

The Kingdoms of Great Britain

Accession and EKV dates for Postage Stamps

Observers have noted the lack of preparations by the Post Office have resulted in some serious delays in the issuance of official instruments bearing the image of the new monarch. Postage stamps were introduced in 1840 during the reign of Queen Victoria and upon her passing, her eldest son, King Edward VII acceded the throne but there was a delay of more than eleven months before the new stamps were issued, some of these issues re-using elements of the Golden Jubilee edition (1887), used for his mother's celebration some fourteen years prior.

Queen Victoria's passing at the age of 83, necessitated that De La Rue were tasked with establishing new stamp designs with de-facto royal approval, as well as the General Post Office (Amongst others).

When King Edward VII passed away in May of 1910 the G.P.O. had just switched the contracted printer, from the long standing and trusted, De La Rue company to Harrisons & Sons. This switch proved to be fraught with difficulties and created the abortive Downy head issues that proved to be a stop gap interim measure, before the first full set of definitives were issued in January 1913, approximately three years after the accession of King George V. As an indication of just how badly this switch of contract printers occurred, the Government used its own printer Somerset House, to help support the changeover since the new printer was not initially capable of multi coloured printing. This likely negated any cost savings that the Post Office hoped to achieve by switching printers. The stamps issued by Somerset House during the reign of King George V were the last to be printed by his majesty's government.

The G.P.O was again blindsided upon the passing of King George V in January of 1936 and so the new designs for King Edward VIII were created largely without much royal input. This stripped down design direction, minus all ornamentation, was perceived to be a new direction for official instruments, ushering in a new aesthetic. There is a delay for issuance of seven months in this scenario to issue just four values of the same basic design.

The sudden abdication of King Edward VIII caught the nation and indeed the empire by surprise. The G.P.O. scrambled to design and develop new issues. It's important to remember that the issues of Great Britain represent the tip of the iceberg, hundreds of new stamps were needed for the British Commonwealth, which in 1937, was at its zenith. New stocks had to be issued and old stocks had to be exhausted or returned for destruction. What is truly remarkable is that the G.P.O. is able to do all of this in exactly five months after the accession of King George VI. Stamps issued within the Commonwealth took considerably longer to deploy than those issued for Great Britain.

The passing of King George VI in 1952 was no surprise. The monarch had been ill for some time and was visibly weak at public events. His daughter, Queen Elizabeth II, proved to be extremely passionate about her depiction and became the monarch with the most involvement in postage stamps; a fact documented by the many surviving files, samples and other materials within the Post Office Museum in London. Queen Elizabeth's involvement in stamp design has been the subject of published works dealing entirely with this period. There was a delay of approximately six months, to issue the first stamps for Queen Elizabeth II, which underlies the deep involvement of the monarch in the process.

Not all monarchs have taken a passionate role in the design of the postage stamps, some allowing the G.P.O. to conduct the business with just tacit approval from the palace. These are shown in the accompanying table, names being shaded in buff, Monarchs taking an active role in stamp design are shaded in purple.

For collectors of first day covers, this poses a question of accuracy. Stanley Gibbons Specialized catalogue editions provide the clearest details of all references and should be considered to be the gold standard. Mixed usage covers represent the stocks held privately or by smaller post office outlets and the attempt to use them up before they became obsolete. This mixed usage, especially from post offices abroad, represents a keenly collected avenue for the hobby.

The accompanying table should help collectors with cover dating.

	Day of	Date of	EKU	
	Accession	Death	Issue Start	Notes
King Edward VII	1/22/1901	5/6/1910	1/1/1902	KE7 was 69 at the time of his passing
King George V	5/7/1910	1/20/1936	6/22/1911	KGV was 71 at the time of his passing
King Edward VIII	1/21/1936	5/28/1972	8/1/1936	The king abdicated his role on December 10th 1936
King George VI	12/10/1936	2/6/1952	5/10/1937	KGVI was 57 at the time of his passing
Queen Elizabeth II	2/6/1952	8/8/2022	8/31/1952	QE2 was 96 at the time of her passing
King Charles III	8/9/2022	N/A	TBD	The King is currently 78 years old

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