

GB Meter Franking

Part 4—The Late Twenties and a New Frank

This month, Jack Peach's history of meter franking covers the arrival of Neopost, the development of new machines and the designing of 'stamp-like' franks

By the end of the last article, Edward Kinnard (born Klaber) had left Universal Postal Frankers in December 1924 and with Frank Langdon had developed a new 'Fixed Value' frank machine at his company, Pedersens Gauges. The machine, built on a cast iron base (Fig 53), contained a single frank (initially of 1½d. value) but which could be easily interchanged with other value franks if desired. The gearing needed to operate a counter relevant to the frank value was integral with the particular frank unit.

The prototype machine (and only that machine) was licensed for use in Kinnard's office at 330 Abbey Street SW1 on 24 March 1925, the letter giving this approval noted that the machine was already in use!

A company called Neopost Ltd was formed to market the machine. It will be recalled that Kinnard's brother, Augustus David Klaber, had formed the office equipment company, Roneo, and after his death in 1915 his son Emile became Managing Director. Not unnaturally, then, Roneo was appointed the sole sales agent for Neopost.

On 30 April 1925 Mr Kinnard sent to the Post Office two unnumbered specimen frank impressions which he was proposing to use. He pointed out that it was 'practically undistinguishable (sic) from the old design. You will see, however, there is no break in border but that the word "fraud" prints if it is improperly used.'

The two marks are illustrated (Fig 51, Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office). It is not known whether the printing of 'FRAUD' was ever put into effect in an operational machine. The design shows the top part of the frank connected to the bottom by 'double arcs' on each side.

Before selling or leasing any further machines Neopost needed Post Office approval. In May 1925 the Post Office suggested that the frank numbers should include the letter 'N' as a distinguishing feature. On 20 July 1925 the necessary approval was given. The first user licenses were granted to Houghtons Ltd, Woolwich Equitable Building Society, British Drug Houses and Pirelli Ltd on 22 July 1925.

Interestingly, the specimen franks sent to the Post Office on 30 April contained a break in the bottom line of the 'Great Britain' tablet, although the use of an 'N' prefix in the number was not confirmed until shortly afterwards. As seen from Fig 52, the break allowed the letter 'N' to be under the number figures, allowing larger numbers. Bearing in mind that the numbers ran from 1 up for each setting office, Mr Kinnard was clearly optimistic.

Presumably the machines first sold in July 1925 were of the single fixed-value

frank type, the customer being supplied with additional franking units of the values required. In the book *The Roneo Story* by J S Dorlay (See Bibliography) mention is made that Langdon produced a '4-value unit for the original base'. The writer assumes that this allowed the franks to be changed without removing them from the machine.

A letter from the Post Office to Neopost, dated 6 March 1926, gave approval for a 'Neopost Franking Machine with four stamp attachments'. There is a handwritten note at the bottom reading 'Mr Kinnard says the price will be £50 as compared with £30 for the single value machine.'

How this machine worked is not known by the writer, but it may have been by a similar principle to that illustrated in Fig 46 (Part 3 of this article). The same Roneo book also mentions that 'completely new 2-value and 3-value models' were introduced in 1928.

Until 1930 all frank dies were of the fixed-value type but a machine might contain one or more of these fixed-value franks. In this context, '2-value model' means it contained two fixed-value franks, arranged so that either could be selected without removal from the machine.

In Fig 52 it is to be noted that there were two 'widths' of semicircle (arrowed). It is thought that these may have related to the mechanism type adopted for the frank units to which they were fitted. The earliest Neopost dies had the wide semicircle and it is suggested that these were from single fixed-value frank units. The narrow semicircle appearing on franks from multiple fixed-value frank units.

The illustration in Fig 53 is part of a Roneo advertisement of 1926. The

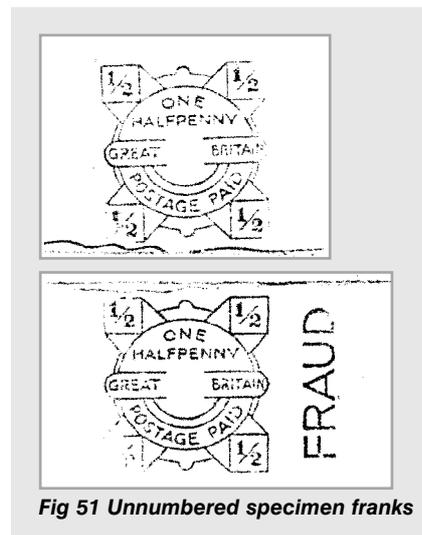


Fig 51 Unnumbered specimen franks

meter machine is clearly one with the original cast iron base.

If any reader can throw more light on these aspects of the early Neopost machines the writer would be most interested to hear from them.

Special uses

Mr Kinnard was nothing if not very much aware of publicity and from the time of his association with Universal Postal Frankers (UPF), he placed emphasis on machines being able to display an advertisement slogan in the mark made. The Neopost machine which produced the slogan in Fig 52 was used by Neopost themselves.

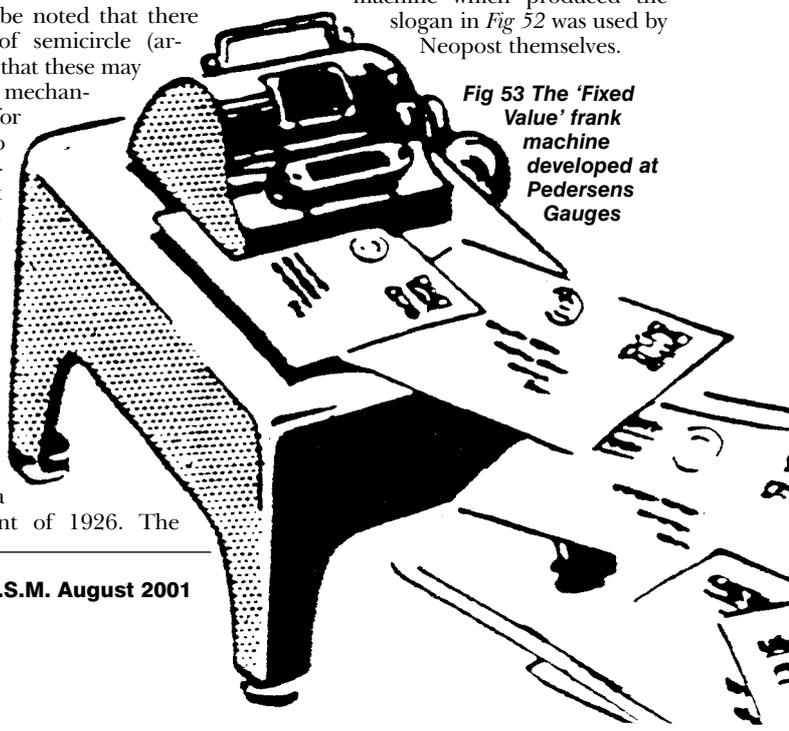
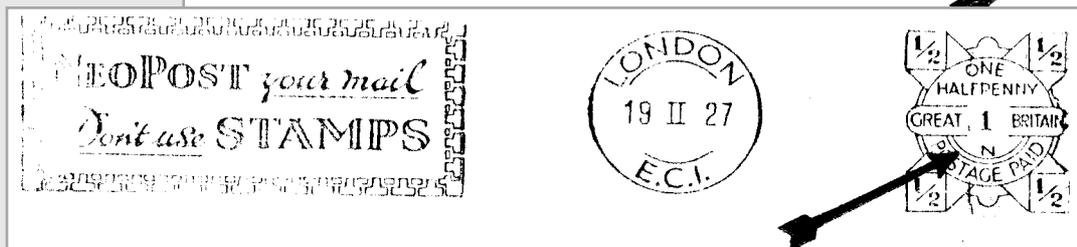
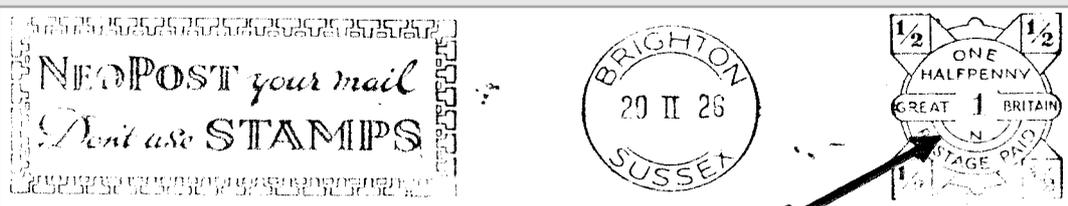


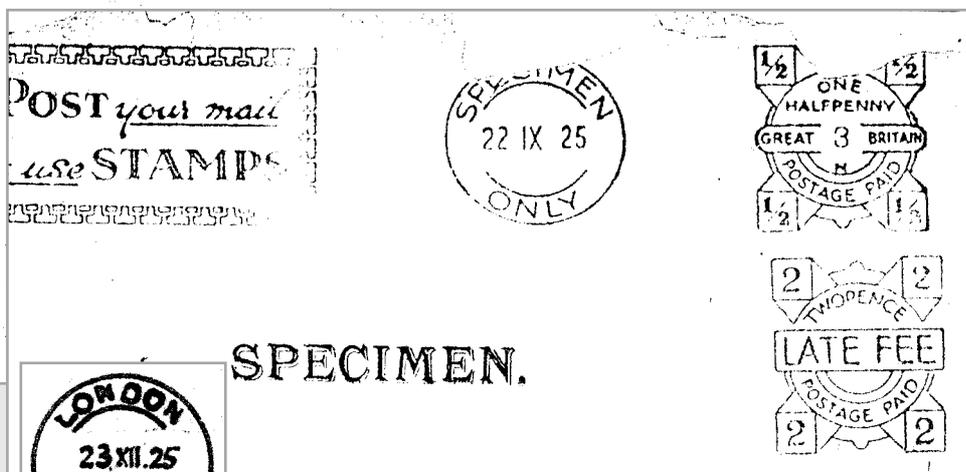
Fig 53 The 'Fixed Value' frank machine developed at Pedersens Gauges

Fig 53
Specimen
franks with
letter 'N' and
frame break
below 'Great
Britain'



LLOYD'S DAILY INDEX.

Registered at the General Post Office as a Newspaper.



SPECIMEN.



Fig 56 Trial frank with
letters 'TNM'—Trial
Neopost Machine

Fig 54 'LATE FEE' frank

Fig 55 Rotated town
mark below frank for
use on wrappers

Another suggestion of Mr Kinnard, but not known to have been used in practice, was the 'LATE FEE' frank shown in Fig 54 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

Firms in the newspaper publishing business who had the need to send periodicals in wrappers through the post were unable to use a normal franking machine. Even if wrappers were passed through a machine before use, the mark was either in the way of fastening the wrapper or, if printed along the side of the wrapper, the resulting town mark and frank were sideways and difficult to read and not approved by the Post Office. Neopost overcame this problem by rotating the town mark and frank die through 90 degrees (Fig 55).

When such a printed wrapper was used, the marks appeared vertical. Two licensees made use of the arrangement—*Financial Times* with machine number N6, London EC2 and *Lloyds Shipping List* machine number N10, London EC3.

By November 1925 Neopost were making headway with their sales and often arranged for prospective customers to try out a machine before purchase. This created problems because the machine had to be sent to the Neopost works for adjustment of the town mark and resetting by the Post Office.

The London Districts were most affected and initially the Post Office suggested the fitting of District initials after the word London using moveable type. Neopost did not consider this practical without leaving

an opening for fraud. On 21 November 1925 the Post Office agreed to a town mark containing just the word 'London' at the top and the letters 'T.N.M.' at the bottom. TNM representing 'Trial Neopost Machine'. The arrangement was to be for a period of six months, the machines being set at one office.

Fig 56 shows the proposed mark as illustrated in the Post Office letter (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

Universal Midget in full production

During 1925 development continued at UPF aimed at producing the production model of the Universal Midget. This machine became available for commercial use in April 1926. The prefix agreed as



Fig 57 Multiple and mixed franks—1½d. Midget dies and 2d. NZ die



Fig 58 Examples of franks designed to look similar to an adhesive postage stamp

part of the machine number was 'M'. The frank design differed from that used in Universal NZ machines by having the top half joined to the bottom by a single-line arc on each side. The machine numbers ran from 1 up for each post town or London district which set the machines.

In early machines, some unused NZ dies were fitted. An example is illustrated in Fig 57 where the 1½d. frank dies are Midget but the 2d. die is of the NZ type.

The size and weight of the Midget machine were small enough for the whole machine to be easily taken to the designated post office for resetting. There was also the capability for the town mark to be moved so that it did not print. In this mode, moving an envelope allowed more than one frank to be printed side by side (Fig 57). The town mark being printed once, in the normal manner. The Midget proved to be a very popular machine.

Three, three the rivals

There were now three suppliers of franking machines in UK: Pitney Bowes (Models A and B), Universal Postal Frankers (Models NZ, HS, and Midget) and Neopost. All franks were of the same general pattern and of the fixed value type, but there were distinguishing features:

Pitney Bowes—Seven wavy bars on each side of frank.

UPF NZ & HS—Top and bottom of frank separate.

UPF. Midget—Top and bottom joined by single-line arcs.

Neopost—Top and bottom joined by double-lined arcs. Line under 'Great Britain' broken.

Naturally, there were one or two exceptions! Early UPF Midget machines used UPF NZ-style franks; less common value franks on Midget machines were in the Neopost style; one UPF HS machine used a Neopost-style ½d. die late in its life. All these exceptions are uncommon and some, quite scarce.

A stamp-like frank

For some time Mr Kinnard had been dissatisfied with the design of frank which the public were associating with invoices, bills and circulars. He felt that a design closer to that of the adhesive postage stamps would be much more desirable. As far back as September 1923 he produced essays showing the King's head.

Fig 58 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office) shows two examples, dated 10 September 1923 and 3 January 1924, together with a contemporary adhesive stamp. For a time, nothing further seems to have happened, then on 12 November 1926 Mr Kinnard visited the Secretary's Office and discussed the design with the

then Assistant Secretary, Brigadier F H Williamson. Kinnard was informed 'there was strong objection to this; we did not wish to have any great variety of design among different franking machines in use.' The main reasons given were the need to send specimens to all foreign administrations and the fact that it might be mistaken for a postage stamp not of the appropriate UPU colour. Shortly afterwards, Kinnard sent the General contemporary examples of French franks which looked more like adhesive postage stamps down to simulated perforations. Fig 59 shows the two (very damaged) envelopes (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

During this period Kinnard had had several thoughts on possible designs for a 'stamp-like' frank and several specimens of these were sent to F H Nichols on 25 November 1926. Two of these are shown in Fig 60 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

In the Secretary's Office under Brigadier Williamson was a Principal, F H Nichols, and under him a Clerk 1st Class, H J Howard. The latter seems to have had a close contact with Mr Kinnard and, knowing the situation in December 1926, sketched out a design which he thought might be accepted. This is illustrated in Fig 61 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

BRITISH STAMPS

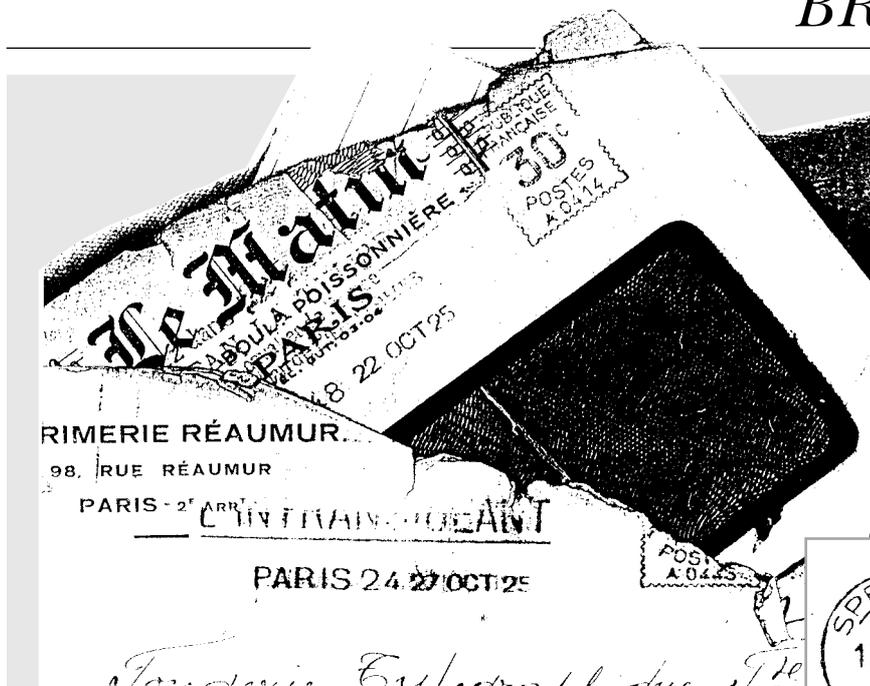


Fig 59 Envelopes bearing French meter franks designed to look like adhesive postage stamps

Fig 61 H J Howard's sketch

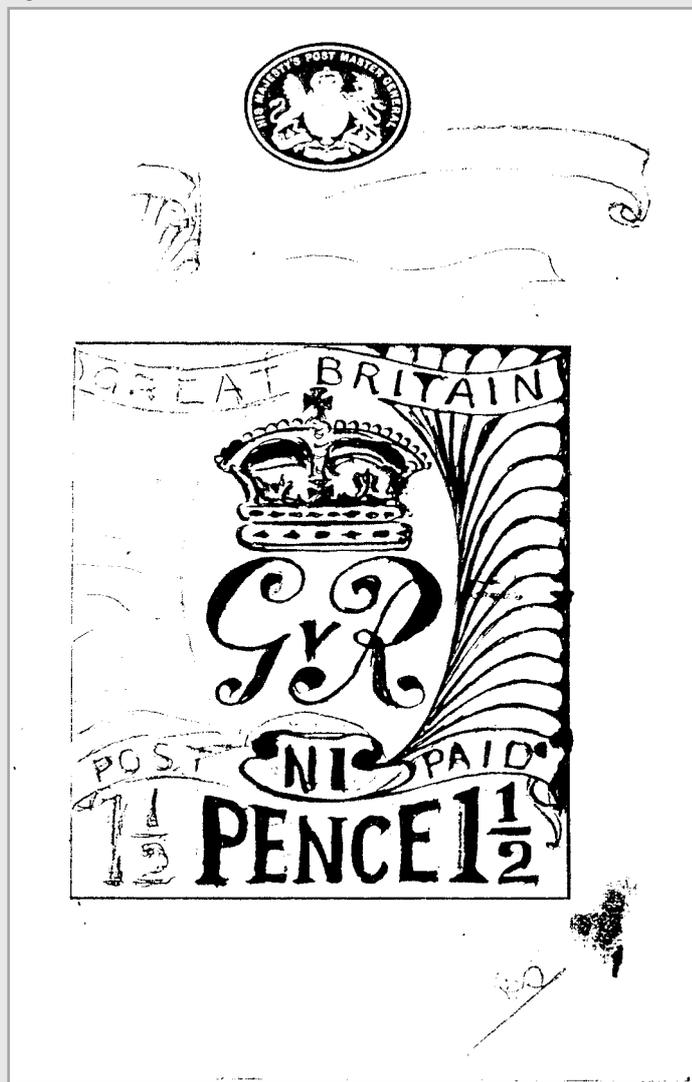


Fig 60 Two suggestions for a 'stamp-like' frank

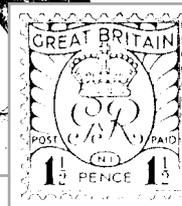


Fig 62 Essays, with and without town die, of Howard's design



Fig 63 Revised design with single figure of value

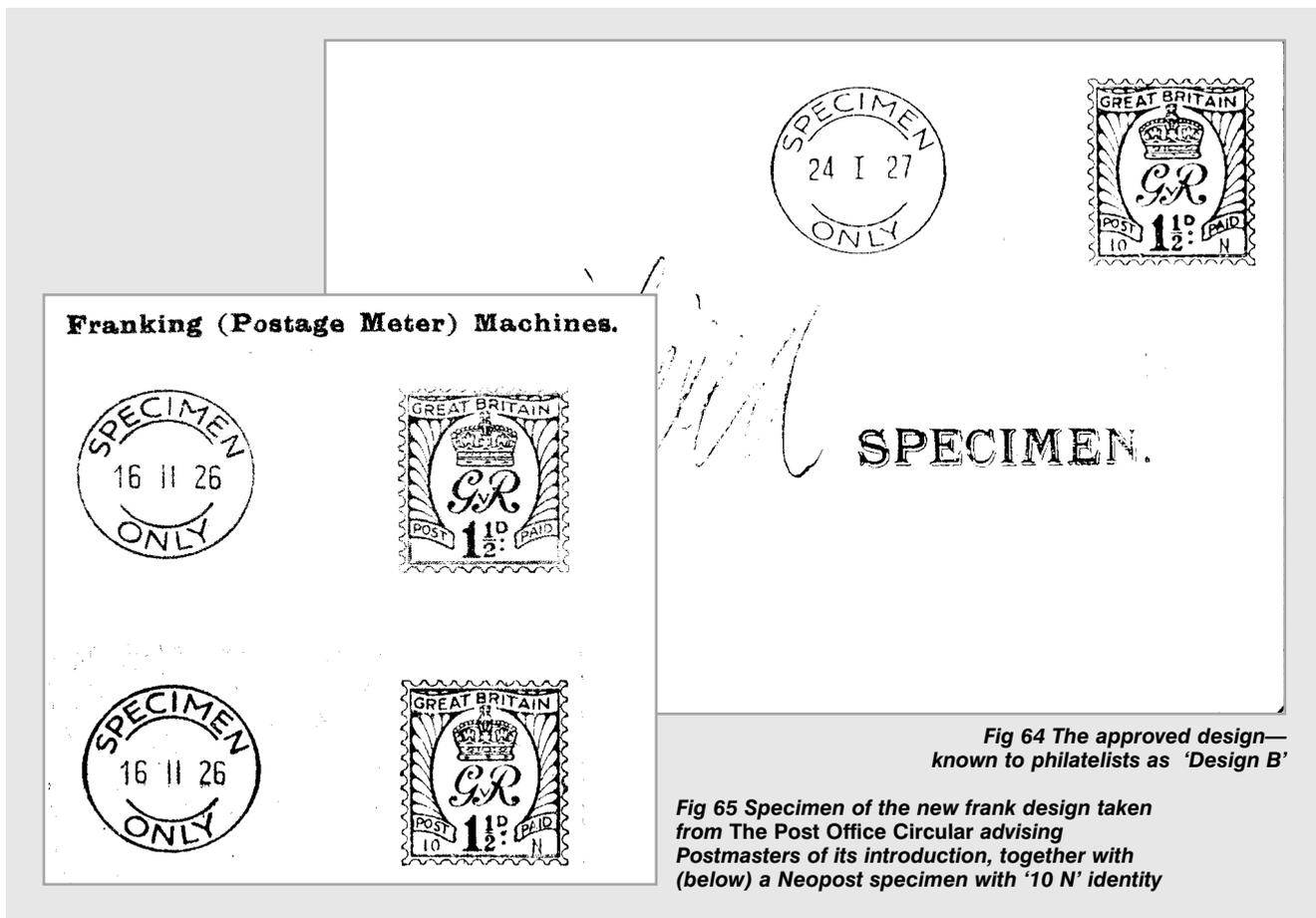
Neopost quickly produced essays of the frank alone in black and also associated with a town mark in red. These were sent to Howard with a letter dated 13 December 1926. They are illustrated in Fig 62 (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

Before any new design of frank could be approved by the Post Office, others had to be consulted. On 14 December a letter was sent to the Home Office explaining what was proposed. On 30 December the Home Office replied that the Post Office letter had been 'laid before the King' and that 'His Majesty has been graciously pleased to approve ...'.

A change was proposed by Neopost, early in January 1927, to place the identity characters on each side of the single central value. It might be presumed that Kinnard had a new model using a mechanism, use of which would really only be possible if there was only one set of value characters rather than two. Fig 63 illustrates the suggested frank. (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

After discussions, involving enlarging the identity characters slightly, the position of the words 'POST' and 'PAID', and making a break in the line below 'GREAT BRITAIN' to more readily accommodate the crown, this arrangement was approved.

Another letter was sent to the Home Office (on 31 January) informing them of



the changes and mentioning that the Postmaster General did not think they 'warrant troubling His Majesty again' but would they please confirm. This the Home Office did on 8 February. On 9 February the Union of Post Office Workers was informed.

The approved design is shown in *Fig 64* with Kinnard's note 'Modified' (Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office).

The *Post Office Circular* of 9 March notified Postmasters of the new frank, stating that it would shortly be brought into use (*Fig 65*, Courtesy Heritage Collections of the Post Office). No machine identity appears in the Post Office Circular illustration because it was to be adopted by all makers and models of machines, although existing machines could continue to use the existing style of frank. Similar specimens of the die but with the identity '10 N' were available from Neopost and an example is also shown in *Fig 65*.

Philatelists came to call this style of frank 'Design B', 'Design A' being the first style, used from 1922.

General adoption of Design B

When UPF discussed the Midget frank with the Post Office it was suggested (in an internal memo dated 24 March) that 'M' and 'N' could be confused in sorting offices and that 'M' should appear on the left-hand side of the value because the Neopost 'N' was at the right. This was confirmed to UPF in a letter dated 29 March.

However, Mr Kinnard had jumped the gun and in the first commercial Neopost franks the 'N' was at the left (*Fig 66*). In the event, it seems that the Post Office let things take their course and identity letters (or prefixes as they came to be known by philatelists) were printed at the left. There was one exception: Pitney Bowes followed the initial instructions and printed their prefix 'PB' at the right. Later it was changed to the left.

UPF Universal NZ machines used the prefix 'NZ'. Early machines with the 'type set' style of town mark continued in use but with the new Design B franks from 3 May 1927. Machines with circular dies adopted the frank from 23 May 1927 (*Fig 67*).

UPF Midget machines used the prefix 'M' from April 1927. There were two sizes of frank (*Fig 68*).

One UPF Special Midget machine used by the Anglo-American Oil Company was fitted with Midget Design B franks, examples are quite scarce (*Fig 69*).

Two Universal HS machines were fitted with Midget franks but with the identity letter 'M' deleted. Examples are very scarce, *Fig 70*.

As already mentioned, Pitney Bowes machines Models A and B (and F, when it appeared in 1927) used Design B franks. In existing machines, when the larger Design A franks were changed, a wide gap was left between the frank and town mark. Slogans still had to be applied by a separate printing operation. *Fig 71* shows the

Great Western Railway Machine 50 with the GWR slogan applied in purple ink.

In later machines and some other earlier machines, the whole die hub was changed with the frank and town mark closer together, leaving room for a slogan. This eliminated the need for the separate printing of the slogan. See *Fig 72*—Barkers' machine 'PB 3', which was one of the first in the UK.

Precancelling by franking machines

One of Pitney Bowes' larger customers was Messrs Arthur Wheeler & Co, Stockbrokers of Leicester. They, together with an associate in Derby, had four machines.

Bearing in mind that each machine could frank 250 items per minute, it is clear that the customer dealt with a lot of mail. In addition to the meter-franked mail, the company sent out large numbers of circulars, the postage being paid by embossed stamps.

These, of course, had to be cancelled by the Post Office. In practice, the embossed stamped envelopes were run through the meter-franking machines solely for the purpose of sealing, no frank being applied.

The Head Postmaster at Leicester discussed the matter with Arthur Wheeler & Co, who intimated that they would be quite willing to cancel the embossed stamps, providing the Post Office defrayed the cost of arranging cancelling dies for fitting to the

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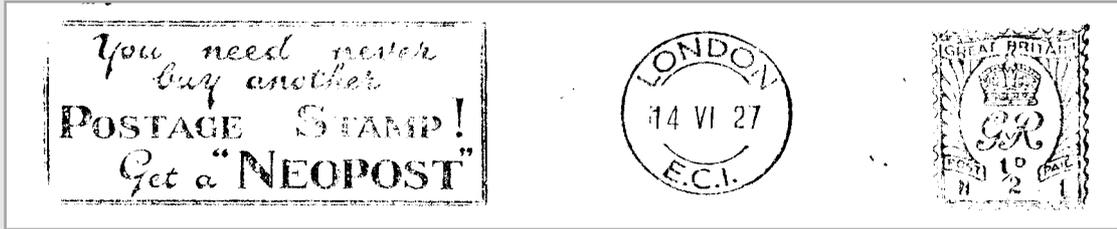


Fig 66 It was suggested that the identifying letter 'M' should be at the left and 'N' at the right. However, the first die had the 'N' at the left and this practice continued

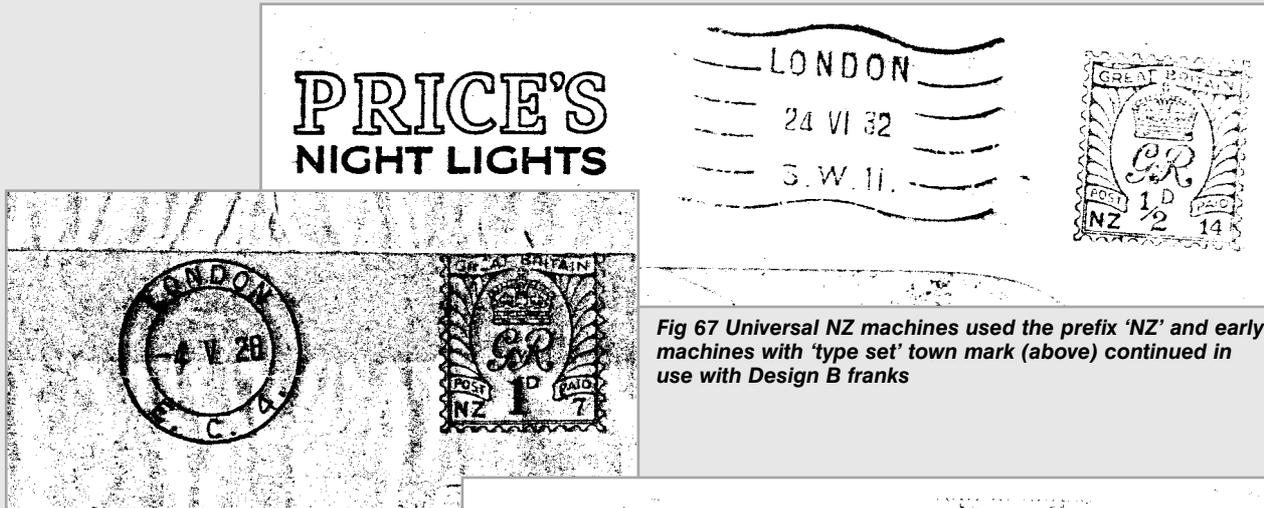


Fig 67 Universal NZ machines used the prefix 'NZ' and early machines with 'type set' town mark (above) continued in use with Design B franks

Fig 68 Midget machines used the identifying letter 'M'. There were two sizes of frank

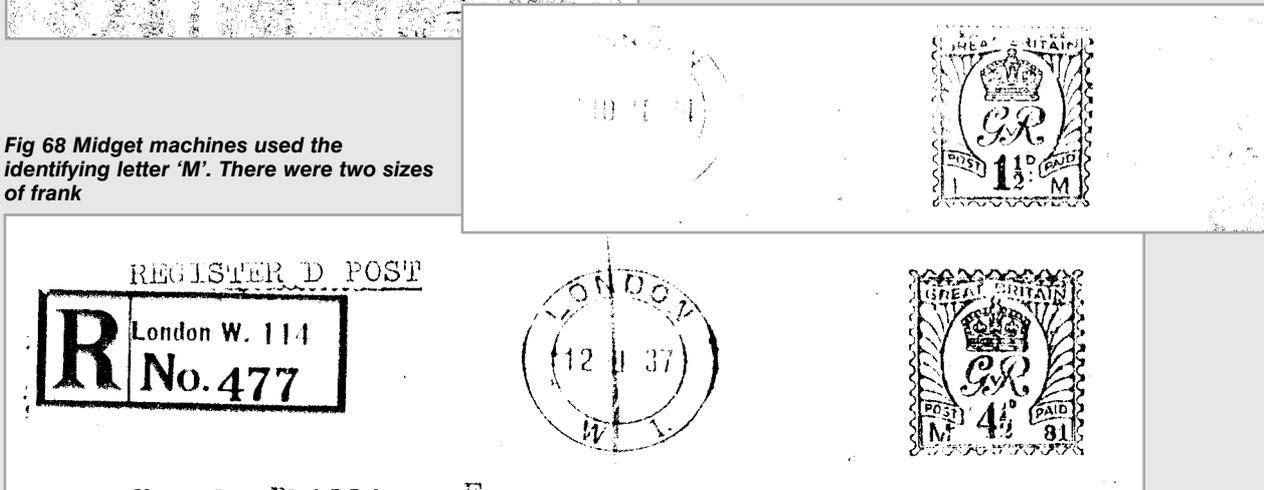


Fig 69 One Special Midget machine, used by the Anglo-American Oil Company, was fitted with a Midget Design B frank

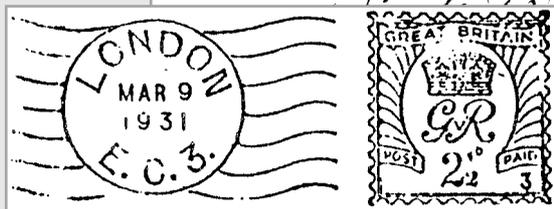


Fig 70 Two Universal HS machines had Midget franks with the identifying 'M' removed

BRITISH STAMPS

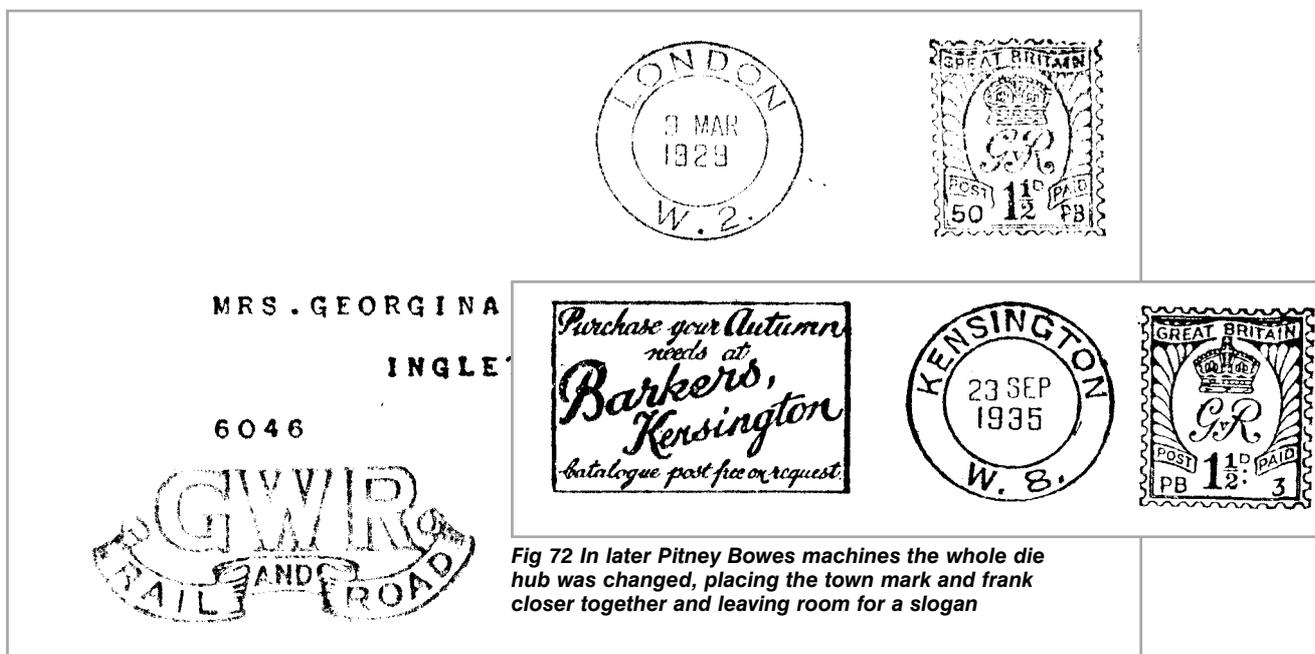


Fig 72 In later Pitney Bowes machines the whole die hub was changed, placing the town mark and frank closer together and leaving room for a slogan

Fig 71 Great Western Railway Pitney Bowes machine showing wide gap between the town mark and the frank caused by the new Design B being smaller than the replaced Design A frank. The slogan was applied separately

Arthur Wheeler & Co of Leicester used special cancelling dies fitted to their Pitney Bowes franking machines (Nos 8 and 9, Fig 73) to cancel embossed stamps printed on circulars (Fig 74)

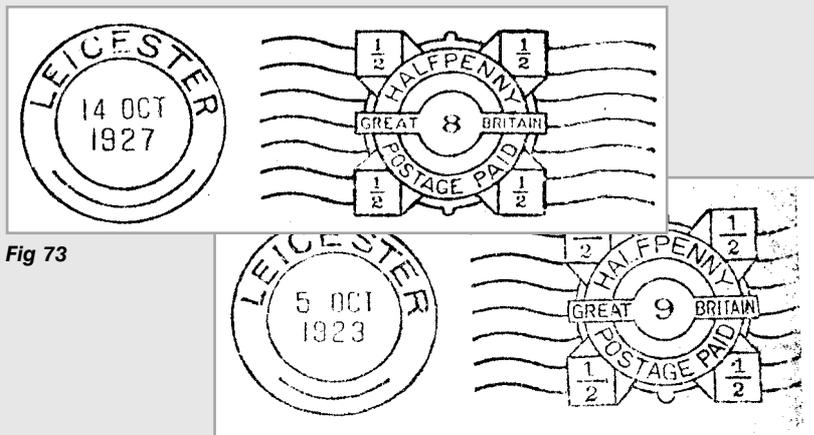


Fig 73

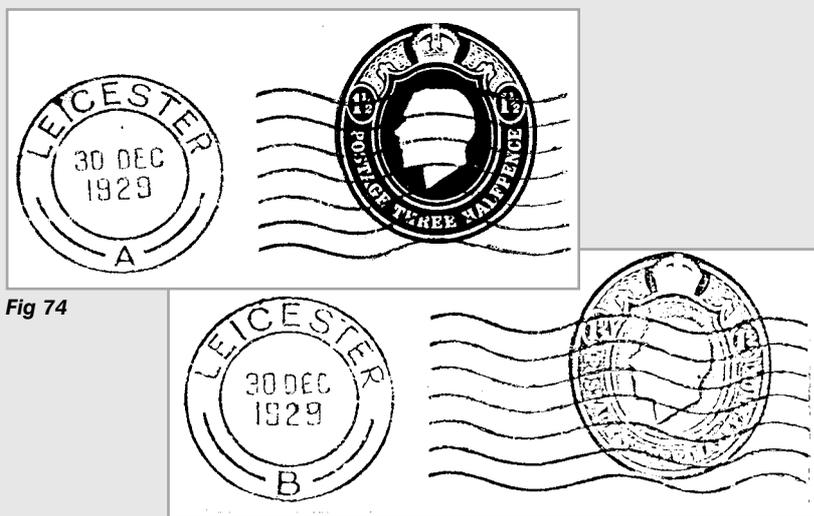


Fig 74

franking machines. The Post Office agreed and the order was placed with Pitney Bowes for two sets of cancellers for a total price of £46.5s., net carriage paid!

The two machines fitted were Nos 8 and 9 and the canceller dies were coded 'A' and 'B'. The meter franks are illustrated in Fig 73 and the cancelling marks in Fig 74.

On 16 January 1928 the Head Postmaster wrote that 493,000 out of a total of 648,000 embossed envelopes had been precancelled. The reason why all envelopes were not dealt with was the necessity to pass envelopes through the machines twice, once to cancel and the second to seal the flaps. Wheeler & Co overcame this difficulty by arranging for Somerset House to emboss the envelopes at the bottom left corner instead of the top right. Both cancelling and sealing operations could then be carried out at the same time.

New model from Pitney Bowes

In September 1928 Pitney Bowes introduced an improved version of their 'table-top' Model B. The new machine was called the Model F and is illustrated (Fig 75). The meter (M), moistener and sealer (S) and water vessel (V) are arrowed. Because the same type of meter was used on all three models (A, B and F) they cannot be distinguished by the marks they made.

Fig 78 The mark made by the Model H machine



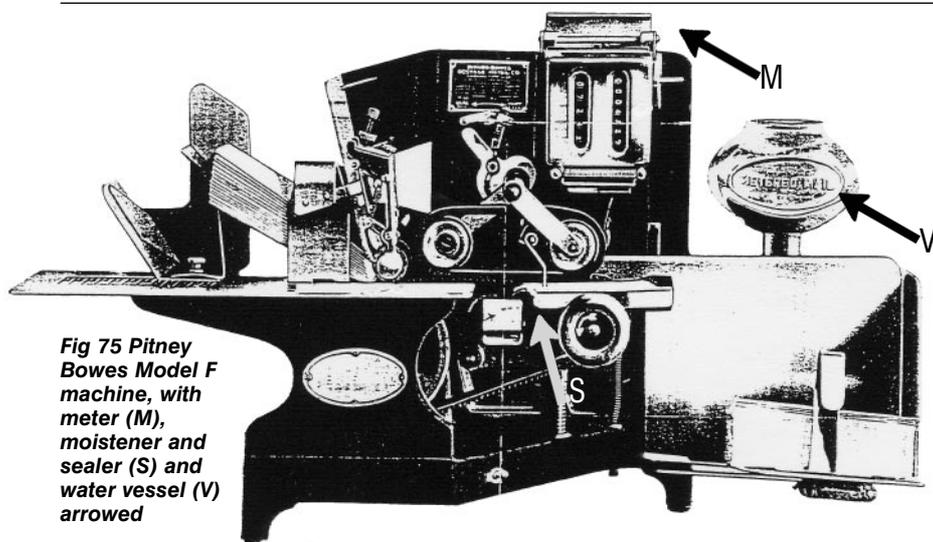


Fig 75 Pitney Bowes Model F machine, with meter (M), moistener and sealer (S) and water vessel (V) arrowed

In 1927 changes had been made to Neopost Ltd. The selling rights for UK were vested in a new company, British Neopost Ltd.

The exclusivity granted to Roneo Ltd in 1925 was withdrawn on payment to Roneo of £3000 as compensation. Neopost Ltd was renamed International Neopost Ltd, keeping the overseas rights.

The single-value machine was small and cheap, selling at 12 guineas. This compared with £83 for the new single-value Pitney Bowes Model F machine. In fairness it must be said that the two machines were not comparable in franking rates or in their ability to seal envelopes.

Competition

The fact that British Neopost and Roneo were both selling into the same market obviously caused problems. By 1928 it became clear that Roneo had the better sales techniques and exclusivity was restored.

By January 1929 the UPF Midget (Fig 76) was offered in two-value, three-value and five-value hand-driven versions, priced at 28, 45 and 60 guineas, respectively. The three-value and five-value machines were also available with electric drives.

Considering the cheapness of the Neopost single-value machine, it is clear that the new Pitney Bowes Model F machine could only expect to attract the larger volume mailing businesses as customers. In September 1929 Pitney Bowes introduced their Model H machine aimed at smaller volume users. From the start, it did not have a great deal going for it. It did have a sealing device but UPF would supply one for the Midget on request and payment of

two guineas, only a few users wanted one! Model H was a five-value frank machine, but most users only wanted a frank for the normal letter rate and one for the printed paper rate, with possibly one other for, say, the foreign letter rate. In any case, both the Model H and the Midget had the facility to print franks without printing the town mark (and slogan). The biggest drawback with the Model H was that it was only available for rental.

During its lifetime on the market, only 62 machines were supplied in the UK and one of those (No H24) was transferred to Eire. Fig 77 shows the machine and Fig 78 the mark made (embracing the five values of franks).

All change

When the Pitney Bowes Model A machine was approved on 19 May 1922, the Post Office letter stated that the Postmaster General 'would expect that machines to be used under this license would be manufactured in this country within a reasonable period.' Mr Kinnard, first from UPF and later from Neopost, did not let the Post Office forget this proviso. By the mid-1920s the UK Government was committed to emphasising 'Buy British' and 'British Goods are Best' whenever possible.

By 1929 the Post Office was wishing to purchase 200 more stamp-cancelling machines from the Walter Bowes' Universal Stamping Machine Company. They wanted the machines to be made in the UK (earlier machines had been imported from the USA). After much discussion and shareholding transactions, UPF became the UK agent for Pitney Bowes and were given the right to manufacture cancelling machines and other postal machinery under all Pitney Bowes patents without royalty payment. UPF took over the Postage Meter and Machines Company.

The extra business made the acquisition of working space a necessity and a small factory was established in Southwark. Machine tools were transferred from Sterling Telephones and manufacturing in Southwark began in September 1929.

The number of franking machine suppliers in UK had now been reduced to two, a situation which was to last until 1967.

The next article will describe major developments in machine operation, some uses by Government in peace and in war and the consolidation of meter franking as a major tool in business post rooms.

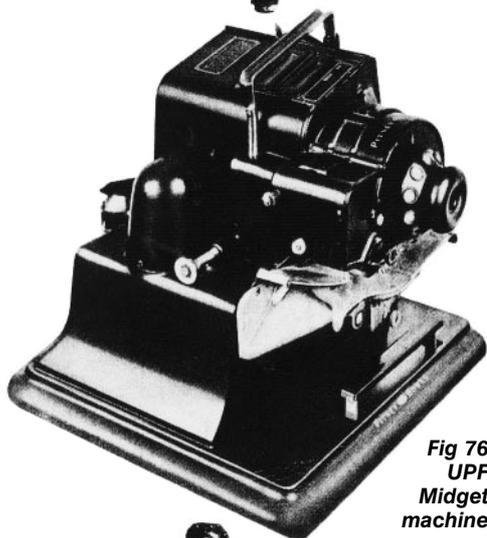


Fig 76 UPF Midget machine

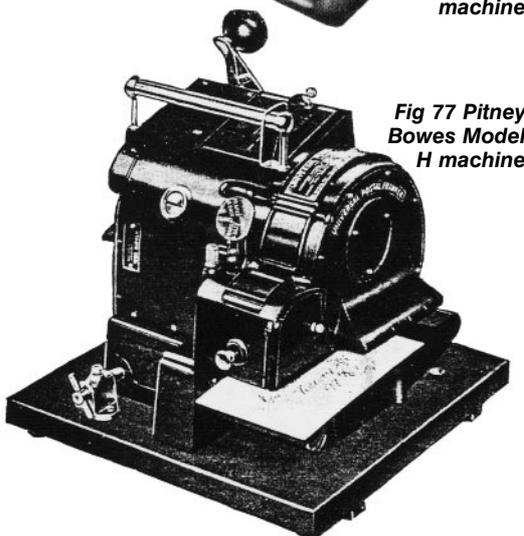


Fig 77 Pitney Bowes Model H machine

