

BRITISH STAMP VENDING MACHINE HISTORY

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There has not been a comprehensive descriptive and pictorial record of British Stamp Vending Machines (SVMs), just unconnected information in diverse documents and publications. To remedy this, we accessed the extensive resources of BPMA and the NPS library, studied our own literature and communicated with collectors and companies. Graham then produced the detailed *Corel Draw*[®] illustrations; while I researched and compiled the text.

SCOPE

This article solely documents the history of vending machines that sold stamps in coils or booklets via equipment that was either owned or licenced for use by the Post Office. (BASTDC / HTA installed and once maintained thousands of machines located on private premises under a general licence to sell stamps away from Crown Post Offices and these models are the same as those supplied to the Post Office, so are not separately recorded.)

Specifically excluded is Post Office or private equipment that either affixed stamps from coils or sheets, or dispensed stationery, stamps in packets, presentation packs, commemorative envelopes, postal orders, or gave customers change.

Testing of SVMs by engineers is an important aspect, whether trialling new machines or ensuring the smooth operation of existing machines. Dummy coils and booklets were manufactured by Royal Mail's security stamp printers and used until recently, when a policy change resulted in 'live' stamps being used instead because it is cheaper and more accurate than creating unique testing material. This is a huge and fascinating subject, but is similarly outside the scope.

A BRIEF SVM HISTORY

The first postal vending machines sited in Britain away from Post Office premises were privately made and owned, appearing initially in the 1880s, although it was as early as 1857 that the first patent for a stamp-selling machine was applied for.

A piece in *The Times* for 8 May 1858 recorded that a postage stamp distributor had been invented by a Mr Derham of Wakefield. "The instrument was intended for the delivery of postage or other stamps singly to purchasers, so as to dispense with the attendance of an official for this purpose at post-offices. A penny being put into a hole near the top unlocks the instrument, and allows a handle to be used to such an extent as to protrude from between two rollers a single stamp, which the purchaser tears off. One stamp only can be had at a time, and a halfpenny or a smaller coin is rejected."

All of the original machines were extremely crude or complicated to use, mainly being manual with some of a clockwork or motor type. The Postcard and Stamped Letter Company in being granted a licence in 1884 had to agree to have a plate affixed to their machines stating that they had no link with the General Post Office. A later machine from c1890 was known as the Balfour and for one penny could dispense either a 1d stamp with paper and envelope or a one-half penny stamp and a stamped postcard. To effect a dispense it was necessary to pull a handle until a bell rang.

Machines located on Post Office property did not appear until 1891, when ten machines were affixed to letter boxes. These had been produced by the Stamp Distribution Syndicate, but complaints from the public that the mechanism was not always reliable resulted in their eventual removal, as they were bringing down the reputation of the GPO in the eyes of the public. An average of 3,103 stamps per day (each held within a memoranda book) had been sold between May and August 1891, proving that there was a need for such innovation.

In the summer of 1906 so-called 'Kermode' machines, which were the brainchild of New Zealander's Dickie and Brown, had been imported by Mrs Georgina Kermode into Britain and appeared inside Post Offices as an experiment, initially at Threadneedle Street and the House of Commons branch offices. After modifications they subsequently appeared nationwide (termed Type A by the Post Office) and set the standard for most machines that followed.

It was 1921 when SVMs started appearing *outside* Post Offices to service customers requiring a stamp out of hours or at times when the counter service was busy. Sir William Preece FRS (1834-1913), who had retired from the GPO as its Engineer-in-Chief, became interested in pursuing the development of these SVMs and is credited with being instrumental in forming the company that pursued the British patent rights and for developing and improving machines through experience in use. (Sir William appears to have had a fascinating career, for example he brought to this country the first pair of practical telephones seen in Great Britain, but I digress.)

Following prolonged trials with the early machines, the British Automatic Stamp and Ticket Delivery Company installed in 1911 100 pairs of 1/2d and 1d machines with payment made to them on a commission basis. In 1920 the agreement was terminated and the GPO purchased the machines outright. In 1928 Hall Telephone Accessories took over SVM manufacturing and many other producers have followed in their wake.

Post Office machine ownership is still the situation today, although private companies can buy or lease machines directly from the manufacture for their own use for dispensing postage stamps or, when housings are re-branded, for making prescription payments, covering squash court fees, buying savings labels or to pay for other services.

By 1930, the early years of coil SVMs was over and this equipment had become a permanent and useful part of the GPOs arsenal of services to its customers, adding to the bewildering array of street vending automation that could dispense anything from peppermints to cigarettes and razor blades to railway platform tickets, plus many other types of small packaged product, at all hours of the day or night.

New SVMs came and went in the intervening 70 years, but in 2002 there was a major change of policy, as 4000 machines located near Post Offices had already been removed that year without fanfare, with plans in hand to remove another 4700 owned by The Post Office Ltd and retailers. It was agreed that up to 800 would be upgraded with new machines at Post Offices, airports, hospitals and at 30 Royal Mail premises. A spokesperson stated: "Customers no longer rely on vending machines in the way that they used to years ago. Since the 1980s there are more than 55,000 retail outlets which have begun selling stamps."

In these more enlightened days, consideration has rightly been given to the Welsh speaking population of Britain by having explanatory text in English and Welsh (i.e. bilingual) on some machines to be found in that country. No machines unique to Wales have appeared, but a few locations in Scotland did once exclusively use converted retail vending machines to dispense packets of loose Scottish Country stamps.

It is likely that we might soon see the removal from sale of 2nd class booklet stamps from external machines in favour of books of four '1st class Large' stamps, which are needed following the introduction of Pricing in Proportion (PiP) in August 2006. It is also possible that internal machines will not be replaced because the queues at Post Offices are now more controllable and the reason for having them has therefore diminished.

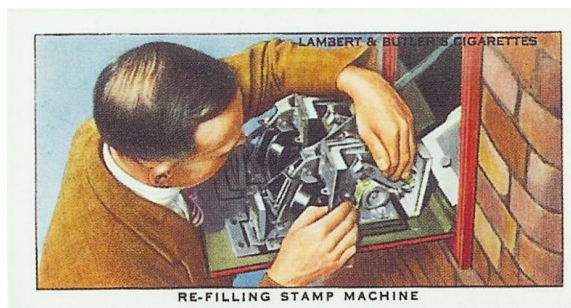
The SVM story has been one of constant technological evolution and response to market demands and change, so who knows what the next 'big thing' in postal vending innovation will be.

THE MACHINES

As touched on above, codes such as Type A1 have traditionally been used to identify a machine to staff and engineers. A number after the letter indicated a modification of some kind – perhaps acceptance of a new coin, the capability to dispense a different number of stamps or a tariff change. Some SVMs were experimental and are outside the traditional coding system and these extra SVMs have been inserted in chronological order and labelled 'Trial' or use the name that the manufacturer had allocated them, especially after The Post Office Ltd took-over responsibility for SVMs from Royal Mail Group plc. To help readers, coil and book vendors are separated into two separate listings.

An explanation of 'Power' in the listings is probably required. If an SVM is shown as being 'coin activated' this means that dispensing will occur when the customer pushes a coin into the slot, as it creates the energy needed and causes a weight to rise within the machine, thus priming it. The coin, on being accepted, releases the mechanism and allows the weight to drop and the stamp to be issued. A 'coin-freed' mechanism, on the other hand, involves the customer in two separate operations. Firstly they have to insert a coin(s) and then they either pull on a handle on the front of the SVM (as Type F) or lift a flap cover (Type G) to prime and release (or 'free') the product.

In the case of modern post-mechanical machines, i.e. after around 1988, the energy required for each dispense is created by electricity or a battery following insertion of a coin(s) or, for Type R, a banknote. A 1987 *Pinpoint* trial machine only functioned by the insertion of a Barclays Bank credit card and dispensed packs of Christmas stamps.



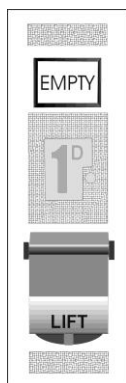
A series of fifty cigarette cards from 1939 relating to the work of the British postal service entitled *Interesting Sidelights on the Work of the GPO* by Lambert & Butler included a drawing of refilling a coil machine.

Each machine has its coins removed and stamps refilled by local Post Office staff. Invariably they are simple to load, although for coil vending it is a requirement that the roll's leader is threaded through various parts of the mechanism and this always looks to be far more difficult to cope with than the booklet machines, where the fresh supply is simply placed in a stack, albeit a certain way up.

There follows a record of all machine types that have been traced by the authors of this article.

STAMPS AND LABELS VENDED FROM COILS

Code	Year	Mechanism	Power	Vended	Producer	Image No
Private trials	pre-1906	Various	Various	Various	Various	-
	Many trials were undertaken with different coil SVMs that had varying degrees of success, or, more often than not, failure! All were of private origin and were not utilised by the GPO, instead most were sensibly just licenced for use by them.					
Trial	1906	Mechanical	Coin-freed	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	Kermode / D&B NZ	-
	On 6 November 1906 the Treasury gave authority for the hire of 12 machines following a successful demonstration of the Dickie and Brown machine by Mrs G Kermode to the GPO in the inner lobby of the House of Commons in August of that year. The test proved to be a great success, having lasted about a week.					
Trial	1907	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	BASTDC	-
	Trialled from 1907 following various modifications by BASTDC, which included a change to the coin acceptance method; much was learnt about their operation and maintenance. The first machine had been installed at the House of Commons on 25 July 1907. 1908 finally saw the extensive in-service trial of 12 hired machines, six used in London Post Offices and six in provincial towns. January 1909 saw the maintenance of the machines by the Post Office Engineering Department for the first time and the installation of a pair of indoor-use machines <i>outside</i> 294 Regent Street, London, working with moderate success for many years. By 1911, the GPO had placed a contract with BASTDC for 100 pairs of 1/2d and 1d machines and payment to BASTDC was based on the number of stamps sold per machine. Some machines were modified in 1918 following an increase in the inland letter postal rates that year to 1 1/2d. The 1d and 1 1/2d machines were adapted to dispense a 2d stamp in exchange for two 1d coins in 1920 following a further rise in postal rates and 106 extra pairs of 1/2d and 2d machines were purchased by the GPO. They were all installed in pairs to give maximum flexibility to the customer and 30 of these pairs continued in service until at least 1937. Experiments with these machines outside Post Offices proved that they required further modifications to prevent dampness and so both the stamp roll and the feeding mechanism were then enclosed in a chamber.					
Trial	1907	Clockwork motor	Coin activated	1 x 1d coil stamp	Abel	-
	The Abel Co. installed a postcard and a coil SVM at GPO East, London. The trial started on 14 February 1907 and finished on 13 July 1907 following complaints from the public about their unreliability.					
Trial	1910	Mechanical	Coin activated	Coil stamp [type?]	BEAM	-
	A machine was installed on 19 November 1910 at the GPO King Edward Building, but it was not found to be acceptable and was scrapped. On 16 February 1911, an improved machine appeared at the same location and this was found to be more popular with the public than the Kermode machines located nearby. The trial machine was in-situ until 1914.					
A	1921	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 2d coil stamp	BASTDC	-
	Following modifications in 1920, a further order for 240 pairs of 1/2d and 2d machines was placed by the GPO. As these were the first general-purpose machine, i.e. they could be used both internally and externally, they received the designation 'Type A'.					
A1	1922	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	BASTDC	1C



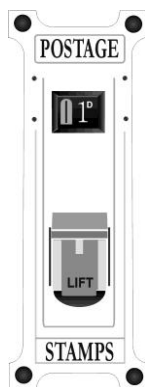
Following reductions in rates, machines reverted to 1/2d / 1d operating. This SVM was in production until 1924, when Type B came into service.

B	1924	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	BASTDC	2C
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1/2d or 1d coins (the final modified version accepted 3d coins) activated these machines, which dispensed single stamps from vertical coils. A total of 1500 extra pairs of 1/2d and 1d machines incorporating all the modifications made to Type A were purchased between 1924 and 1929. 1928 saw BASTDC reforming as HTA. With the prospect of varying face values of stamps being dispensed, the brass casting no longer bore the large 1/2d or 1d.

B1	1929	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	-
Following changes to the loading and mechanism of Type B, it became known as Type B1 and a further 1000 pairs of 1/2d and 1d machines were purchased over the next two years.						
B2	c1930/1	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	-
A 'value analysis exercise' on the design undertaken by HTA resulted in only the front plate and lift flap remaining as castings. 175 more pairs of these modified machines were purchased by the Post Office. Various subsequent changes to Type B2 occurred over the next five years and it has been referred to as the 'Golden Age' of SVMs.						
B3	1932	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	BMR	-
BMR submitted a revised design of SVM similar to Type B1, but with improved coin tester that found favour and was purchased in a volume of 1525 pairs between 1932 and 1935.						
B4	1935	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d, 1 x 1d or 1 x 3d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	3C



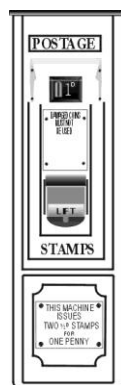
With the removal of Hall's monopoly and the chance to use knowledge gained from the sub-office machines, HTA modified their machines again, creating more mechanism changes and the ability to accept 1/2d, 1d and 3d coins depending on the size of the coin slot, coin tester and escapement weight fitted. Suitable for indoor or outdoor use.

Type B4 was set to last beyond its logical expiry date (decimalisation) because of difficulties in manufacturing and supplying Type G machines. 2700 machines were converted to accept 1p coins and to dispense single 1p stamps, which they did until late into the 1970s. The conversions were undertaken by Barber Weston Ltd, which was able to call on expertise from ex-staff of the BDR operation, which had ceased trading by the late sixties or early seventies.

B5	1947	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 1/2d or 1 x 1d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	-
Further modifications to the long-running Type B4 occurred in the late 1940s whereby the stamps were magazine loaded (using Stamp Loader No. 1) in an attempt at stopping the continuing dampness problems. It appears that trials of 100 new machines were not a success due to 'unforeseen operational difficulties', despite the fast and simple loading technique, and they were replaced in 1953.						
B6?	1958	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 3d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	-
Acceptance of the twelve-sided 3d bronze coin meant that 3d stamps could be issued alongside the 1/2d and 1d machines, a necessity following the postal rate changes of 1958. What the code of these machines was has not been ascertained, although logic says that it will have been Type B6. Dummy 3d 'coins' were requisitioned for testing – probably the only time that this has happened.						

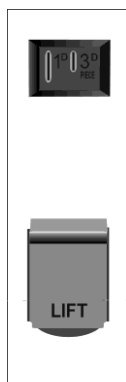
C	1926	Mechanical	Coin activated	2 x 1/2d coil stamps	Hall Telephones	-
In 1926, 15 Type B machines were purchased and successfully modified, as it was necessary to dispense two 1/2d stamps for a 1d coin. These modifications took the form of an increased stroke to the driving bar and modifications to the escapement wheel.						

C1	1930	Mechanical	Coin activated	2 x 1/2d coil stamps	Hall Telephones	4C
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It was decided that by 1930 enough information had been gleaned as to how to effectively supply stamps from outside Post Offices and so attention was now given to the mounting of SVMs on the side of pillar boxes. 950 machines were purchased for this purpose and were designated Type C1 to identify their intended use.

C2	c1930/1	Mechanical	Coin activated	2 x 1/2d coil stamps	Hall Telephones	-
A 'value analysis exercise' on the design was undertaken by Hall, which resulted in only the front plate and lift flap remaining as castings and were recoded Type C2. 100 more of these modified machines were purchased by the Post Office.						
C3	1932	Mechanical	Coin activated	2 x 1/2d coil stamps	BMR	-
BMR submitted a revised design of SVM similar to Type B1, but with improved coin tester that found favour and was purchased in a volume of 1000 machines between 1932 and 1935.						
C4	1935	Mechanical	Coin activated	2 x 1/2d coil stamps	Hall Telephones	-
With the removal of Hall's monopoly and the chance to use knowledge gained from the sub-office machines, HTA modified their machines again, creating more mechanism changes and a recoding to Type C4. These machines were similar to Type B4, but the feed wheel travelled twice as far, thus issuing two stamps. 1/2d coins were demonetised on 1 August 1969 and all 1/2d stamp vending ceased the day before. An exception was made at five London rail termini where TPOs departed from in order to pay the Late Fee. These machines were finally removed in 1970.						
D6	1951	Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 2d coil stamp	Hall Telephones	-
A 2d stamp was issued in exchange for two one penny coins and covered the increased postal rate for postcards, being installed primarily at holiday resorts, hospitals and other places where a heavy card mail was experienced. It had a similar coin testing mechanism to that of the B4, but prevented dispenses with just one coin and when the roll was nearly exhausted it would not drop the EMPTY plate after insertion of just one coin. Models Type D1 to D5 do not appear to have been produced, as numbering jumps straight to Type D6 in all records examined.						
D7		Mechanical	Coin activated	1 x 2d coil stamp	Ass. Automation	5C



This SVM had two slots for coins and accepted both 1d or 3d pieces and any excess coins inserted were rejected. Some machines could dispense two stamps, so presumably if 4d was inserted, then two 2d stamps would be dispensed.

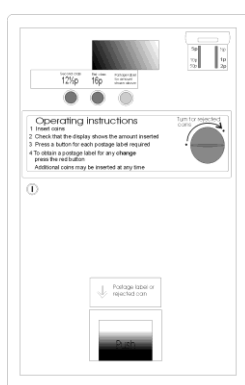
D, E and F *Book machines. (Note that Type D's code was uniquely used for both book and coil machines, presumably in error)*

G	This SVM was designed by Elliott Automation to cater for a wide range of postage rates and was developed in readiness for decimal coinage, initially dispensing five multi-value stamps for one shilling (5p) and a unique facility was that the machines could (but never did) dispense commemorative stamp issues in coils. An order for 10,000 machines costing around £350,000 was intended to be manufactured to replace roughly that number of the rapidly ageing earlier book and coil machines then in service. However, production difficulties and delivery delays resulted in a rethink, as the so-called D-Day (Decimalisation Day) was approaching and Type B4 would become obsolete from that date. A plan to convert 2700 B4s to 1p working was therefore instituted. The Type G SVM should have been a greater success (they were expected to last at least 20 years), but it was shown that around half of the machine malfunctions were caused by petty vandalism, with even more problems caused by dampness in the equipment. The ravages of 1970s inflation also resulted in the demise of a machine that the public never really took to because they disliked having to store the spare small value stamps that were invariably left over from the strip and they took a long while to come to terms with the novel method of needing to lift a large flap to effect a dispense.					
G1	1969	Mechanical	Coin-free	1s Strip of 5 x coil stamps	Ass. Automation	-
Dispensing stamps in strips of 2d, 2d, 3d, 1d and 4d, this arrangement cleverly gave any combination of any amount from one penny to one shilling and provided for easy separating into three divisions of 4d (2d and 2d, 3d and 1d, or 4d) and two divisions of 5d (2d and 3d, or 1d and 4d). It accepted both 1s and 5p coins (which were the same size and weight as the pre-decimal coinage). Type G could be adjusted to dispense strips of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5 stamps and although only strips of five were nationally available, a machine at Cannon Street in London was once set to dispense three red Machin 4d stamps for a one shilling coin, possibly a unique situation. There were initially 22 pre-production-run Type G machines installed in August 1969, nine in London and the rest elsewhere in the UK, with the balance of the production version appearing over the next two years.						
G2	1971	Mechanical	Coin-free	5p Strip of 5 x coil stamps	Ass. Automation	-
A post-decimal version of Type G1, the Type G2 machine dispensed five multi-value stamps for 5p initially in strips of 2p, 1/2p, 1/2p, 1p and 1p. 6000 Type G1 machines were converted. (What ever happened to the other 4000 that had been intended to exist before decimalisation? Presumably the production difficulties resulted in a smaller total order?)						



From 3 December 1975, the Type G2 was progressively converted to accept ten pence coins instead of five pence and to initially dispense five multi-value stamps in strips of 6p, 2p, 1p, 1/2p and 1/2p to cover the 8 1/2p (first class) and 6 1/2p (second class) basic postage rates for insertion of one coin.

Trial 1984 Electronic Electricity Variable value postage labels Frama 7C



After four years of indecision, these machines were introduced on 1 May 1984 at four trial sites (Windsor BO, London KEB, Shirley BO and Cambridge HPO – plans for machines at Edinburgh HPO and Colchester HPO never happened) in a one-year trial as part of the Post Office’s plans to improve out-of-hours sales service. The micro-processor controlled machine issued stamp labels from an imperforate roll, rather than ordinary stamps, and they were a huge success – but only with philatelists who gave them incredible patronage. Unfortunately they were not used much by the general public. They accepted any decimal coin, except for the recently introduced £1 and 20p coins and had three selection buttons for 1st and 2nd class dispensing, plus the ability to issue a ‘residue’ label in lieu of change, or as a make-up value.

They were withdrawn on 30 April 1985 and following evaluation of the results of the experiment it was concluded that the machines ‘did not meet all the necessary Post Office requirements for a nationally acceptable vending machine’. They needed frequent maintenance, were easily put out of action by damaged coins or other items being inserted, and sorting-out the box of mixed coin proved too expensive.

One machine was subsequently located within the National Postal Museum where it dispensed specimen labels with a unique cliché, but only until the machine eventually became irreparable.

Collectors and cynics believe that this SVM was almost destined to fail because they were sited at locations with a minimal out of hours need by the public. It is also rumoured that Her Majesty disliked the rendition of her head on the labels, although this story is probably not based in fact for the Palace would unquestionably have needed to approve the labels before they came into service.

H, J, K and L Book machines. (Code I was not utilised due to potential confusion with the number one)

Trial 1987 Electronic Electricity 1st or 2nd class coil stamps Hillday -

These magnolia coloured machines were designed for internal use within six selected Post Office premises. The first three installations accepted all coins up to 50p and were located at Cardiff, Edgbaston and Kettering from the beginning of May; while in the second type machine located at Grimsby, Newark and Winchester from later that month, the £1 coin was also accepted. 13p and 18p coil stamps in vertical format were available and these SVMs were the precursor of what Hillday internally called Model 1712P (below).

These SVMs were supposed to take pressure off counter staff at busy periods of the day, being sited away from the main counter areas of each location. Date of eventual withdrawal of the six experimental machines appears to have gone unrecorded.

1712T	c1988	Electronic	Electricity	1 st or 2 nd class coil stamps	Hillday	8C
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Known by Hillday in its catalogue as the 1712P, this SVM could accept up to eight denominations of coin and vend between one to four differently priced stamps and give change, depending on its configuration. It was only suitable for use within Post Office premises and was the production version of the trial machine above, but coloured in the more traditional red with yellow lettering for many years. This model has recently been seen coloured turquoise in keeping with The Post Office Ltd branding.

VSS1	1989	Electronic	Electricity	1 st or 2 nd class coil stamps	Verlink	9C
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This machine was designed for indoor only and some machines are still in use.

Trial	1989	Electronic	Electricity	Postage labels	Klüssendorf	-
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A trial was undertaken at PORC to see if postage labels could again be used within the UK, following the demise of the Frama labels. This internal trial did not result in adoption for unrecorded reasons and further details have not been found within official records.

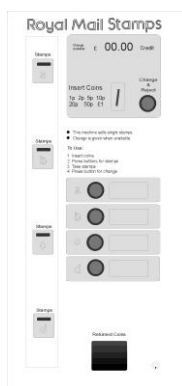
M, N and O Codes not utilised. (M and N omitted in error, O not used due to potential confusion with the number zero)

P, Q, R and S Book machines.

DC22	1993	Electronic	Electricity	2 x 1 st or 2 nd class coil stamps	Meo Products	10C
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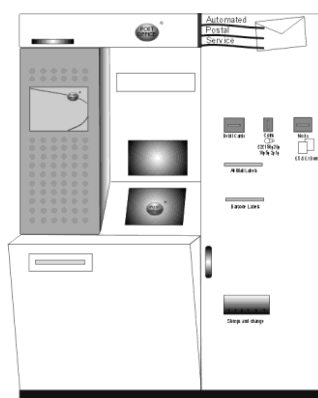


Meo refer to this 'double module coin operated postage stamp dispenser' as the DC22. It could issue two different value stamps supplied from vertical coils and has only been seen vending first and second class NV1 stamps.



Referred to by Coinage as the 'SVM5 Stamp Vendor', this stamp machine could dispense up to four different values of single stamps from vertical coils. They accepted up to nine coins and had a stamp capacity of 4 x 1000 stamp rolls. It was suitable for use within Post Offices and at other locations, such as hotels, shopping arcades and other covered public places.

They now vend 2x1st, 2x2nd but when introduced were installed predominately in tourist areas because they dispensed 1st class, 2nd class, Postcards (outside Europe) rate and Airmail (maximum 10g) rate stamps. The rolls of stamps for postcards and airmail are no longer produced.



The Post Office Ltd installed turquoise Automated Postal Service kiosks at three offices in 2004. They were located at Broadgate in the City of London, Alfreton in Derbyshire and Luton in Bedfordshire and could be used to weigh and pay when sending UK and overseas mail including Special Delivery and Signed for International. The labels created within the machines resembled the counter Horizon system labels and were issued from a roll.

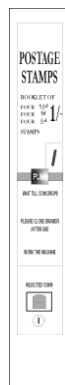
Samkyung of South Korea produced the machines (which weighed a staggering one metric tonne) and they have been successfully launched across that country and in Germany, but were withdrawn in the UK as they were slow to use and proved unpopular with the public (except with philatelists, who were probably the biggest user group).

STAMPS VENDED IN BOOKS

Code	Year	Mechanism	Power	Vended	Producer	Image No
Trial	1931	Mechanical	Coin activated	2s stitched book	BMR	-
	25 of this new type of machine were introduced as an experiment. The public disliked the machines from the start and they proved to be unreliable, largely because coins in circulation went back to the reign of Queen Victoria and they varied greatly in size and thickness causing frequent coin rejection. They accepted either a 2s coin or 2 x 1s coins. This SVM appears to have been abolished by 1938 at all locations.					
Trial	1937	Mechanical	Coin activated	6d stitched book (panes of two)	BMR	-
	These red (later changed to brown) SVMs were introduced on 22 January 1937 at 40 locations with KEVIII stamps in panes of two. It resembled the type familiar to those purchasing, among other things, razor blades (by which name the booklets are sometimes called). All machines were recovered from their locations and scrapped early in 1942, for this machine had proved to be as unpopular as the previous 2s machine. A contemporary description of the SVM stated that "at the top is a slot for your nimble sixpence. At the bottom is a drawer which you pull out after the coin has been inserted." Clearly this is a different layout to the later Type D razor type.					
Trial	1940	Mechanical	Coin activated	6d stitched book (panes of four)	BMR?	-
	This SVM was introduced into service on 1 July 1940 and stood in the Public Hall of the King Edward Building (KEB) in London and dispensed panes of four stamps from a total printing of 10,000 booklets. By December 1941, stocks of the booklet were almost exhausted and spare parts had become unavailable, so the experiment finished in January 1942.					

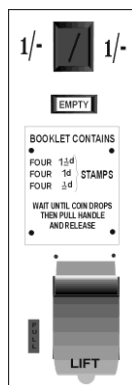
A, B, C and D Coil machines. (Note that Type D's code was uniquely used for both book and coil machines, presumably in error)

D	1947	Mechanical	Coin-freed	1s stitched book (panes of two)	BDR?	1B
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On 12 December 1947, a one-shilling machine was erected experimentally at Tooting Bec, SW17. Further machines were erected at Cambridge on 14 January 1948 and at the London Chief Office, King Edward Building the following day. It is understood that 6 x 6d machines had been converted to one-shilling operating. The first book of this reign was dispensed on 2 September 1953 and only Cambridge remained when the final machine was withdrawn in November 1960.

E	1951	Mechanical	Coin-freed	1s stitched book (panes of four)	BDR	2B
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The development stage of machine booklets ended when the first of a larger-sized book with panes of four stamps for one-shilling went on sale on 3 May 1951 at the Festival of Britain on London's South Bank. This SVM type reappeared in February 1953 in Leicester Square and elsewhere, but did not get the number of installations that it could have done due to the scarcity of one-shilling coins which were increasingly being used in domestic meters. Gradually, they were phased-out and withdrawn from service during 1964 following full conversion by Brecknell, Dolman and Rogers who had started the task in 1959 of moving from 1s to 2s working. These Type E machines were then re-coded Type F.

Trial	1955	Mechanical	Coin-free	2s6d stitched book	BDR?	3B
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A grey-coloured converted lettercard dispensing machine started vending 2s6d stamp books from 17 June 1955 at Charing Cross branch, with two further machines, now coloured brown, appearing subsequently at Gracechurch Street, EC3 and Nottingham HPO.

The mechanism was very large and would not fit standard housings, but was otherwise a success in later field trials of four machines that occurred in 1956. Stacking of the machine was of the 'Maltese Cross' pattern and they were simple to construct and to maintain. However, following development work on a 2s book machine (to become known as Type F) that would fit into the standard housings, the machines were discontinued and recovered from their sites.

F	1957	Mechanical	Coin-free	2s Stitch stitched books	BDR	-
During 1957, work commenced on modifying a Type E SVM to 2s (florin) coin operating that could accept thicker booklets. It was not, however, until two years later in May 1959 that they were eventually field-trialled at 35 sites nationwide, with eventual total conversion in 1964. Some 2500 machines were purchased of this type.						
F1	1971	Mechanical	Coin-free	10p stitched/folded books	BDR	-
The F machines were later able to accept 10p coins (the same size and weight as 2s coins) without being adapted. When conversion to 50p working commenced in 1977, the unconverted 10p machines were recoded F1 to identify them separately from the 'new' F2 mechanisms. The final machine conversion of the 2300 machines occurred early in 1981.						
F2	1977	Mechanical	Coin-free	50p folded books	BDR	4B



Five of these converted models were successfully field-trialled in London in 1979, plus the Conference Centre in Brighton. Alteration, adjustment, replacement and modification of parts were required for this complex change of coin acceptance, resulting in delays.

G	Coil machine.					
H	1979	Mechanical	Coin-free	1 x 50p folded book	Belling	5B



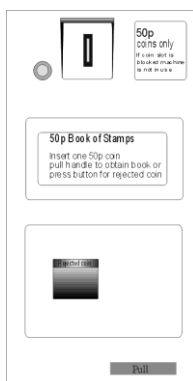
A new machine was designed and field trialled during August 1979, with full installation by the spring of 1981. It was manufactured by Belling Production Techniques (with Associated Automation staff experience) and its success meant that they were subsequently

installed at suitable vending sites outside of Post Office premises nationwide, except in the North East, North West and Northern Ireland postal regions which were served by the new Type J machines. In all, 5000 machines were supplied to the British Post Office.

Belling could not, however, supply the total required production order of 6500 machines, hence the sharing of production with Sterners. This machine could accept up to four 50p coins per dispense, but this facility was, perhaps surprisingly, never utilised.

I Code I not utilised, due to potential confusion with the number one.

J 1979 Mechanical Coin-freeed 1 x 50p folded book Sterners 6B



A further new machine, largely based on an existing Sterner's SVM with only minor modifications, was field trialled in November 1979 with full installation by the spring of 1981. 1500 machines were made and, like Type H, they were subsequently installed at suitable vending sites outside of Post Office premises, but only in the North East, North West and Northern Ireland regions. This machine could accept up to four 50p coins per dispense, but like Type H was never utilised.

FMJ c1983 Mechanical Coin-freeed 1 x folded books Sterners/Hillday 7B



Model 'FMJ' was sold both by Sterners and Hillday and was mainly intended for indoor use, holding up to 160 booklets at any one time. A photograph of the machine in a Sterners brochure from 1991 shows 10p operating at a private (i.e. non-Royal Mail) site. It has been impossible to prove when it was first introduced by Royal Mail for its own use inside Post Offices, but it did appear within a 1989 Hillday brochure in Royal Mail livery. Hillday sold directly to Royal Mail, while Sterners sold to private purchasers, such as shops.

K c1985 Electronic Electricity 2 x folded books Coinage -

Various internal trials at the Post Office Research Centre of a potential new electronic machine proved successful following the creation of a series of prototype machines that were tested for suitability. These trial machines had a short LCD display contained at the foot of the black button area. Coinage beat-off foreign competition to win an initial contract to supply 500 machines, increasing to some 2000 machines over two years at a cost of just under £1000 each.

K1 1986 Electronic Electricity 2 x folded books Coinage 8B



From 29 July 1986, the first five electronic vendors were field-trialled in the Brighton postcode area, with an additional four that were delayed due to planning permission, etc., being installed shortly afterwards. They originally issued 50p and £1 (later £1 and £2) stamp books with wrappers reading 'for electronic vend only'. The success of this model meant that it became the SVM of choice outside

Post Offices, often ousting mechanical machines so long as there was an adjacent power supply. Indeed, it had been stated that the intention was to replace every other type of machine by March 1988.

These machines had, like the original Type K, a short LCD display contained within the black button area. Coinage refers to this machine as ‘Stamp Vendor SVM1’ in its literature and machines could hold up to 440 books in two columns of 220 and accepted up to six coins. There was, at some point, a move away from acceptance of £1, 50p, 20p and 10p coins to £1 only when Royal Mail changed from 50p/£1 books to £1/£2 books.

K2 1987 Electronic Electricity 2 x folded books Coinage 9B



These machines had a short LCD alphanumeric display contained to the right of the black button area and there was, at some point, a move away from acceptance of £1, 50p, 20p and 10p coins to £1 only when Royal Mail changed from 50p/£1 books to £1/£2 books. No change could be given, over-payment was not acceptable and money was automatically returned after 30 seconds delay in completing the transaction.

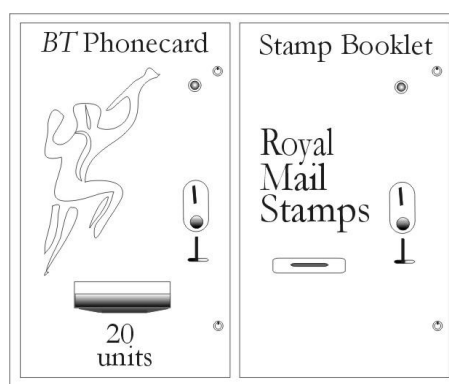
L 1987 Electronic Electricity 2 x folded books Sterners 10B



Sterners produced a Type K look-alike machine that had a long LCD display positioned to the right of the black button area. It is assumed that they were contracted to help the other supplier keep up with demand for this popular SVM outside Post Offices.

Sterners’ literature refers to this machine as an ‘EFM-E2’ and records that it could hold 400 books at a time in two columns. There was, at some point, a move away from acceptance of £1, 50p, 20p and 10p coins to £1 only when Royal Mail changed from 50p/£1 books to £1/£2 book vending. A version of this machine was produced in bronze instead of red for use within Windsor Castle.

Marquis 1987 Electronic Electricity/Battery £1 /£2 folded books Hillday 11B



Marquis in Qbuster Plus configuration

Made to be sited inside Post Office premises, London Bridge Post Office boasted the first installation of the ‘Marquis’ (a smaller version of the ‘Premier’, below). It could hold up to 200 books and was often coupled in the same housing with a machine that could dispense BT telephone cards (when it became known as the ‘Qbuster Plus’). Although primarily intended to be electric vend, battery operation was an alternative offered in situations where electricity was not readily to hand. Approximately 85,000 vends were feasible before the battery needed replacing. A light told customers that the machine was functioning, which extinguished itself when a malfunction occurred, or when it became empty, with a bar ensuring that no further coins could be inserted.

Premier **1987** **Electronic** **Electricity** **£1 /£2 folded books** **Hillday** **12B**

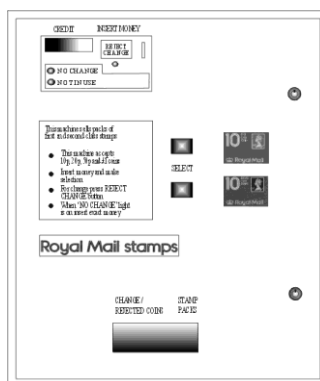


Made to be sited inside Post Office premises, the 'Premier' was the larger version of the 'Marquis' (above), with a larger casing and a window to show booklet cover. This machine held up to 200 books and was often coupled with a machine that could dispense £2 BT telephone cards. Although primarily intended to be electric vend, battery operation was an alternative offered in situations where electricity was not readily to hand. Approximately 85,000 vends were feasible before the battery needed replacing. A light told customers that the machine was functioning, which extinguished itself when a malfunction occurred, or when it became empty, with a bar ensuring that no further coins could be inserted.

Trial	1988	Electronic	Electricity	Window book	Meo Products	-
The Museum of the Moving Image (MoMI) on London's South Bank briefly field-trialled for Royal Mail in 1988 a machine that outwardly resembled a Type K machine installed for visitors as part of a one-machine field-trial. It was a change-giving machine that vended the £1.08 postcard rate retail book. When the compiler of this article visited the museum in 1989, the SVM was behind the coat racks and lockers and was out of use, displaying 'EMPTY'.						
Trial	1988	Electronic	Electricity	Folded counter book	Meo Products	-
Counter books of ten stamps were trial vended from an adapted ticket issuing machine sited within the factory of Meo Products. Nothing came of these experiments.						
Trial	1988	Electronic	Electricity	Folded counter book	Unrecorded	-
The counter sale type of stamp book was also trialled with different equipment of unknown manufacture at the PO Research Centre that year, but again nothing came of this internal experiment.						

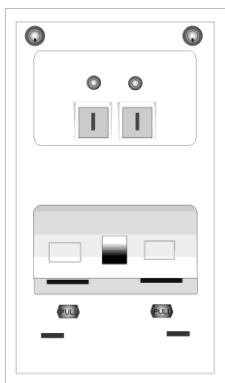
M, N and O *Codes not utilised. (M and N omitted in error, O not used due to potential confusion with the number zero)*

VSS2 **1989** **Electronic** **Electricity** **2 x 1st or 2nd class window books** **Verlink** **13B**



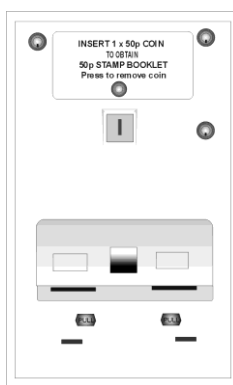
Twelve change-giving electronic book vending machines were produced by Verlink and were seen at the time in Bristol, Bath and Nottingham (at least). This machine was solely for use inside Post Office premises and they dispensed ten first or ten second class window books, accepting 10p, 20p, 50p or £1 coins. Some are still in use.

SIFM	by 1991	Mechanical	Coin-free	2 x folded books	Sterners	14B
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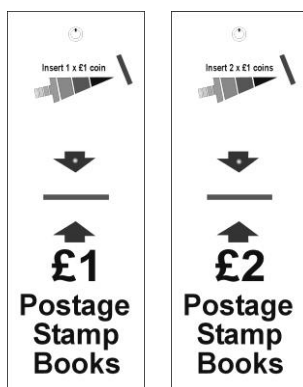
Referred to Sterners as the 'SIFM', this machine dispensed two booklet types having two mechanisms and two coin slots. Each mechanism could be set for one type of coin and stamp booklet and accepted between 1 to 5 coins of the same denomination. (This machine has not been seen other than in a poor quality photograph, where the entire wording was illegible, so no words can be included on the line-drawing.)

HLFM	by 1991	Mechanical	Coin-free	2 x folded books	Sterners	15B
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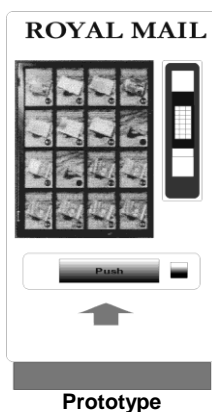
Referred to Sterners as the HLFM, this machine dispensed two booklet types having two mechanisms, but had just the one coin slot.

Mini	c1992	Mechanical	Battery	1 x £1/£2 folded book	Meo Products	16B
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Mini in £1 and £2 configurations

These two machines (known as the 'Mini') are identical, except for their ability to either dispense a £1 or a £2 book of stamps in exchange for 1 or 2 £1 coins. With a capacity of 100 books, they were battery operated with 100,000 vends per battery and appeared at some sub post office locations as private purchases by the postmaster.



In 1994, six machines of the type more normally used to dispense chocolate, sweets and crisps in factory and office canteens were installed only in the London area. What they vended included presentation packs, retail stamp booklets of four and ten in 1st class and 2nd class formats, telephone cards and the so-called PHQ cards (now called Stamp Cards). They were not adopted beyond the trial offices. Interestingly, these machines vended the original 1993 self-adhesive stamp book/sheet long after it had been withdrawn from use generally and, of course, a long way from its intended 'North East England only' trial.

Royal Mail commissioned at least one prototype machine with red-coloured branding which was in an attractive livery by Design and Build and was installed in Princess Street PO, Bristol on 9 September 1998 - office now closed.

B52, P and Q Series

Primarily for affixing to pillar boxes, they could also be mounted in Post Office walls. They accepted only £1 coins and the majority were used to replace existing 50p machines primarily at sub post offices, with others being located at railway stations, airports and what Royal Mail calls 'prestige sites'. Avery knew this range as 'Type P2 long door/short door', which were produced in two lengths to suit apertures from the old machines that they replaced.

B52 Electronic Battery 1 x £1 folded book Hillday 18B



B52s were the precursor to the P series and only appeared in the Norfolk area, due to Hillday being based in that county.

P1 1995 Electronic Battery 1 x £1 folded book Hillday 19B



Hillday was responsible for the creation of the mechanism, while Royal Mail commissioned its street furniture branding company IDEO to create the stylish external appearance. This is a short-case version of Type P4.

P2 Electronic Battery 1 x £1 folded book Hillday -
 Details of the modifications made have gone unrecorded, in fact Hillday make no reference to a P2 in their literature, skipping straight from P1 to P3 models, despite Avery knowing the range as the P2.

P3	Electronic	Battery	1 x £1 folded book	Hillday	-
Details of the modifications made have gone unrecorded.					
P4	Electronic	Battery	1 x £1 folded book	Hillday	20B



This is the long-case version of Types P1-P3 and was introduced to replace the unreliable Type H. By the time that the P4 was fully in service, Hillday had delivered over 2000 of the P series machine (and its predecessor, the B52) to The Post Office.

Q1	Electronic	Battery	1 x folded book	Hillday	-
Details of the modifications made have gone unrecorded, although they did have a slightly different circuit board.					
Q2	Electronic	Battery	1 x folded book	Hillday	-
Details of the modifications made have gone unrecorded, although they did have a slightly different circuit board. This model proved to be the last ever such device because an edict was issued that required engineers to remove all of these (and any earlier) machines still in-situ on the sides of pillar boxes or set into walls.					

R	1995	Electronic	Electricity	2 x 1st or 2nd class window books	Thomas	21B
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Prototype version



Production version

This machine (known to the manufacturer as the Thomas 6001) was the first and only SVM that accepted banknotes (£5 or £10 denominations) as well as coins (10p, 20p, 50p, £1 and £2). They could dispense window books of either ten first or ten second class stamps, holding 100 of each per hopper and 600 were made in total.

These machines should have been the workhorse of the Post Office lasting decades, but because of the denomination of coins accepted, it was necessary to produce and manage stocks of special books of ten stamps. This was because machines could only dispense books with face values in 10p increments, i.e. could not dispense counter books of 12 stamps as no 'copper' or 5p coins, were accepted. This SVM had its external appearance created by Hodges and Drake Design.

DCD1 2000 Electronic Electricity 1 x 1st class folded counter book Hillday 22B



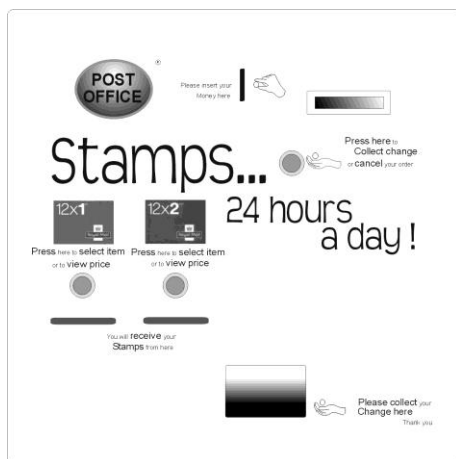
This machine was designed solely for use inside Post Offices and dispensed a single book only. The first ten were rolled out in November 2000. Four examples of this machine were produced in bronze instead of red for use within the House of Commons and were installed on 27 March 2003.

DCD2 2000 Electronic Electricity 2 x 1st or 2nd class folded counter book Hillday 23B

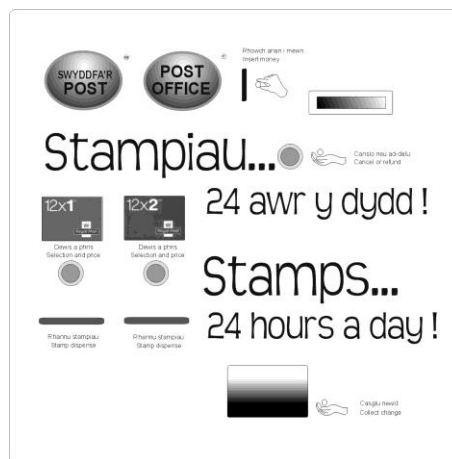


This machine was designed solely for use inside Post Offices and dispensed two different books.

S 2002 Electronic Electricity 2 x 1st or 2nd class window books Thomas 24B



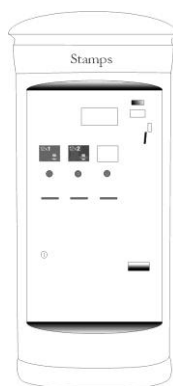
English language livery



Bilingual (Welsh and English) livery

This machine (known to the manufacturer as the Thomas 6002) is coloured turquoise and not the traditional red, being owned and managed by The Post Office Ltd rather than Royal Mail Group. Thomas won the contract following an EU public tendering process that resulted in the company designing, manufacturing and supplying these attractive machines, the first of which was installed on 23 September 2002 at Lutterworth Post Office and put into service that day. There are circa 502 currently in the network and they have proved to be a reliable machine.

T	c2003	Electronic	Battery	3 or 2 x 1st or 2nd class window books	Royal Mail	25B
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These machines were solely for use inside non-Post Office locations, such as airports and hospitals. The large casings are made by Broadwater Mouldings, who make the letter boxes that generally stand alongside these SVMs to form a posting suite. This model, which is used at Heathrow airport and just four other locations, had an unusually long SVM casing with three dispensing slots, although only two of these slots ever appear to have been in use based on collector visits. Most unusually, Royal Mail staff made this machine themselves having sourced the component parts and assembled it in their own workshops.

Prototype	c2005	Electronic	Electricity	2 x 1st or 2nd class window books	Hillday	26B
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This design never got past the development stage and was a prototype model only that was not field-trialled by The Post Office.

MANUFACTURERS

Abel Stamp Automatic Co. Ltd, Germany. Abel produced a pair of trial postal vending machines in 1907 installed at GPO East dispensing either a 1d stamp or postcards. Not reliable, despite the number in use on the continent.

Allied Ironfounders Ltd, Scotland. AIF only produced cast-iron cases, not actual SVMs. The company is probably best known to consumers as the manufacturers of AGA and Rayburn ovens from 1946.

Associated Automation Ltd., London. Formerly Hall Telephone Accessories, Associated Automation of Dollis Hill Lane also made the GPOs coin-functioning telephones between 1928 and 1982. In 1933 the GPO Research Station was built at Dollis Hill and during WWII the components of *Colossus*, regarded as the first electronic computer in the world, were made there and sent to the code breakers working at the once-secret Bletchley Park. The company became part of the Elliott Automation group, which is now part of GEC Alsthom.

Balfour & Co. Ltd., London. This company was granted a licence in 1890 for the automatic vending of postcards and postage stamps.

Belling Production Techniques, [located where?]. No information found for this company that had only a limited involvement with SVM production for Royal Mail (Type H). The business has ceased trading.

Brecknell, Munro and Rogers Ltd. (BMR), Bristol. BMR appears to have been founded by the early 1900s, having previously traded as Henry Brecknell & Son. BMR had started by producing plumbing brassware and was involved in the manufacturing of equipment for trolleybuses. By 1932 they were producing fare collection machines for the Underground network and produced SVMs from this date.

Brecknell, Dolman and Rogers Ltd. (BDR), Bristol. In addition to SVMs, cigarette vending machines were also made by BDR. It is assumed that this company is a further name change for BMR, above.

British Automatic Stamp and Ticket Delivery Co. Ltd. (BASTDC), London. This Kermode-owned company was around from the early days of SVMs having been formed on 31 December 1907. On 22 November 1911 they signed a contract with the GPO to supply them with 100 machines. In 1928 BASTDC was reformed to become Hall Telephone Accessories and changes to manufacturing methods occurred at this point. Previously, polished and lacquered brass was heavily used in construction, whereas items became fabricated from sheet steel or were produced as nickel-plated stampings.

British Electric Automatic Machines Ltd. (BEAM), London. BEAM was the British offshoot of the German Abel Company.

Broadwater Mouldings Ltd, Eye. Broadwater is a producer of housings for post-boxes and SVMs.

Coinage Bristol Ltd., Plymouth. Established in 1963 to manufacture soap-packet vending machines, Coinage now primarily design and manufacture payment and cash automats. They designed Type K, which was the first British electronic SVM introduced to the UK market.

Dickie and Brown, New Zealand. See the Kermode / Dickie and Brown entry below.

Frama AG, Switzerland. Founded in 1970, Frama specialises in franking and weighing systems, folding and enveloping machines and self-service postal and counter systems, plus SVMs. For Royal Mail, they produced the equipment used to dispense the so-called Royal Mail Postage Labels ('Frama labels') in the 1980s pilot project that was not subsequently adopted.

Hall Telephone Accessories (1928) Ltd, London. Incorporated on 21 January 1928 as Hall Telephone Accessories from the old BASTDC, it later became Associated Automation Ltd. HTA opened a factory in Dudden Hill Lane, grew in WWII and again in 1960 and had 920 staff by 1974, which was reduced by 1978 to 600. In 1994 it was listed as one of 633 subsidiaries of GEC-Marconi.



The Abel machine from February 1907 being used at GPO East, London, probably on the first day of its operation

Advertisement from Hall Telephone Accessories showing a B type machine internal mechanism and face plate



Hillday Ltd., Attleborough. The company, formed in 1977, specialises in the manufacture and distribution of automatic vending machines which sell a variety of small items such as stamps, cards, maps, etc. Hillday has supplied not only Royal Mail and overseas POs with thousands of SVMs but also BT, most supermarket groups, as well as many smaller companies, clubs and other organisations.

Kermode / Dickie and Brown, London / New Zealand. In 1906, Mrs Kermode demonstrated to the GPO a machine made by Robert J Dickie and John H Brown of New Zealand, along with engineer W Andrews who produced the first functioning model. Georgina Elizabeth Kermode and her sister Katrine Ellen Fawns were granted a British Patent under licence to Dickie, who Kermode had met on board a ship and had offered to help promote his machines. Eventually, the so-called Kermode machines were to be dominant in the British marketplace after she had set-up the British Stamp and Ticket Delivery Company Limited.

Klüssendorf, Germany. No machines were supplied to the British Post Office network of branches, but the Post Office research laboratories did trial a postage label machine made by them circa 1989.

Meo Products Ltd, London. Meo once supplied vending equipment for many purposes, but has recently pulled-out of this market. It now solely produces specialist equipment for the military, such as night vision goggles.

National Vendors, Chippenham. Crane Merchandising Systems designs and manufactures a range of drinks machines, snack and food merchandisers

under the National Vendors brand. It is one of these models that Royal Mail used at various sites around the country to dispense a range of products including stamp books.

Royal Mail Royal Mail entered the field of SVM manufacturing when they produced Type T. This is their only foray into producing machines.

Samkyung C&C Co. Ltd., South Korea. Established in 1993, Samkyung has developed many products in the field of postal automation; the main one is known as PASS (Postal Automatic Service System) and was developed in 1998. Since then they have provided 60 units of PASS to major local post offices in Korea and many more in Germany. PASS is a self-service system for various mail types such as registered mail, express mail, international airmail and parcels and was trialled in Britain for a short period with three machines.

Sterners Specialfabrik AB, Sweden. This company was established in 1946 and the main areas of manufacturing comprise vending machines for stamps, ticket and phonecard vendors, coin-operated timers and roller-skis.

Thomas Automatics Co. Ltd., Loughborough. Thomas's range of specialist vending machines is based around the secure acceptance of banknotes, cards, and coins and the dispensing of a wide range of prepayment media and other products. It is the producer of the current turquoise 'hole-in-the-wall' machines to be found outside Post Offices.

Verlink Ltd, Farnham. This company only had a fleeting involvement in SVM manufacturing and later sold-out to Meo.

CASES

There have been various cases, mountings and housings for the SVM mechanisms. These used to be made of cast iron or sheet metal, but recently self-coloured plastics or resins have been utilised removing the need to repaint and helping to preserve a pristine image of the Post Office to its public.

The various cases all serve the same basic purpose and have largely been of the same size, differing mainly in things like whether there was capacity for one or two machines, the amount of space allocated to coin storage, the number of locks and whether they were for wall, letter box, window, door, railway station or pedestal mounting.

To combat dampness within machines and therefore preventing the stamp gum from activating prior to sale, the cases sometimes had a simple silica-gel dehydrator installed whereby the crystals would absorb the dampness. In extreme cases a small light-bulb would be utilised to generate just enough heat to maintain dryness within the SVM. An experimental silicon coated roll of stamps was produced in an attempt at combating dampness, but to no avail.

The cases are frequently attractive items, especially the preserved or prototype examples which are now invariably held in private collections by individuals or museums. A selection of what is a huge field in itself is illustrated here.



Left to right:

(1) Birmingham SVM casing produced by local postal engineering workshops, 1980.

(2) 1995 prototype in wood of the production version made by IDEO models.

(3) 1994 unadopted wooden model by IDEO.

(4) "Kiosk number 4" providing letter posting slot, SVMs and telephone services.

Imagery © Royal Mail Group plc, pictures (1-3) and © British Telecommunications plc, picture (4)

MACHINE POPULATIONS

Year	Quantity	Year	Quantity	
1921	100	1965	27,848	
1925	500	1969	10,000	
1930	2,500	2001	9,000	
1935	7,500	2002	800	
1937	13,000	2007	1,178	670 indoor locations
1960	20,000			508 outdoor locations

MACHINE VIEWING

Several machines are located at BPMA's remote store in Debden, Essex and these can be viewed at any of their frequent open days, although most are stored in locked cages so advance warning of your interest would no doubt be appreciated by curatorial staff. Visit www.postalheritage.org.uk where current information and contacts for BPMA staff will be found.

It is also possible to visit the Colne Valley Postal History Museum which is to be found in the grounds of The Laurels, 109 Head Street, Halstead. Visiting days are outlined on the website www.shortal.com/kitmaster-bloke/profile.html. This is a privately owned postal history museum in the heart of East Anglia and the collection has been built up over a number of years by one man and now comprises more than 70 ex-British Post Office letter boxes together with SVMs, documents and associated artefacts. The museum houses the second-largest private collection of post boxes in the UK and is an invaluable resource for teaching and historical research. Regular public open days are held each year, but otherwise there is no general public access other than by prior arrangement by emailing curator@cvphm.org. Steve Knight and his family are renowned for always giving fellow enthusiasts a most warm welcome.

PHOTOGRAPHY

There are lots of opportunities to see current machines in Post Offices, hospitals, airports and shopping malls across the UK, but always carry identification and obtain permission first if you intend to photograph any SVM (or letter box!). Not only is this courteous but, if you fail to ask, you may be seen as a security threat and could face police questioning or arrest – especially when inside or outside Post Office branches.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Barry Eastwood and Ian Davis of The Post Office Ltd. and David Miles of Avery Weigh-Tronix Global, who all totally embraced the idea behind this article and ensured the accuracy of the modern-day content by sharing their considerable knowledge and practical experience gained in working with postal stamp vending equipment.
- David Hunt, Gavin Dickson, John Richards and Steve Knight for provision of many of the SVM photographs used to complete the line drawings.
- Dr Jean Alexander FRPSL for verifying the accuracy of the early history of stamp vending, an area in which she has immense knowledge.
- Staff at BPMA for their considerable assistance in helping track down material within their extensive archival records.
- SVM manufacturing staff Eric Sterner (Sterners), Arthur E Brugger (Hillday), Charles Hailes (Coinage), David Verden (Verlink and Meo Products), and Alan McCourt and Mark Edmundson (Thomas Automatics) for responding to many detailed questions and for verifying dates.

➤ Finally, thanks are offered to the writers of all source material examined, especially articles in *The Bookmark*, *The Great Britain Journal*, *Philatelic Bulletin* and other British philatelic publications, where often a mere snippet of information expanded understanding.

ERRORS AND OMISSIONS

When researching a subject that has received scant coverage, the odd error or omission will hopefully be excused, despite the extensive research and checking that has been undertaken. If anyone can either expand or correct information, then contact via the Editor is both welcomed and encouraged. Readers should note that minor evolutionary changes (different type-faces, slightly amended coin slots, etc.) are intentionally omitted.

MAIN SOURCES

ARTICLES: ENGINEERING

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BPMAs portfolio entitled **Stamp Vending Machines** contained many useful references and images that helped fill-in missing pieces of the jigsaw, as did the various references contained in the relevant **POST** series of archival records, all of which are to be found listed in their on-line catalogue by entering keywords such as SVM, Vending, Dispensing, etc. Visit www.postalheritage.org.uk

COMPANY RECORDS

British Stamp and Ticket Automatic Delivery Co. Ltd., Stamp Affixers Ltd. and Stamp Distribution Syndicate. Files on these dissolved companies are held by The National Archive, Kew.

PATENT APPLICATIONS (SVM, stamp affixing and coil stamp production)

British Patents numbered 2828 (1870), 6568 (1884), 3654 (1891), 7259 (1891), 766 (1903), 19533 (1903), 25875 (1904), 13587 (1906), 13481 (1907), 19500 (1907), 4871 (1908), 16242 (1912), 5462 (1915), 414194 (1934).

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