

Baked Stuffed Haddock

2 Fillets of fresh haddock (about 2 lb each)
2 large sliced tomatoes
2 skinned and chopped tomatoes
2 level tbsps chopped parsley
2 level tbsps chopped celery
3oz melted butter
1 lb fresh white breadcrumbs
3 level tsp salt
Milk



Figure 8. A pane from the 1969 *Stamps for Cooks* booklet includes 15 Machin definitives (three varieties) arranged in a block at right, with a recipe printed in the pane selvage (Scott MH7d).

pensed a coil strip consisting of two 2d stamps and single 1d, 3d and 4d stamps, all with a single band (Figure 6).

The phosphor bands themselves proved to be exceedingly complex, and the composition of the phosphor was changed as the electronic sorting equipment became more sophisticated. In 1969, the Post Office began experimenting with phosphorescence as an integral part of the printing ink, and on December 10 that year issued the 1sh6d stamp with an all-over phosphor coating.

Even by February 1971, when the stamps in shillings and pence gave way to the series in decimal currency, the Machins were well on the way to being regarded as a series to tax the expertise of the most advanced philatelists.

While the ultraviolet lamp became an indispensable tool for sorting out the different phosphors, the stamps at the most basic level threw up new varieties in paper quality, not to mention the permutations and combinations of se-tenant pairs, strips or blocks from coils and booklets.

This was nothing compared to what has transpired since February 1971. The decimal series was launched at the most inauspicious moment: in the middle of a long-running postal strike. Few post offices were open on Decimal Day, February 15, when the nation's currency was decimalized, and as a result, genuine first-day covers are scarce.

The vast majority were dated February 15, but because they were not dispatched until several weeks later, every major office had to apply a cachet inscribed POSTING DELAYED BY THE POST OFFICE STRIKE 1971.

Thus, from the outset, the decimal Machins provided almost limitless scope for the postal historian, as the number of different cachets runs into three figures and tracking them all down has become a lifelong task in its own right.

Even on the most simplified basis

there must be over 200 stamps, distinguished solely by color or value, from ½p to £5, including the NVI (no value indicator) stamps, such as the non-denominated first-class or second-class, European and airmail-rate issues.

Six different firms — Harrison, Questa, Walsall, Bradbury Wilkinson, De La Rue and Enschede — have been involved in their production. The low values have been produced by photogravure or offset lithography.

The high values originally were intaglio printed, then photogravure, and finally back to intaglio. This is not counting the large-format stamps, originally intended for parcels (1977-87), which were revived in a 1999 prestige stamp booklet with intaglio, letterpress (typographed), and embossed and lithographed stamps.

There are major variations in gum (both conventional and self-adhesive), paper, phosphor bands, phosphorescence, fluorescence, inks and perforation (including the security elliptical types).

If you include the regional or country stamps of 1971-2000 with the Machin design — modified to incorporate the emblems of Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Isle of Man (Figure 7) — you are looking at a further 300 stamps on a simplified basis alone.

Add to that the booklet panes and composite coil strips with different values side by side or advertising labels attached, and the permutations are almost infinite. The standard booklets, retail window booklets and the mixed panes from prestige booklets are a major study in their own right (Figure 8).

And don't forget such short-lived experiments as the "landscape" format used for the first experimental self-adhesive booklets (restricted to the Tyne-Tees television area, the only instance of stamp distribution restricted to the area covered by a TV network) and the

so-called Boots retail sheetlet containing a single first-class stamp, confined to the Boots drugstore chain as part of the wrapping of greetings cards.

It is interesting to see how the major stamp catalogs cope with this formidable volume of material. The most basic listing is provided by the *Gibbons Stamps of the World Catalogue*, where almost two columns are required.

This expanded to more than six columns in the "red" Gibbons — its *British Commonwealth* catalog — but volume 4 of the *Gibbons Specialised Stamp Catalogue*, devoted entirely to the decimal definitives, now runs more than 800 pages.

Other British catalogs, such as *The Connoisseur Catalogue of Machin Stamps* edited by James Skinner and the *The Complete Deegam Machin Handbook* by Douglas Myall, provide even greater detail and a more logical arrangement of the mass of data.

I have to say, however, that the *Scott Standard Postage Stamp Catalogue*, Volume 3, offers the best, concise overall survey of the Machins. For one thing, the grouping of all these stamps in one section with MH prefix to their numbers is ideal.

Although Scott does not identify the different printers, every other aspect of the stamps is well set out, with illustrations of the different styles of numerals and the subtle modifications in the portrait.

Now, as the Machin series enters its fifth decade, there is no indication that Royal Mail has any serious intention of abandoning it. Of course, there have been occasional experiments with essays utilizing a more mature portrait of the Queen in line with the evolution of the coinage since 1953.

But Royal Mail has a useful precedent. After all, the entire British stamp series from 1840 continued to portray Queen Victoria as a teenager, right up to the day she died at the age of 84 in January 1901.

The Machin profile of Queen Elizabeth has acquired the same iconic status as the Wyon effigy of Queen Victoria and, in default of any inscription identifying the country that issues the stamps, the diademed profile is immediately recognizable everywhere. ■