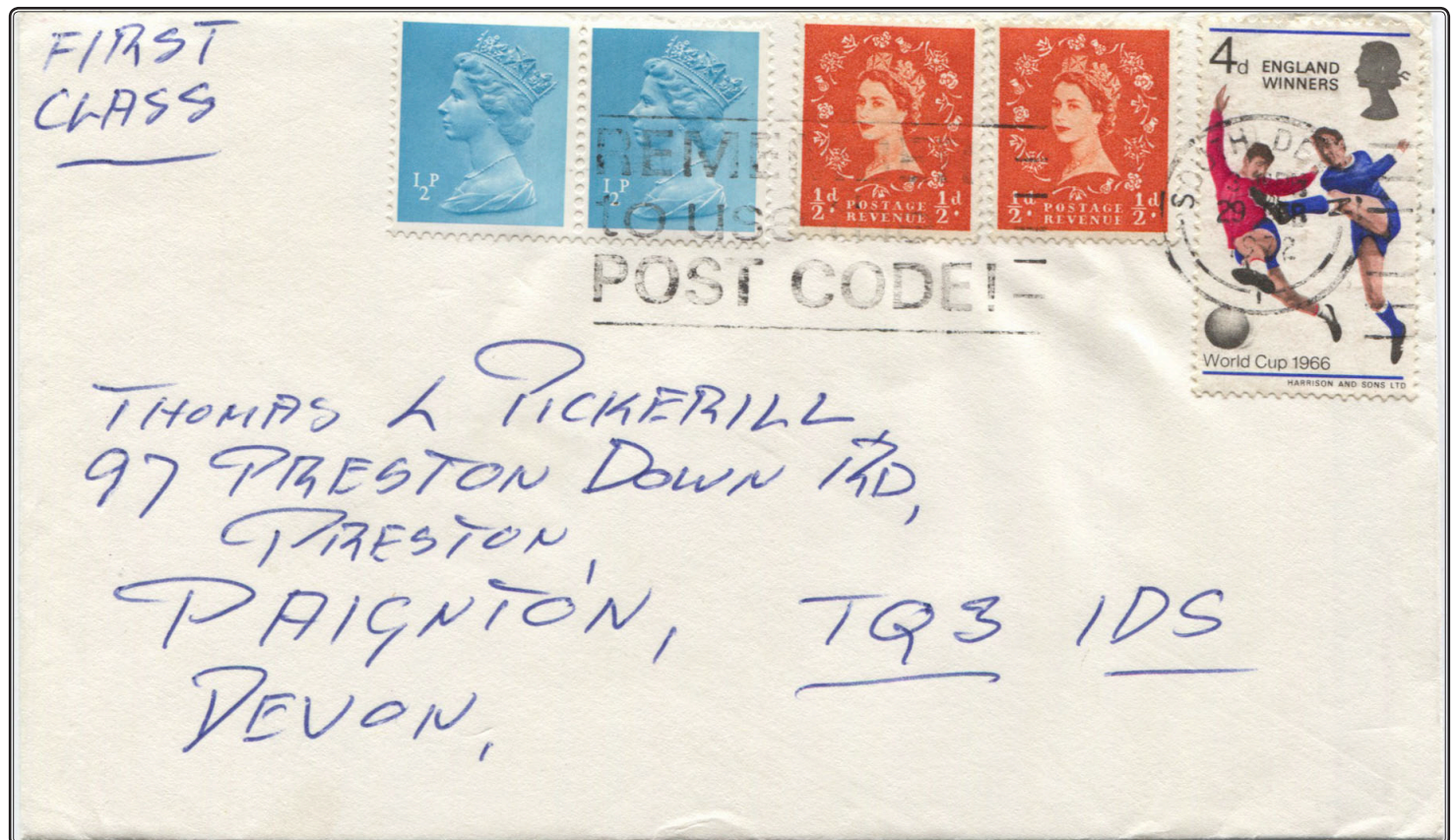
End of the pre-decimal era

After 29 February 1972 all previously issued pre-decimals were demonetised. The transition was over a mere 12½ months after D Day

**29 February 1972** Last day of validity for pre-decimals, thereafter - demonetized



**29 February 1972** Another last day of validity for pre-decimals



# A Decimal World

“Illegal” use

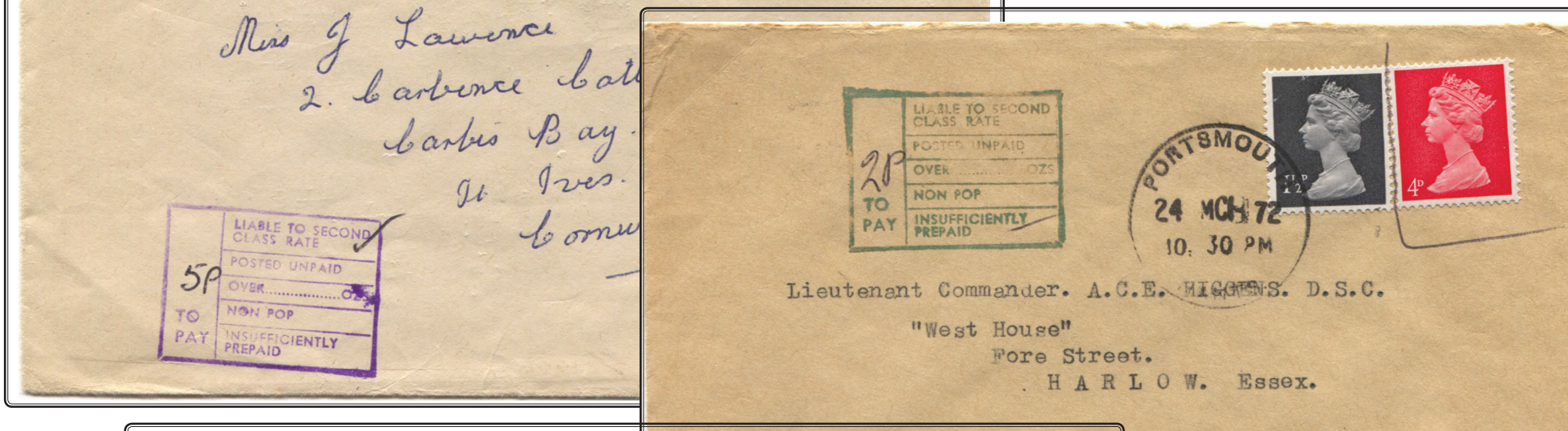
Despite, nevertheless, following demonetisation, attempted use of pre-decimals did continue, though, with little general success. Sometimes years after D Day.



← **29 March 1972 Inland**

1<sup>st</sup> class rate would be 3p, 2<sup>nd</sup> class 2½p

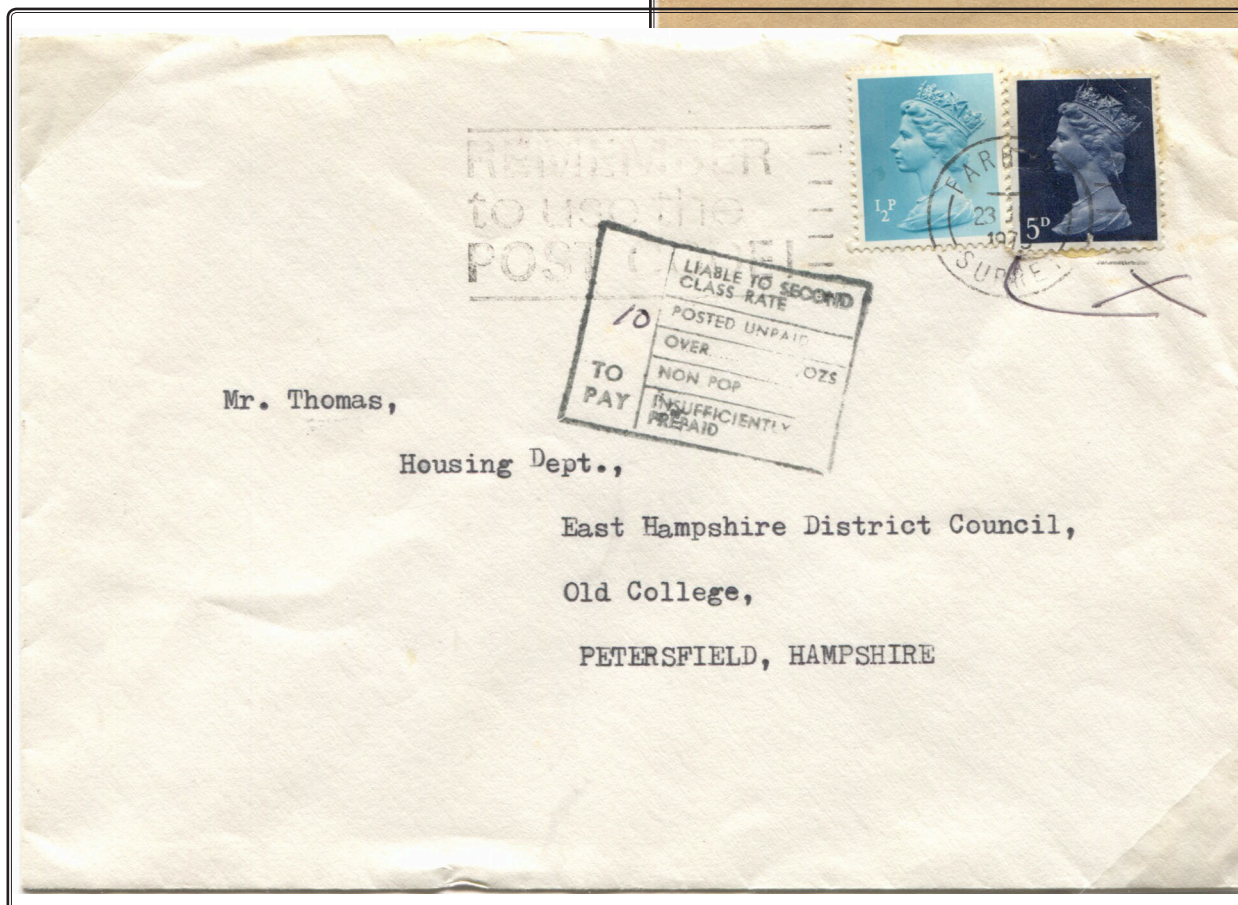
The 3d Machin is not valid one month following demonetisation. Moved at the 2<sup>nd</sup> class rate, 2½p, doubled as penalty, hence the 5p postage due stamp.



↑ **24 March 1972 Inland**

1<sup>st</sup> class rate would be 3p,

The postal patron appears to be attempting use of the 4d Machin worth 1½p for 1<sup>st</sup> class. The 4d not valid, being past 29 February 1972, the letter was moved at 2<sup>nd</sup> class, 2½p, the deficiency was 1p, doubled for the penalty to 2p.



← **23 February 1975 Inland**

2<sup>nd</sup> class 5½p

The 5d Machin is being used 3 years too late. At this time the 2<sup>nd</sup> class rate was 5½p. The deficiency being 5p, doubled for the penalty, i.e., 10p.