

British Philatelic Automation



Scout FDC coil affixing machine



Stamp burster



Presentation Pack stamp inserter

It was more than 50 years ago when the British Post Office started to use automation to assist with the preparation of items intended for sale to collectors and members of the public seeking a souvenir.

The 1957 Scout Jamboree was the first time that the GPO had offered FDC servicing. With orders estimated at two million by the stamp trade, it was essential to automate the process. True orders were only 60,632 covers, rendering the custom-made equipment and coils unnecessary. It was a long time before further philatelic automation was considered again.

First Day Covers and Presentation Packs continued to be assembled by hand until Stephen Mayer International created viable stamp sheet 'busters' and equipment that fed single stamps from hoppers onto the cover or into the pack. Walsall Security Printers now has a bureau that assembles items for a growing number of Post Office administrations, including Royal Mail.

'Smilers' (stamps with attached photo labels) are produced by mail order or in person at events, where a camera or scanner, PC software and colour printer automates the personalisation of images onto blank label sheets.

The introduction of self-adhesive stamps required new techniques and internal coils in unique formats unavailable to collectors are now often created by the stamp printers for Royal Mail Tallents House use. The first miniature sheet in a self-adhesive format resulted in dummy rolls for testing.

It is expected that future stamp formats will result in yet more specialised equipment and innovative solutions to assist with the processing of orders.



FDC stamp affixing machine



Walsall's pack assembly equipment



Self-adhesive MS stamp affixing



Imperforate between



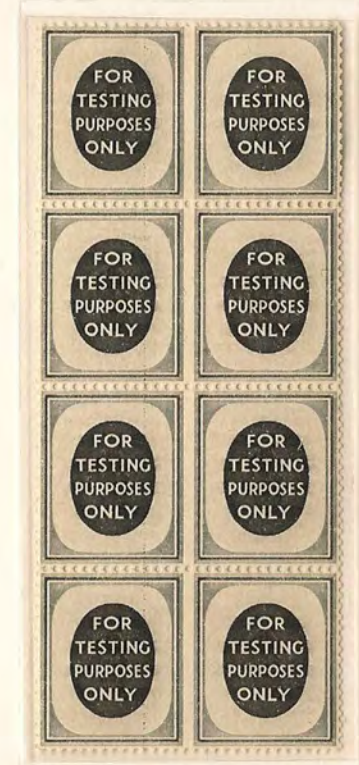
Tudor Crown wmk

The 1957 Scout Jamboree saw three commemorative stamps produced in the usual sheet format and also in unique coils for First Day Cover servicing purposes.

Dummy coils for testing the automatic servicing of FDCs were printed by Harrison to use with the stamp affixing machine made by Vacuumatic Ltd....



Dummy FDC envelope. Note how the stamps were affixed at a consistent angle that slopes down to the right, further proof of machine affixing



Vertical strip of four dummy coil testing labels

1957 World Scout Jamboree

Issued Coil Cover Servicing

....The machine positioned the FDC envelope and applied moisture to top right corner, it then advanced, guillotined and affixed the three special stamps. Cancelling was done later after covers had dried.

Around 120 envelopes per minute could be serviced in this way. The machine was never used again.

(Right) Issued strips of 21 4d stamps proving that they come from coils (sheet stamps were only 20 rows high).

(Far right) Strip of 21 4d value with perforated transparent paper coil join.

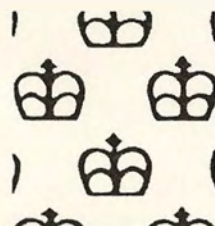


Issued illustrated First Day Cover envelope with stamps affixed by machine





Note 'doctor blade' flaw



Multiple Crown wmk

The GPO *Philatelic Bulletin*, volume two, number one from 1964 gave readers a sample of what they claimed was the World Scout Jamboree testing label. However...

It is printed on multiple crown watermarked paper, which was not introduced until late on in 1958 and was clearly torn from sheets, not coils. Its reason for issue has therefore remained a mystery to this day.

The machines are maintained by Post Office engineers and, to test them, the engineers use specially designed labels. These are very seldom seen by the public and we thought our readers would like to see the labels now in use. For interest we also include a specimen of a label produced specially to test some stamp affixing machines used in connexion with the World Scout Jubilee Jamboree first day cover service. These labels are printed in red, to identify them, and are perforated as for special issues.



Normal testing stamp



Special testing stamp

The incorrectly termed Scout Jamboree testing label on a page extracted from the *Philatelic Bulletin*

1984 FDC Stamp Affixing by SMI

Philmec Brand



By 1984, Stephen Mayer International (SMI) was actively selling its First Day Cover stamp affixing equipment to postal authorities worldwide under its Philmec brand.

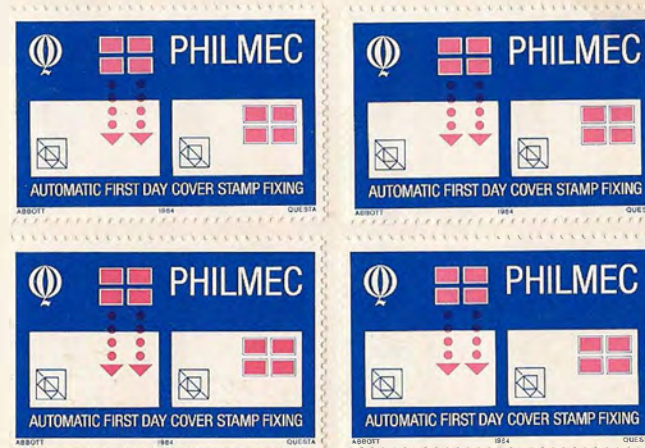
Clive Abbot designed labels that the House of Questa printed. The lilac version was for the IMPA '84 show and blue was for general use, but also used at IMPA.

PHILMECTM

STEPHEN MAYER
INTERNATIONAL
SOLE WORLD AGENTS



For further details contact:
Stephen Mayer International Limited
PO Box 104 Balcombe
Haywards Heath
West Sussex RH17 6PD England
Telephone Balcombe (0444 83) 663
Telex 878110 Beebee G



NOT VALID FOR POSTAGE

Four of the blue labels affixed by machine at the IMPA '84 exhibition to a sample cover

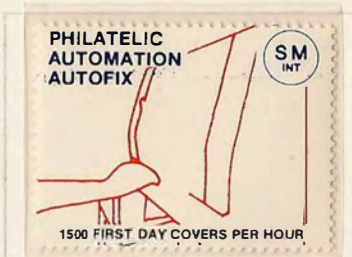


SMI had also developed stamp insertion equipment under its Philmec brand initially. By 1986 it was called Autopak, due to another company already owning the Philmec brand name.

Green or purple Abbot/Questa labels were printed for IMPA '84, while a 1986 Australian version in blue and red in the new product name was also produced for an unsuccessful venture.

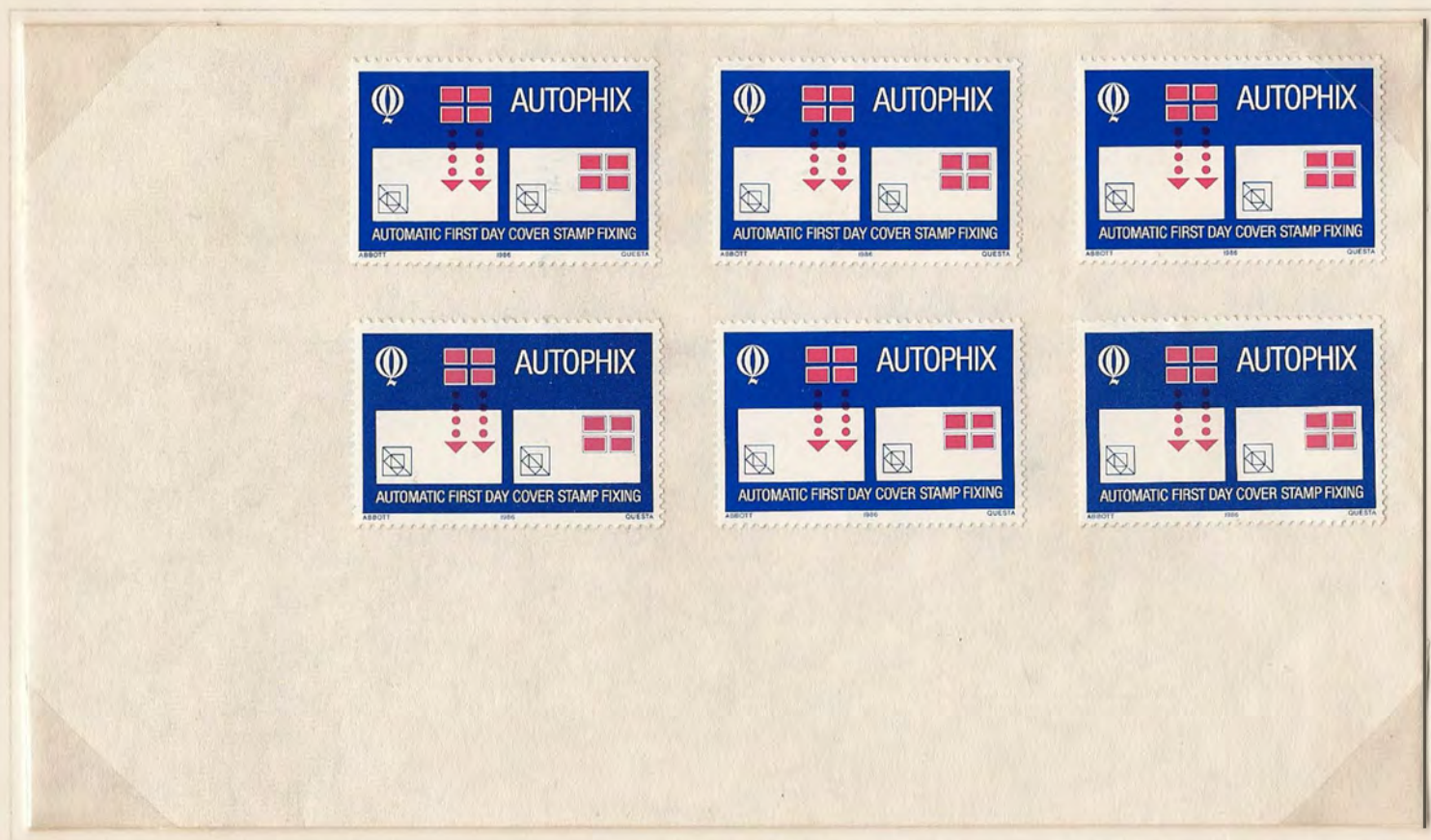


The two IMPA '84 labels, as automatically inserted into a presentation pack stock card



In 1986, SMI also rebranded its First Day Cover stamp affixing equipment, but under the Autophix brand.

The 1984 blue label was reissued to reflect the name change.



Six of the blue labels affixed by machine to an unprinted sample cover



(Above) The first Greetings stamp book

In 1989 *The Sunday Times* magazine gave away pre-stamped Valentine postcards from the Post Office to promote new Greetings stamp books.

The stamp came from a special web printing, disposing of the other unwanted booklet designs and labels. Vertical perforations were cut by Harrison, while horizontal were torn when automatically affixed to card.



This St Valentine's Day postcard celebrates the issue of Greetings Stamps by the Royal Mail. The stamps, available at post offices from January 31st 1989, feature five different 19p designs, with adhesive labels to fit most occasions.

Designed by Ogilvy and Mather Direct, London
Printed by Taylor Bloxham, Leicester.

Reverse showing the coil version of the Cupid booklet stamp. Glue residue to right of rouletting indicates where the card was stuck to magazine page



Mock-up of coil strip of four

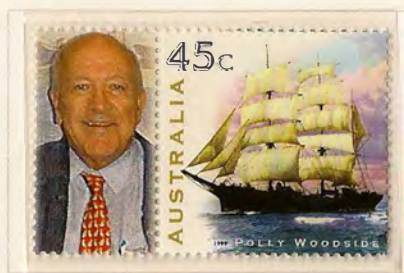
2000 Smilers Personalised Stamp Labels

The Background

In May 2000, Royal Mail experimentally issued Smilers stamps at The Stamp Show 2000. The process involved having your picture captured by camera into a computer and automatically output to a printer that positioned your image onto blank labels.

At Christmas 2000, the service was formally launched to the public and rare trial sheets were created by Questa for internal testing purposes (*next page*). Later developments included use of self-adhesive paper with a change of stamp and label size.

Royal Mail produced labels with their cruciform logo in water-activated and self-adhesive versions for staff use only.



The first ever photo-stamps came from Australia Post and created a sensation at the time of release.

A Stamp Show 2000 Smilers stamp used commercially on mail.

One of ten different stamp designs utilised in each sheet.



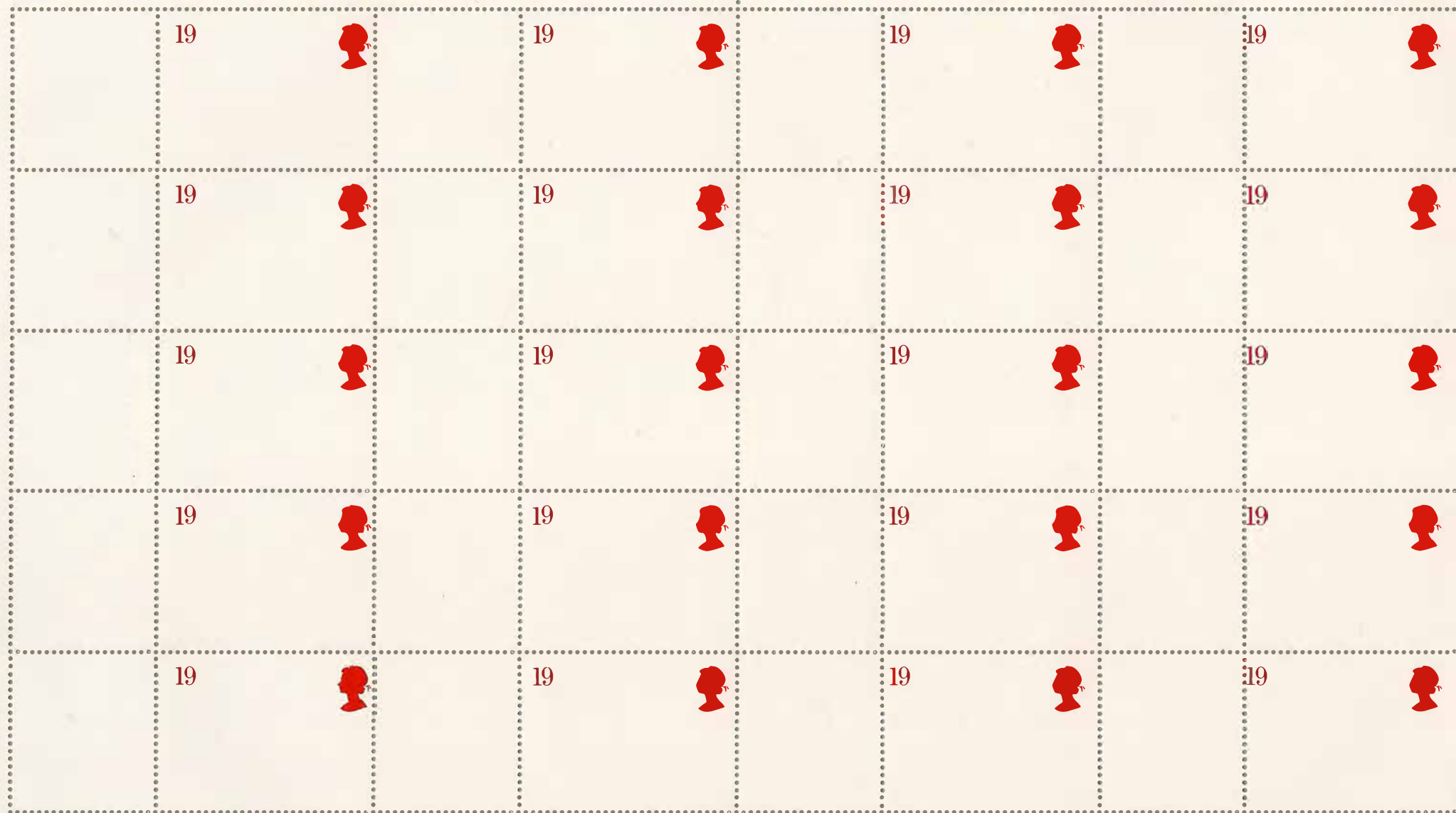
Christmas 2000 second class personalised Smilers from sheets of twenty stamps / labels.

The testing version of this value on the next page is virtually unknown in complete sheets



(Top) Water-activated Royal Mail staff use Smilers stamp / label.

(Bottom) Self-adhesive equivalent with unique blank margins. [These are otherwise pre-printed with a decorative image to help avoid inappropriate text/imagery that might be applied after delivery.]



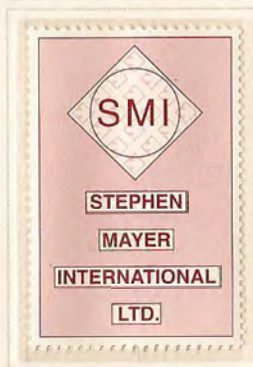


By 2000 SMI had introduced a new sample presentation pack and label in a cohesive green design produced by Top Flight Designs of Bristol, where SMI had moved to from Balcombe.

The brand name for their new SI-310 Stamp Inserting Machine changed again, this time to Stampac.



An SMI branded sample presentation pack with a set of four matching promotional labels within



From early to late 2000, a series of four demonstrations were undertaken to the Post Offices of Italy, Malaysia, Denmark and Belgium of the SAM21 affixing machine. Testing covers were produced during each demonstration.

A red vertical label joined the green label already in use.



STEPHEN MAYER

INTERNATIONAL LTD.

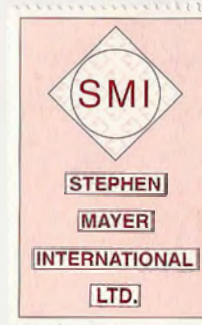


SAM 21

STAMP AFFIXING MACHINE
TEST COVER

SERIAL No. 002 JULY 2000

POS MALAYSIA



SERIAL No. 003 JULY 2000

POST DANMARK

STAMP AFFIXING MACHINE
TEST COVER

SERIAL No. 004 OCTOBER 2000

LA POSTE • BELGIUM • DE POST

At Christmas 2004, a New Year's greetings pack produced by International Security Printers (comprising Walsall, Cartor, Courvoisier and The Philatelic Bureau) was sent to its major postal administration clients around the world.

Examples of ISPs publicity labels were automatically mounted via the latest insertion equipment to show what can consistently be offered to customers.



An ISP branded sample greetings presentation pack with a set of three promotional labels within



Self-adhesive stamps need special affixing equipment and unique coils for automatic processing.

In 2007 the Union Flag stamp design was utilised for an 'Act of Union' cover and dealers were sold excess strips, but told not to let customers buy mint examples. This instruction was clearly flouted.

Royal Mint, Llandisant, Pontyclun, Mid Glamorgan, CF72 8YT



The issued cover. Note how the stamps were affixed at a consistent angle that slopes down to the right. Further visual evidence that they were machine affixed.



Royal Mail issued its first self-adhesive miniature sheet in 2007 for the Diamond Wedding anniversary of The Queen and Prince Phillip. To service covers, unique horizontal coil printings of the sheets were created in a dummy testing version (*photo at left*) and with the issued stamps, minus the B&W imagery used on the reverse of the single sheets (*photo at right*).

Unavailable to collectors, the item below is a mock-up of what a pair of sheets from the coil printing would have looked like.



Mock-up. None of the coil version of the issued sheets have reached the collector market, nor have any of the testing sheets. Two lost opportunities on the part of Royal Mail?