

1935: St Andrew's Cross Testing Labels

Glenn H Morgan FRPSL

'Light Rectangle' is the term mainly used by the GPO to describe this label design. Few collectors would give it this terminology though, indeed 'St Andrew's Cross' has been seen used with greater frequency on album pages and in dealer's listings on the rare occasion that this label has been offered for sale, so is the term generally used within this article. To complicate matters further, it appears that the GPO also called this label the 'Maltese Cross' design in some of its paperwork, which is even less accurate of its appearance!

Most collectors are familiar with the green poached egg labels used in Britain for a short spell from 1936 for stamp vending machine testing. Fewer collectors are aware of its predecessor – a green cross within a rectangle (St Andrew's Cross design) produced in 1935.

These rather bland and rarely seen labels had, until now, been understood to have been printed *after* problems with the poached egg design. However, new research by me in BPMA records reveals the true order in which these labels were used by engineers.



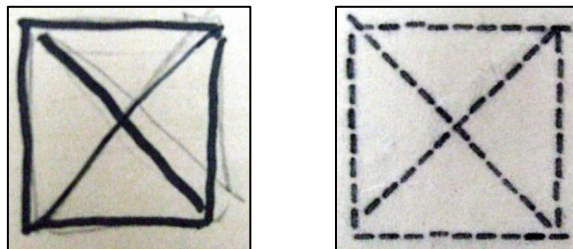
St Andrew's Cross design with misprint showing green ink drag

Technical Details

The labels were printed by photogravure in green ink in the same colour as the then current halfpenny definitive stamp.

They utilised unwatermarked paper, presumably with triple row comb perforation, as with the subsequent poached egg labels. Delivery was vertical, i.e. each label was joined to the next at the top and bottom rather than by both sides (which is known as horizontal delivery).

Designers were a Mr Rhodes and Mr Fanshawe of the GPO and printing was by Harrison.



Original ink sketch and equivalent typed version of the St Andrew's Cross design, as held in BPMA files
(Images courtesy BPMA)

Test Roll Orders in BPMA Files

POST 52/952	Stamp Rolls - Dummy rolls for testing selling machines <i>This is a correspondence file with an index to the thirteen sections at the front. This whole file relates to dummy rolls, from request for, to reference to the contract, order, and supply of.</i>	1922-1954
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<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
1. March 1935	3,100 rolls	Stamp Section, Somerset House	16s 2 1/2d (81p) per 100 rolls	£25.11

This file shows that “3,000 continuous rolls each containing 960 blank gummed pieces of paper” were supplied by Harrison between December 1934 and March 1935 and, while these unprinted labels are the subject of another paper, it serves to demonstrate that until 1935 blank rolls were serving the purpose of testing the vending equipment.

There had been difficulties with the above unprinted rolls (perforations, paper thickness, etc) and on 30 May 1935, the file mentions and illustrates for the first time the St Andrew's Cross design of label. A typed Memorandum from an unidentified person (just a set of initials) states that: “I had mentioned to Mr Rhodes last week and again today the question of unsatisfactory dummy rolls. Mr Rhodes stated that it would be helpful if the dummy rolls were printed with a rectangle of the size of the printed area of a live stamp to serve as a guide to the operatives on the perforating and slitting machines. The additional cost of printing would be small as the paper for dummy rolls has already to be run through the printing machine for guide holes to be punched.”

The file goes on to state that Harrison had an outstanding order for blank dummy labels and that these could be printed “with the proposed rectangle”. A hand-annotated note in the margin shows the proposed label design (see above) and additionally reads: “Mr Fanshawe agrees to the proposal that a printed outline should appear on these dummy “stamps”, but would like the rectangle to be crossed by diagonal lines.” So, one of the most simple of designs ever seen on a stamp, took two people to execute!

On 18 June 1935, Harrison advised PO Stores that: “we consider a light design will enable us to give greater accuracy in measurement. As it is necessary to put the paper through the Printing Machine to make the perforation register holes, a plain design can be very cheaply printed, and we beg to quote 2 1/2d (circa 1p decimal) per 100 rolls extra to the usual price”. Interestingly, the letter concludes with: “It is understood that this particular design can be used for making dummy rolls for commercial purposes”. If the design was used by commercial customers, this may be the source of copies in collections today, rather than a GPO leak of supplies. A revision to the original order B2 placed with Harrison on 12 March 1935 showed that 3,100 rolls were left to print and that these would bear the new printed design.

From June through to August 1935, there is mention on file of problems with the dummy stamp rolls supplied, but it has not been possible to ascertain whether they are referring to the ongoing problem with blank labels or the new printed design. It seems likely that it might be the blank rolls, as one memo states that they are no worse than those previously supplied by Harrison or Waterlow and should be accepted. Unfortunately, the file does not include any details of delivery dates of the printed type of label to enable clarification.

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<u>Order / Date</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Supplied to</u>	<u>Roll Cost</u>	<u>Order Value</u>
2. October 1935	6,000 rolls	Stamp Section, Somerset House	16s 2 1/2d (81p) per 100 rolls?	£48.60?

On 2 October 1935, Harrison was instructed in a letter from the GPO to produce “a further supply of dummy rolls” and requested a delivery date. No quantities were stated in the letter, or to what specification or design the labels should be printed to! However, a hand annotation on the copy letter usefully reads: “11/10 Mr Rhodes promised 5% ***Green**** by end of next week (18/10)”. A subsequent letter from Harrison to W Mason of the GPO reveals that the order had been for 6,000 rolls.

**my emboldened italics to emphasise that it was the St Andrew's Cross design that was being put back on press.*

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The St Andrew's Cross design is mentioned again in POST 52/952 in a letter to Harrison & Sons dated 15 October 1937 from a colleague of the Post Office Controller, who writes: “It is understood that some time must

elapse before deliveries of dummy rolls to the new design* under contract 81045 can be made, and that rolls printed with the "maltese cross" design could not be supplied at short notice".

**The "For Testing Purposes Only" design, further proving that the St Andrew's Cross design was not printed after the poached eggs.*

The letter goes on to request a quotation for 6,000 rolls of blank unprinted paper, as per the B2 order of 1935 (i.e. the portion of the order that had been delivered before the St Andrew's Cross design was introduced).



POST 52/179	Harrison & Sons – Contract Number 72257 – Dummy Rolls for Testing Stamp Selling Machines, 1936-1937 <i>Based on Tender No. C. 1632 covering your letters WHR/DMS of 20 November and 10 December 1935 for 12,000 Rolls for testing stamp vending machines.</i>	1936-1937
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Stores order dated 10 March 1936 for the poached egg design states: "Price includes 11d (4.5p) per 100 Rolls towards liquidation of cost of two cylinders (*one for the 'light rectangle' design already made** and one for fully inked design in photogravure now ordered) at £22 each, spread over a total requirement of 96,000 ['poached egg'] Rolls by 31 December 1943."

**my emboldened italics, emphasising how the St Andrew's Cross design had been printed before the 10 March 1936 Stores Order.*

On 13 March 1937, "The Controller" wrote to Harrison advising that "...It seems unlikely that any further supplies of dummy rolls of the present *designs** will be required ...advise the unexpired value of the two printing cylinders. The cylinders will be taken over by the Department's Control Officer."

**my emboldened italics. Note use of plural word 'designs', implying the poached egg and St Andrew's Cross label cylinders, as any previous dummy labels of that reign had been unprinted.*



The initial order above shows conclusively how the St Andrew's Cross design had been printed and first issued for use about a year *prior* to March 1936, i.e. *well before* the green poached egg design was even conceived, printed or delivered, *not after it* as is generally stated in philatelic publications and on album leaves. Even the second St Andrew's Cross reprint order was executed pre-egg era, as would be expected.

This is yet another example of how the records held by BPMA can help rewrite the philatelic literature and correct so many misconceptions!

Bibliography

No specific articles have been traced and this label has almost never even been mentioned in more general testing label articles.

An album page recently examined stated: "This label was used for a very short time and is not often found. This was succeeded by a plain paper type, also unwatermarked." Files at BPMA show that an order for unprinted labels was not proceeded with and that engineers were supplied instead with the new FTPO grey-black labels, to be the subject of another paper in this series...

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