

POST OFFICE STRIKE & THE SPECIAL UNITED KINGDOM DELIVERY SERVICES

On 15 February 1971, known as Decimal Day, the United Kingdom and Ireland decimalised their currencies. Regrettably many of us will remember that day!! What many members may not remember is that there was the first full national strike in the history of the British Post Office which took place from Wednesday 20th January to Sunday 7th March 1971. This had nothing to do with decimalisation so was merely a coincidence.

The first issue of the decimal machine stamps was affected by this strike so the First Day Cover for this issue carried an additional handstamp.



Although local mail deliveries were possible in some areas, either where the postmen did not go on strike or as some gradually returned to work, the bulk of the country's postal services came to a complete halt.

The Government announced that the Post Office's monopoly on carrying letters would be suspended for the duration of the strike. Several hundred private posts were set up throughout the country; some of these were of course "philatelic", but many operated with efficiency and transported significant quantities of mail, although normally at a much higher price than the normal first class rate. A number of these posts linked up in an "Association of Mail Services" which provided for transmission of letters from post to post across the country, and also to overseas destinations. Considerable use was also made of the existing alternatives, and of course the Armed Forces had their own postal arrangements.

The strike dragged on for seven weeks as the Union and the Post Office were unable to agree. Eventually, faced with rapidly worsening finances, the Union Executive proposed a public enquiry as a peace plan to Employment Secretary Robert Carr. A ballot resulted in a majority for ending the strike, and postmen were told to return to work at 9am, Monday 8th March.

Incoming Mail to the UK.

Malawi Post Office.

On 6th February the Malawi Post Office announced a 'Special Airmail Delivery Service' (S.A.D.S.) to England, linked with a Private Mail Service for onward transmission. The 3/- Paradise Flycatcher (SG319) was overprinted '30t Special United Kingdom Delivery Service' as a surcharge for this service and is listed as SG369. Approximately 500 only commercial air letters using this stamp were carried. Each air letter (tourist issue) with a 8t decimal coinage stamp (SG371) and strike provisional received a special red S.A.D.S label in Malawi and on arrival in the U.K. the private local stamps were affixed and cancelled as shown below. I have covered the address with a white piece of paper.



Readers will note the 10p Randall Postal Service label that was affixed and cancelled Chelsea 3 Mar 1971. Given that this air letter was cancelled in Malawi on 1 Mar 1971, 2 x days for it to arrive at the Randall Postal Service is quite remarkable. The design on this 10p label was introduced when decimalisation took effect. Prior to this a large arrow and London skyline was used to make up the design.

Other Examples of Incoming/Outgoing Mail.

In theory any country sending mail to the U.K could affix bird stamps to the envelope/parcel; the only obvious restriction is that the currency must be valid at the time of posting. Quite a large number of Commonwealth currencies changed from £sd to Cents/dollars etc in the late 50s & 60s and bird stamps issued by these countries (as listed in Collect Birds on Stamps) are not that numerous. Nevertheless the number of possibilities for mail coming into the U.K. is large.

Below is an example of an outgoing mail item sent to Finland on 3 March and on arrival the Finnish Postal Service added a 30p Golden Eagle stamp which was cancelled on the 15 March (day of arrival). Below that is another example of an item sent to Canada. I am unclear as to what arrangement the U.K. had with overseas countries; there are several examples of letters sent to many countries where stamps of the destination country have been added.





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Hundreds of private mail delivery companies were used to deliver mail throughout the U.K during this strike. Many cities and large towns produced their own stamps or used a pre-decimal stamp and overprinted it – a small selection are shown below:





Many of the postal services were provided by taxi cab companies, who could act as local couriers.

The 3p Obese Penguin was revalued 15p and used throughout Wales. The Obese Penguin may have the greatest girth. Its rarity is due to its short life span, and it has recently been discovered that it is the only bird in the world to have type II diabetes. I am not entirely convinced that these facts are true or 'fake news'; maybe members may be able to clarify?



Alderney produced a whole range of stamps that were overprinted with the destination country.



Last Day of Issue



Literature Available.

Catalogue of British Postal Strike Stamps – Gerald Rosen 1971 – originally priced at 40p, the only copy found on a reknown Internet site costs \$73.81 for a used copy.

