GB Meter Franking

Part 6—Postwar to Decimalisation

Continuing his history of meter franking, Jack Peach looks back at the postwar period, with new machines, new frank designs, and company amalgamations

Peacetime and shortages

The last article brought our story to the end of the 1939-45 war. The factories of the meter machine manufacturers had been primarily engaged in making armaments rather than cancelling and franking machines. Since 1936 the UPF factory had been in Cannon Street, Islington, but by 1946 the lease was due to expire. New premises were found at Edmonton but the 'fuel crisis' during the winter of 1946-47 and general shortages of materials did not help the transfer. The company gained priority support from the Post Office and the Board of Trade so that by the end of 1947 the move had been completed.

UPF had used the telegraphic code word 'Francopost' for some years so, with a slight change of spelling, the Edmonton factory became the Frankopost Works. The name Universal Postal Frankers was a bit of a mouthful for everyday use so the word 'Frankopost' was used in connection with all UPF products. It also made a better comparison with 'Neopost'!

During this immediate postwar period Frank Parfett (in charge of UPF machine development) spent time restyling the Midget which had remained virtually unchanged since its introduction 20 years previously. Frank Parfett, incidentally, had been concerned with franking machine design since he joined Frank Langdon at UPF to develop their first NZ model in 1922. Langdon had left UPF in 1934 to form his own company, Langdon Precision Engineers Ltd, to develop and manufacture industrial machine tools in his factory in Battersea. It will be recalled that Langdon had been responsible for the development of the first Neopost machine with Kinnard in 1927.
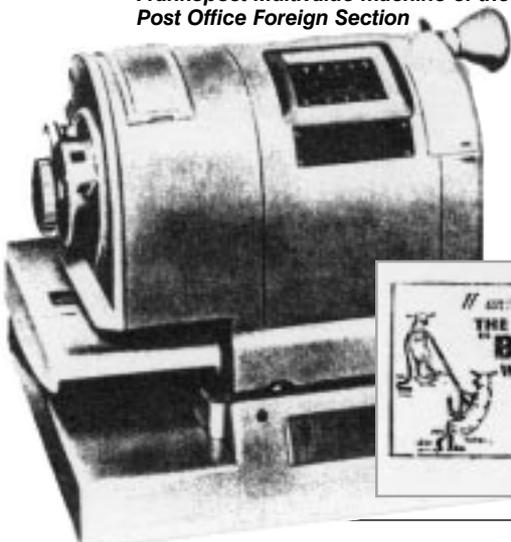
In 1931 Roneo-Neopost had been registered and the production of the Neopost machine transferred to the Roneo factory in Romford, where the modern machines are still made today.

During the war Roneo, like others, were concerned with armament production. When the war ended they were faced with similar problems in getting back to franking machine manufacture as were UPF. At Romford, however, priority was given to making Roneo duplicators; franking machines had to take a back seat. Little or no development took place. The Neopost range had remained unchanged since the introduction of the Limited Value machine in 1930. It was clear that a multivalue machine was much needed. As a matter of fact, Roneo had designed a prototype before the war but it proved too costly to produce and was generally unacceptable. Roneo-Neopost approached Frank Langdon and he agreed to undertake a design.

As the production of franking machines increased it became necessary to extend the prefixes of more popular machines. The 'UA' for the UPF Multivalue was followed by 'UB', 'UC' to 'UF' in George VI's reign and to 'UK' in later years. The Pitney Bowes Model CV followed the prefix 'P' with 'PA' and 'PC' later ('PB' was already being used on Single Value machines).

The restyling of the Midget machine was completed and launched as the Frankopost Simplex with the prefix letter 'S' and later by 'SA'.

Fig 105 (below) Frankopost Simplex
Fig 106 (bottom right) Mark made by the Frankopost Simplex
Fig 107 (right) Cover franked by the Frankopost Multivalue machine of the Post Office Foreign Section
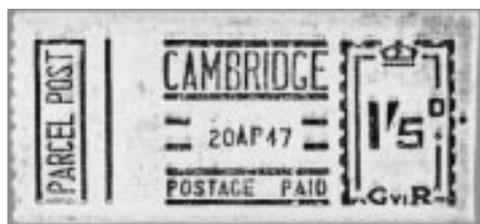
Fig 108 Ticket Issue Machines Ltd
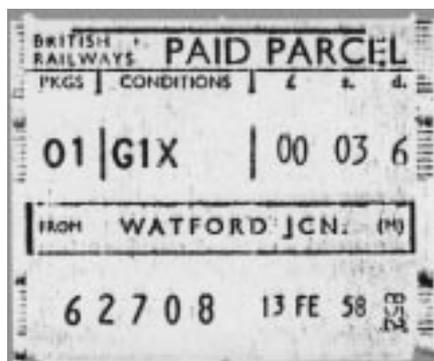Cambridge trial mark

Fig 109 Westinghouse-Garrard Ticket
Machines Ltd used by British Rail

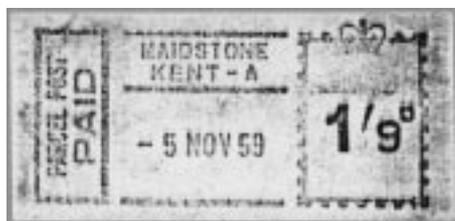Fig 110 Frankopost Simplex trial on tape
from a roll

Fig 111 An example from the Parcel-
Label Printing and Issuing Machine No 2

Fig 112 Frank from the Festival of Britain
Branch Office TIM machine

Fig 113 Specimen examples from the
British Industries TIM machine. The
machine printed its mark in two
operations and the lower example has
part missing

Fig 105 illustrates the machine and *Fig 106* the mark made. The Simplex machine was of the Limited Value type with a range of 13 values from ½d. to 6½d. This was the only new machine introduced during the reign of King George VI.

In the last article some uses of franking machines by the Post Office were described. Another use was by the Foreign Section, mainly on Post Office mail to countries abroad. As far as is known, only one machine was used, a Frankopost Multivalue machine number UB 52. The town mark was London/FS. An example with the added handstamp 'On Postal Service' is shown in *Fig 107* on a cover from GPO HQ to Belgium.

Parcel post

Parcels sent through the post attracted a large number of rates and in most cases more than one adhesive stamp had to be applied. This meant much 'licking and sticking'! By 1947 several machines had been developed which could print money values on to paper tape held in roll form and from which short lengths could be readily separated after receiving a printed value. These machines had been largely developed to provide receipts for fares on buses and trams. The Post Office saw their potential for use at post office counters to produce postage paid labels, gummed on one side, for fixing on parcels.

The first trials took place at Romford and Cambridge between April and September 1947. The two Limited Value machines were made by Ticket Issue Machines Ltd (TIM). The 12 values ranged from 6d. to 1s.5d. in steps of 1d. *Fig 108* illustrates the mark made by the Cambridge trial machine. The example is clearly dated 20 AP 47, although the official date for it being brought into use was 28 April 1947.

The trials were considered successful and the Post Office ordered 100 machines which they called 'Parcel Label Machine No 1'. The main difference in the mark made by the production machines was the wording 'PARCEL POST/PAID' instead of 'PARCEL POST'. They came into use in 1948.

The second type of machine to be tested was made by Westinghouse-Garrard Ticket Machines Ltd. Again, the test was undertaken at Cambridge between 12 December 1947 and 2 November 1948. A further

trial was carried out at Birmingham between 14 February 1949 and September 1950. No orders were placed but similar machines were later used by British Rail (*Fig 109*).

In September 1950 two Frankopost Simplex machines were modified to print on tape from a roll. These were placed for trial at Romford and Birmingham, respectively. An example from Birmingham is illustrated (*Fig110*). Again, no orders were placed.

The last of the series of trials was undertaken on two machines made by Setright Registers Ltd in October 1951, installed at Birmingham and Cambridge. They were Limited Value-type machines and no orders were placed at that time.

Arising from the experience gained in these various tests, a specification was prepared for a two-bank Multivalue-type machine. In the event, an order for 600 machines was placed with Setright Registers. They were capable of printing any value between 1d. and 19s.11d. (in steps of 1d.). Known as the Parcel-Label Printing and Issuing Machine No 2, they came into use in 1959. An example is shown (*Fig 111*). One of these machines is in the Heritage Collections at the Post Office, arranged to print Specimen examples.

A TIM machine was installed at the Festival of Britain Branch Office in 1951. Only 2000 labels were printed (only 73 went on to actual parcels!) so they are not very common (*Fig 112*).

The TIM machine printed its mark in two operations as shown by the Specimen examples from a machine at the British Industries Fair (*Fig 113*—on one the left-hand part of the mark has been omitted).

By 1960 only Setright machines were in use.

New reign, new frank

King George VI died on 6 February 1952 and was succeeded by his elder daughter, Elizabeth—Queen Elizabeth II. The general style of franks remained the same but the cypher was changed to EIIR, there was also a change to the shape of the crown. These franks are known by collectors as group E.

Pitney Bowes Single Value and Model CV meters, UPF NZ, Midget and Simplex machines and Neopost Fixed Value and Limited Value machines all changed to the new style of frank in 1953. Only three NZ machines (numbered NZ 13, NZ 16 and NZ 170) were still in use and no Pitney Bowes Model H machines changed.

In 1953 UPF (Frankopost) introduced a Simplex machine capable of printing 25 different values. This was called the 'Major' model and values ranged from ½d. to 1s.½d. The original 13-value machine (½d. to 6½d.) was called the 'Junior' model. SA and SB prefixes were used with Junior machines. The Simplex Major was more popular and prefixes ran from SX to SZ, then backwards SW to SV; SV being reserved for Junior models converted to Major. One machine, SZ 638, used by
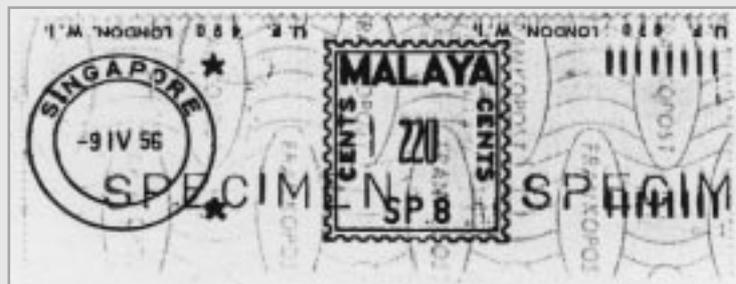
Fig 114 (top) *Label from the modified Simplex Major machine of Draffens of Dundee*
Fig 115 (above) *Specimen label from Draffens' second machine, numbered SL2, on tape intended for the multivalue machine*
Fig 116 (below) *A label anticipating foreign sales of the Simplex*

MacRobertson & Hutchinson of Glasgow, was issued posthumously with a George VI Group D frank die.

Although the normal Simplex machines could not print on to continuous paper tape, it has been mentioned that two machines were modified for the Post Office to produce parcel post labels. In 1955 a similarly modified Major model was sold to Draffens of Dundee Ltd. The values printed ranged from 1d. to 2s.1d. in steps of 1d. The prefix SL was allocated to this model.

Fig 114 shows labels for this machine, numbered SL1. Initially, 'SL1 DUNDEE ANGUS' was printed continuously along the tape. Later, when the company acquired a second machine, the wording was changed to 'DRAFFENS OF DUNDEE LTD. ANGUS'. The second machine, numbered SL2, was supplied in 1956. This was a Junior model with values from ½d. to 1s.½d. Some specimens from this machine were printed on tape intended for the multivalue machine UF 490 (*Fig 115*), later the normal DRAFFEN tape was used. Only two machines were sold in the UK but foreign sales were at least anticipated, as illustrated in *Fig 116* for use in Singapore.

By 1955 Langdon had developed a multivalue machine for Neopost. It was given the name 'Frankmaster' and the earliest model was available for commercial use in that year. The electrically-driven version is illustrated (*Fig 117*). As introduced, the machine was heavy and awkward to handle, bearing in mind that it had to be taken to a local post office for resetting. The features offered were the basic minimum. Nevertheless, it filled a major gap in the Neopost range. Development continued and a redesigned version called the Model 305 was launched

in 1965. During the 'E' frank period, prefixes used were NA to ND. For each prefix, machine numbers ranged from 001 to 999. There were several versions of the Neopost 305 with either 3 or 4 operable banks. From the right of the frank, the first bank printed either '½' or '=', the second bank printed '=' for the nil value, then '1' to '11' ('10' and '11' were printed as if single characters). The third bank used '0' for the nil value, then printed '1' to '9'. The fourth bank again used '=' as the nil value, then printed '1' to '9'. *Fig 118* shows how '2d.' appeared. *Fig 119* is a specimen, illustrating the maximum possible value from a four-bank machine and shows '11' as a single character. *Fig 120* shows a frank on a piece of continuous tape.

As with the Simplex, one machine, numbered NA 156, used by James H Lamont of Edinburgh, was fitted with a G VI R Group D die posthumously. It would appear that the machine was originally supplied with an EIIR die. It has been suggested that the user requested a G VI R die for patriotic reasons!

At Universal Postal Frankers their design team had been commissioned to redesign the multivalue machine. The new version was launched in 1958 with the name 'Automax'.

Three-bank machines had the value range ½d. to 9s.11½d. and four-bank either ½d. to 29s.11½d. or ½d. to 99s.11½d.

Hand-driven models could print up to 40 items/minute and electrically-driven models up to 80 items/minute. The earliest recorded date for commercial use was 12 November 1958, although Specimens with earlier dates are known (*Fig 121*).

The prefixes used with Group E franks were A and AA, each prefix catered for numbers from 001 to 999. *Fig 122* illustrates each of the prefixes. Some early machines had a small '=' sign as the nil value in the first bank, also shown.

Fig 118 A frank from the Neopost 305

Fig 117 The electrically-driven version of the Neopost Frankmaster
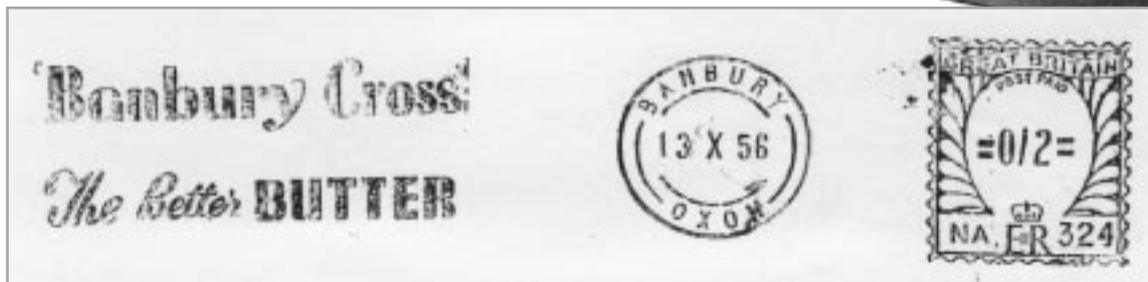
Fig 119 A specimen from the Neopost 305 showing the maximum possible value

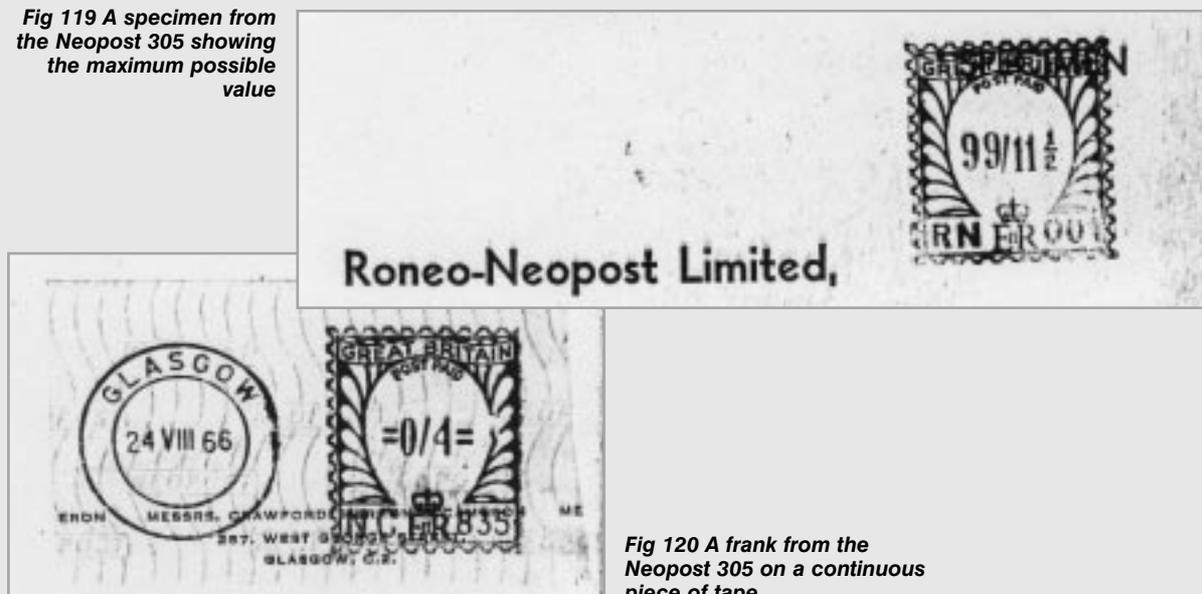Roneo-Neopost Limited,

99/11½

Fig 120 A frank from the Neopost 305 on a continuous piece of tape

Fig 121 A specimen frank from the Universal Postal Frankers Automax machine

Fig 122 The two prefixes, A and AA, used with the Automax machine

Fig 123 Group F frank from a Frankopost Multivalue machine

Emblems

Following the change of adhesive stamp design coinciding with the new reign, the postal authorities noted comment in the press and elsewhere that it was time to consider changing the design of meter franks. A major criticism was that they resembled an adhesive stamp. It should be remembered that 30 years previously, when the design was introduced, the main reason for change was that the original design was insufficiently like that of an adhesive stamp! The Post Office asked the two manufacturers (UPF and Neopost) to propose a new design. They, in turn, consulted the Council of Industrial Design, who nominated Stuart Rose, a well-known industrial artist.

Stuart Rose prepared a design which was submitted to The Queen and approved by her.

The new design embraced the floral emblems of the constituent parts of the United Kingdom; a rose for England, a thistle for Scotland, a daffodil for Wales and a shamrock for Northern Ireland. This design of frank—Group F—came into use in September 1959. *Fig 123* shows the new frank fitted to a Frankopost Multi-value machine in use at Pitney Bowes' Birmingham office.

The following machine models were in use when Group F franks were introduced and were fitted with the new franks. Group F franks were in use up to decimalisation and the prefixes used by these machines until that time were:

Neopost LV	N
Pitney Bowes CV	P, PA, PC
Simplex Junior	S, SA, SB
Simplex Junior machines converted to Simplex Major	SV
Simplex Major	SX to SZ then backwards SW to SG omitting SI, SO, and SQ
UPF Multivalue	U, UA to UK omitting UI
Neopost Frankmaster	NA to NX omitting NI
Pitney Bowes Automax	A, AA to AH

Machines not fitted with Group F dies were: Pitney Bowes Model H; UPF Midget; Universal NZ and Pitney Bowes A, B and F.

Fig 124 Specimens from Model CV machines before and after the merger of UPF with Pitney Bowes

Fig 125 (below) Specimen mark on perforated adhesive tape from the Neopost Model 205
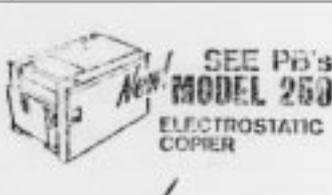

Fig 127 Frank from a four-bank Pitney Bowes 5000 Series machine

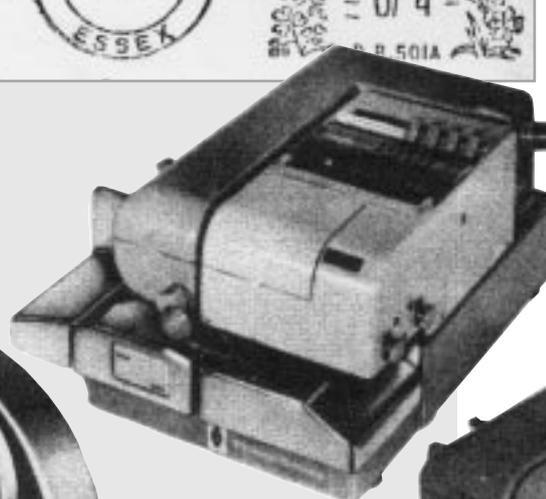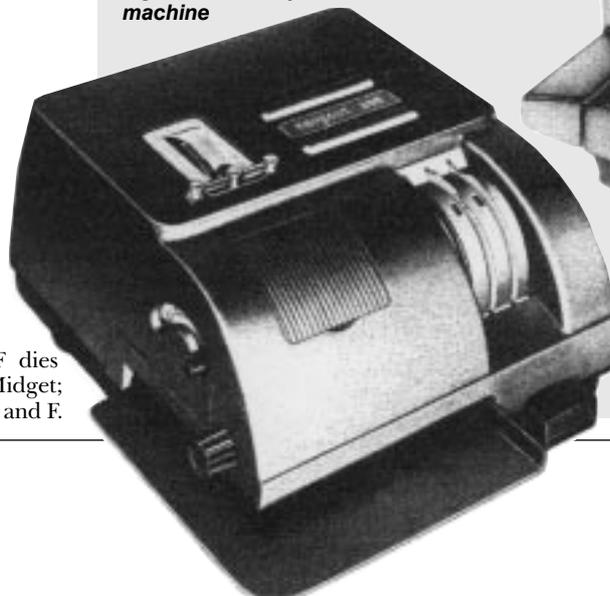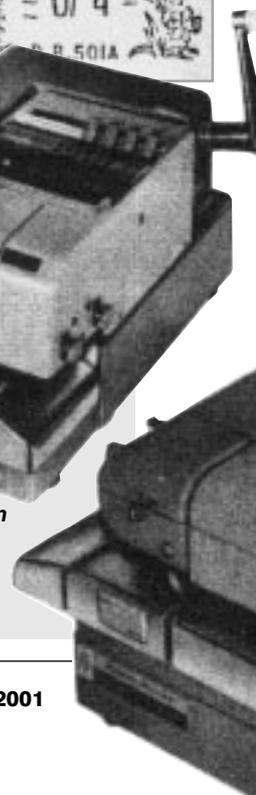**Fig 126 The Neopost Model 205 machine**

Fig 128 Hand-driven (above) and electrically-driven (right) 5000 Series machines

Pitney Bowes and UPF become one

It will be recalled that since 1929 UPF had been the agents for Pitney Bowes. By the late 1950s the embarrassing situation had arisen whereby Pitney Bowes and UPF were competing against each other in world markets. An International Division was created in Pitney Bowes and in 1959, by shareholding arrangements, UPF became a wholly owned subsidiary of Pitney Bowes. In January 1960 a new company, Pitney Bowes Ltd, was registered in the UK. In September a letter was sent to all customers and dealers stating that from 1 October 1960 the name Universal Postal Frankers was being changed to Pitney Bowes Ltd. The two specimens from Model CV machines (*Fig 124*) illustrate the change.

The resources available to the new company meant that Roneo-Neopost was faced with a very formidable competitor. New products, not only franking machines but other associated postroom equipment which had been developed by Pitney Bowes in USA, were now more readily available in the UK market. Roneo-Neopost decided that the only speedy solution was to associate with foreign manufacturers of equipment which would enhance their product range. The first of these was with the French franking machine maker Societe pour l'Affranchissement et le Timbrage Automatique (SATAS) to make their small multivalue machine in Romford. These appeared in the UK as Neopost Model 205 in April 1963. The machine was small in size and electrically driven. It was a three-bank machine with a value range ½d. to 9s.11½d. (actually, there was a smaller range model, ½d. to 4s.11½d., but the marks are indistinguishable). The size of the frank was the smallest in Group F. A specimen mark made on perforated adhesive tape is shown in *Fig 125* and the machine in *Fig 126*.

The prefix in the specimen example is 'RN' (presumably Roneo-Neopost) often used at this period for such specimens. The normal prefix in commercial franks was 'J', followed by a number of up to four figures.

In 1959 it had been decided that Pitney Bowes' British factory should be a main source of meter machines for the world market. Between 1961 and 1963 a new factory was built and equipped at Harlow, Essex. The first major project was the 5000 Series of multivalue machines developed in the USA. By November 1963 the factory was ready for the official opening. The Assistant Postmaster General passed the first letter through a 5300 Postage Meter Machine. At that time the Post Office had not given its approval for commercial use. It was launched on 9 March 1964.

There were two models, the three-bank 5335 with a value range 0/0½d. to 10s.11½d. ('10' and '11' in bank 2 and the '10' in bank 3 were engraved as single characters. The nil value in bank 1 (halfpenny) was '='. The four-bank model, 5345, had a range ≈0/0½d. to 99s.11½d. The symbol '≈' was printed by the fourth bank unless a button was depressed when it could print '1' to '9'. This was a safeguard against very high value franks being printed accidentally.

Both hand-driven (Model 5400) and electrically-driven (Model 5500) bases were available. The meters were detachable from the bases for resetting at a post office.

The machine numbers in the franks comprised a prefix 'P.B.' followed by a three-figure number and a suffix 'A' to 'L' (some letters were omitted, perhaps used on machines for abroad). *Fig 127* shows the mark made by a four-bank model used at Pitney Bowes Harlow factory. *Fig 128* illustrates the machine fitted to hand- and electrically-driven bases. The 5000 Series of machines was a replacement for the Automax.

Roneo-Neopost looks abroad

Over the years the Neopost Limited Value machine had been very successful and it was obviously considered worthwhile to put some effort into a redesign. In 1964 the improved version was introduced as the Neopost 105. This time there were ten values: 2½d., 3d., 3½d., 4d., 4½d., 5d., 6d., 7½d., 9d. and 1s. The machine was smaller (footprint 9in×9in) than the previous model and was said to be the cheapest machine in the UK. Repeating franks was rapid and with a label dispenser could deal with parcels. The machine number in the frank had the pattern, prefix N, three-figure number, suffix 'A' to 'L' (omitting 'I'). The mark made is shown in *Fig 129*.

The changes in policy at Roneo-Neopost towards meter franking and postroom equipment from 1960 onwards meant more development activity at the Romford factory. Langdon, who had undertaken earlier development and who was still making the Model 305 in his factory, was aware of this and his future seemed uncertain. In 1964 Roneo made an offer for his business which he accepted and Langdon Precision Engineers became a subsidiary of Roneo-Neopost.

Towards the end of 1965 Pitney Bowes Ltd modified some of the American-made Model RT machines to suit British currency. These multivalue machines were used on collating, sealing and franking machines similar to the Model AV which used the CV meter. The meter was similar to but smaller than the 5000 Series and had only two banks.

The values ranged from 0/0½d. to 9½d.; being decimal, 9½d. was the highest value. *Fig 130* shows two examples of the mark. The '0/' and 'D' were fixtures and part of the main frank die. The town mark (of varying style) was very close to the frank. The machine number had the Prefix 'RT' followed by a four-figure number. The 'nil' value symbol in the first bank was either '-' or '='. The date had an apostrophe before the year.

Fig 130 Two marks from American-made Model RT machines modified to suit British currency
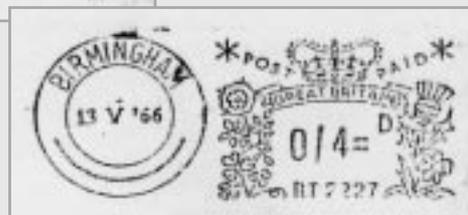
Fig 129 Frank from the redesigned Neopost Limited Value machine— the Neopost 105

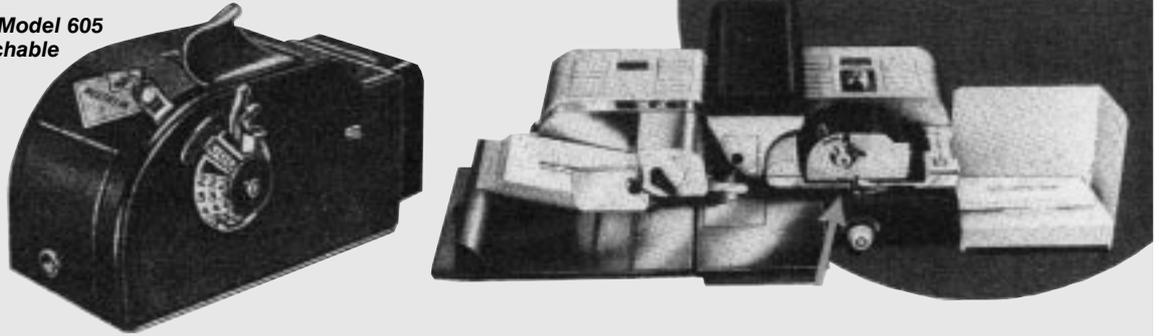*Fig 132 The Model 605 and its detachable meter*

Fig 131 Franks from Postalia Freistempler Gmbh's Model P3, sold as the Roneo-Neopost Model 605, showing solidus and apostrophe
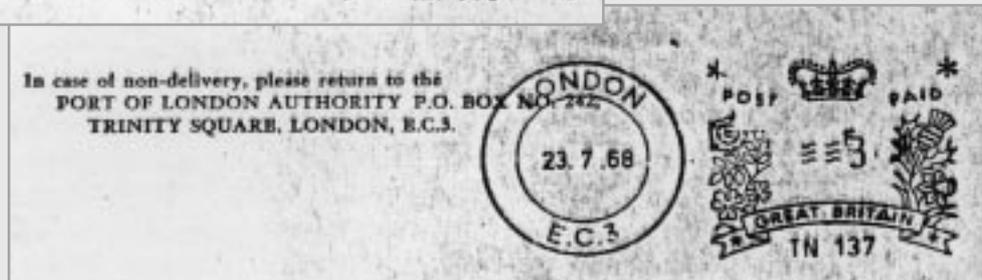
Fig 133 Examples of franks from the Hasler Frankiermaschinen company's Model F88. The frank design, similar to a Dutch frank (centre), was used only by this machine which could also accommodate a larger than normal slogan (bottom)

Following the deal with SATAS, Roneo-Neopost made an arrangement with the German company, Postalia Freistempler Gmbh, for their Model P3 to be sold as the Roneo-Neopost Model 605. It was an advanced machine capable of automatically feeding, sealing, franking, stacking and counting up to 10,000 items per hour. Another feature was that the meter could be detached from the base and used by itself; 'wiping' it across the item to be franked. For countries with decimal currencies the machine was offered in three-bank and four-bank models but in UK only one bank could be used, printing values '1' to '9' (no '½'). Characters to the left of the shilling solidus were either '≈0' or '≈≈'. In some machines the solidus was replaced by an apostrophe (*Fig 131*). The Model 605 entered the UK market early in 1967 and the machine number comprised prefix 'TN' followed by a three-figure number. The complete machine and the detachable meter (arrowed) are illustrated (*Fig 132*).