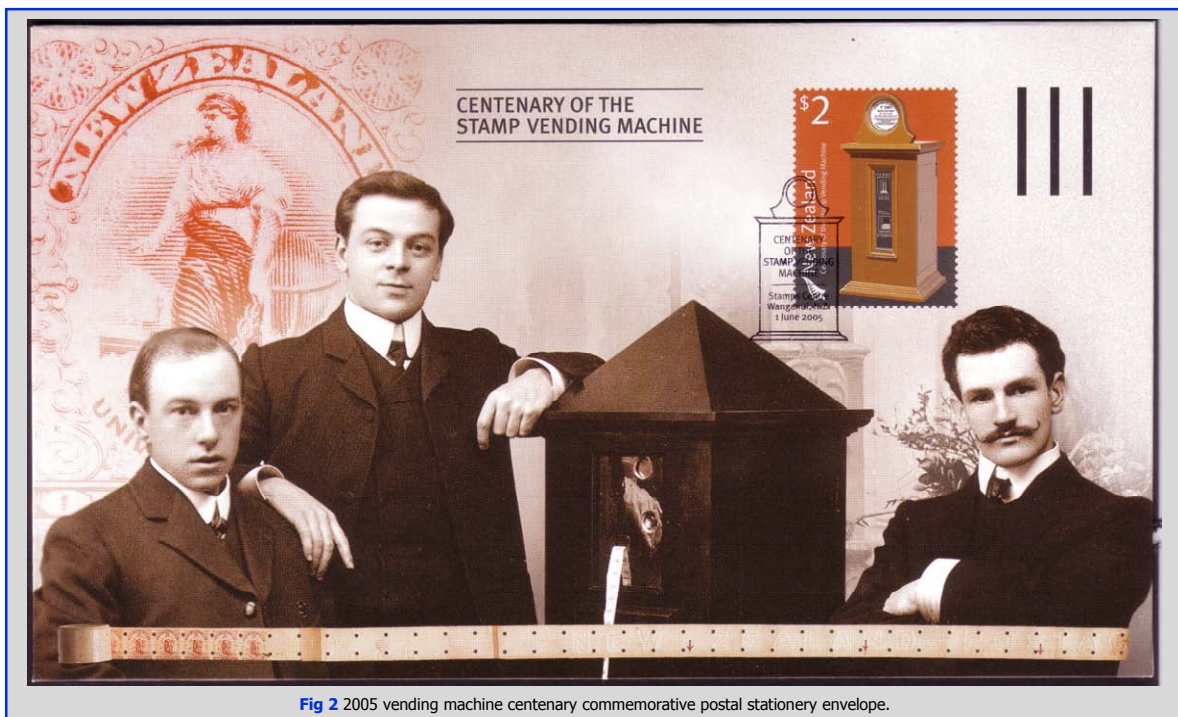


Dispensing Postage

It was tempting to add *with* between the title's words! When one considers that much communication today is effected via telephone and/or email maybe the title should have been altered? At various times this writer has used eBay to sell goods and to buy. Most transactions were completed with the item(s) being despatched via mail, so maybe this electronic medium is indeed beneficial to our postal services?

Perhaps the most obvious method of dispensing postage is the vending machine. New Zealand's RJ Dickie invented the world's first coin in the slot vending machine in 1905, from which 3901 stamps were dispensed during the initial fortnight's trial. To mark the centenary of his invention New Zealand Post released a commemorative postal stationery envelope on 1 June 2005. The Dickie vending machine stamps can be easily recognised by two large circular sprocket holes at each side of the 1d Universal stamp, which are shown on the centenary envelope. Without going in to the rigours of the development of the Dickie machine and vending machine stamps suffice it to say that today there are some relatively inexpensive stamps from the early era of dispensing postage via vending machines.



The Christchurch International Exhibition of 1906/07 had many things to attract visitors – one of which was an exhibition post office. However, stamp vending machines were still in their infancy and it was not until the 1913 Auckland Exhibition that there were machines that dispensed postage to on site visitors.

The Auckland Exhibition had vending machines that dispensed 1d Dominion stamps (overprinted AUCKLAND EXHIBITION 1913) that had been double gummed. This was done only for rolls of 1d Auckland Exhibition stamps as there may have been problems with the climate affecting ordinary gummed stamps. Today these double gummed stamps sell for around \$150 each.

Vending machine stamps can be fairly easily recognised. They usually have the two horizontal rows of perforations with straight edges. Depending upon how well centred the vending machine rolls are they may produce stamps with little or no discernable signs of being guillotined, or they may have almost no perfs along one edge – having been trimmed off – and the other of course will be almost complete. Stamps dispensed from stamp booklets may show this trait on only one, or two adjacent sides.

Also, at the Auckland Exhibition were several post card vending machines. These were not any old postcards but postal stationery post cards! Contemporary messages written on some of these postcards indicate that they were bought (two for a penny!) from a coin in the slot machine. This meant that the postcard itself was free. Ah, those were the days – something for nothing! The postcards depicted various scenes and were issued with either a ½d or a 1d denomination. Only 41,400 of the ½d were printed and 20,980 of the 1d. Remainders were destroyed after the close of the exhibition. Some 20 different Auckland views are known and have been reported printed in three different colours on both denomination postcards. Any of the Auckland Exhibition postal stationery postcards in fine condition today is going to cost around \$500.



Fig 2 1913 ½d Auckland Exhibition vending machine postal stationery postcard.

In late 1963 New Zealand's vending machines saw the introduction of specially printed vending machine stamps. The 1d and 3d flower stamps were printed with a sideways NZ and a five pointed star watermark. Whilst they are not overly expensive today they can easily be recognised by their distinctive watermark characteristic – in addition to any trimmed parallel perfs.

However, in 1964 several New Zealand cities a new stamp vending machine was installed. The Comac machines were radically different to the contemporary stamp vending machines. There was an aperture for one to insert one's envelope and once the correct amount of coins had been inserted in the coin slot a red meter frank impression was stamped on to one's envelope. There was a two letter indicator to identify machine's location in the meter frank. The franked letter was then able to be posted in a nearby letter box. Comac machines were converted for decimal currency use and were also phased out in the early 1970s.

For a period in the early 1980s there were no stamp vending machines in New Zealand. The Swiss produced Frama machines gradually made their appearance in a number of countries after debuting in 1976 in Switzerland. The New Zealand Post Office in their wisdom decided to trial a solitary Frama machine at the Auckland GPO in September 1984.

No philatelic notice was released as the NZPO wished to trial this machine for its efficacy as an outlet for the after hours sale of stamps to the general public. Suffice it to say that despite the best of the NZPO's intentions the philatelic world knew about this stamp vending machine. First day covers were prepared and as the machine in Auckland was the sole Frama machine in New Zealand trade orders for Frama stamps from around the world had to be supplied from this machine, as none were supplied from the New Zealand Post philatelic bureau simply because even they did not have a Frama machine!

The trial was aborted earlier than intended because of the philatelic use of the machine rather than the intended public use. That a trade colleague essentially sat outside the Auckland GPO feeding the Frama machine for the duration of the trial is beside the point. With only one machine in NZ and a **huge** overseas demand was there any wonder that the trial was a New Zealand Post Office fiasco?



Fig 3 1984 Auckland Frama trial 30c stamp.

In February 1986 more Frama machines were installed throughout New Zealand. Unlike the trial machine which used plain white paper, from 1986 specially printed paper was used, new NZ Frama stamp papers were produced in 1986, 1988, 1990, and 1993 and in 1996. Eventually over 100 Frama machines were installed across the length and breadth of New Zealand before Kiwi vandals forced a rethink. The number of non post office outlets (which were open for longer hours and at week ends) for the sales of stamp booklets expanded and made the after hours sale of multiple rather than single stamp sales easier. Consequently, New Zealand Post progressively withdrew Frama machines so that today there are none.

Other than single or even multiple stamp sales over the post office counter resulting in stamps dispensed from sheets, the New Zealand Post Office came up with an idea for dispensing stamps (single/multiples sales) from counter dispensers. These saved time for the counter clerks no longer had to turn to his/her book for (part) sheets to dispense the stamps. Instead, small brass vending receptacles were produced. These had a number of compartments to hold various denomination stamp rolls.

A few 1935 pictorial counter coils are known. How? From the counter coil number pairs. The counter rolls were made up from sheets of stamps. Essentially the upper and lower most sheet selvages were removed. The side selvedge of one sheet was affixed to the side selvedge of another sheet and so on. The first sheet's left selvedge was affixed to a coil leader which when completed was rolled around the core of the roll.

Such information as the number and value of stamps in the roll as well as the stamp denomination and date of printing may be seen on coil leaders. Usually the small sized definitive stamp counter rolls comprised 480 stamps with numbered 19 coil joins resulting in 20 sections of 24 stamps. Twenty sheets of 240 stamps resulted in 10 rolls of 480 stamps being produced.

Before being guillotined into rolls the sheet selvages had a number printed on sideways. They were printed as an aid for the counter clerks, who had to balance their sales each day and rather than spend time unwinding a nearly new roll, then counting the stamps left and rewinding the rolls the clerk merely had to unwind the stamp roll until the next coil number appeared. This would tell the clerk how many multiples of (usually) 24 stamps remained in the roll. The clerk then had to add up the number of stamps appearing before the coil number to ascertain the exact number of stamps remaining. From then it was a simple matter of mathematics as to the number and value of stamps that had been sold from that roll. To avoid confusion between the digits 6 and 9 (remembering that the coil numbers appeared *sideways* on the coil joins) these numbers had a full stop after the digit viz., 6. and 9.

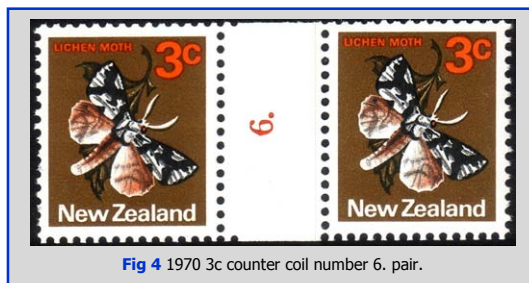


Fig 4 1970 3c counter coil number 6. pair.



Fig 5 1970 3c counter coil number 9. (normal, at left) and 9 (error, at right) pairs.

Counter coil number pairs are very collectable and range in price from a few dollars each to some costing \$1000 or more! At a recent Mowbrays auction in Wellington an 8d Tuatara coil number pair sold for in excess of NZ\$3000 by the time the buyer's premium etc. was included! Before moving away from these, it must be remembered that counter coil numbers may be found on a range of definitive stamps for some 40 years, terminating with the unwatermarked 1970 pictorials (released thus from 1973) and that coil number pairs with both watermarks are quite tough to acquire.

For a few months, during late 1969/early 1970 at Wellington's Te Aro post office locally made rubber stamped coil numbers could be acquired, before this practice was officially stopped by the New Zealand Post Office Headquarters.



Fig 6 Te Aro local coil number 15 pair.

Three different Postafix stamps were issued in 1977 and 1978. At the time of their introduction New Zealand enjoyed a sealed letter rate of 8 cents and an unsealed printed matter rate of 7 cents. The Postafix stamps were issued in rolls of 400 stamps and were required because of the importation of small stamp dispensers capable of not only dispensing a single stamp but also wetting the adhesive prior to placing it on the envelope. Postafix hand held machines were aimed at the small to medium sized businesses that were unable to benefit from bulk mailing discounts. The time saving device from memory cost something around \$30.00.

Initially, obsolete sheets of 3c and 4c moth stamps were surcharged specifically for the dispensing machines. Like the earlier counter coils, Postafix rolls can be found with sheet selvedge joins every 20th stamp, however unlike the earlier stamps, owing to the dispensing mechanism no visible (from the front) join existed.



The most common missing colour error of the 1970 pictorials occurred on the 4c Puriri Moth, viz., missing dark green (veins). However, a very few sheets (of 200 stamps) of the 4c missing veins were surcharged 8c and made up into Postafix rolls. These are very scarce and at a first glance nothing appears amiss. Check your 8c Postafix stamps now!



Fig 8 1977 8c Postafix missing veins error at left.

The third and final postafix issue of 1978 (the 10c QE II silhouette) was specifically printed with the postafix dispenser in mind: in a complete roll of 400 stamps. This stamp is easily confused as being a vending machine stamp. Similar stamps, but denominated 1c, 2c and 5c were issued in rolls of 800 stamps; these were the last of the coin in the slot vending machine stamp rolls (before the infamous 1984 Auckland Frama trial).

Whilst working on some stock stored in a small manila Laurie Franks window envelope, that bore Laurie's handwritten "*Coil queens/14c oprints*" in red ink, several 14c on 10c Queen Elizabeth II coil stamps were discovered. These stamps were in vertical strips of 3 (two) and 4 (two) as well as three different numbered counter roll pairs. Once free of the envelope, each strip of stamps still showed the characteristic curl from being in a roll.

The counter roll pairs were numbered **520**, **530** and **540** in blue biro on the reverse. As with earlier counter roll number pairs these were a helpful guide to the counter clerk when reconciling his stock after the day's sales were made.

A range of denominations of the 1970 pictorials were made up into counter rolls; initially watermarked sheet stock was used, and later unwatermarked sheet stock. By the time the larger dimension roses and later definitives were issued from 1975, coupled with the start of creeping inflation that saw domestic postage rates rise from 4c in 1974 to 24c by 1982, the usefulness of counter rolls and their dispensers was greatly diminished. Whilst anyone today can contrive to manufacture such items given enough stamps and the will to make paper curl, that these were in a Laurie Franks envelope with Laurie's writing indicates that these were likely produced sometime in late 1979/early 1980; probably by a local Christchurch post office that still had one of the obsolete counter roll dispensers that had not been discarded or returned to the stores branch of the NZPO for destruction.

The 10c, and 14c on 10c Queen Elizabeth II definitives have for all intents and purposes the same dimensions as some earlier New Zealand definitives that were made up into counter rolls; viz., the 1960 1/6d tiki and the 1967 8c New Zealand flag. Those were made up into counter rolls with 19 counter roll numbered joins (some other denominations had 23 such numbered counter roll numbered joins).

The 14c on 10c Queen Elizabeth II counter roll number joins all bore **SONS LIMITED**, part of the imprint that extends in the lower sheet margin from the 1st to 5th stamps. Thus, these counter rolls are clearly from the 4th column of stamps, perhaps easiest to view on number 540? The 12 mm lower selvages have been guillotined down to 6 mm and in the process, all traces of the cylinder numbers have been removed. It appears that the upper sheet selvedge was similarly guillotined (down to 8 mm) before being affixed over the lower selvedge of the stamps from another sheet.

The numbers **520**, **530** and **540** clearly indicate the numbers left in the counter roll. Both the strips of four show signs of the sheet having been folded before being made up into a counter roll – *presumably* these are from rows 4, 5 (fold), 6 and 7. None of the strips show signs of being guillotined as do many of the earlier counter roll stamps.

It could be surmised that the counter rolls comprised 600 stamps given these numbers, but probably the maximum number that may have been able to fit into a compartment in a counter roll dispenser would be 400, thus 600 is an unlikely sized stamp roll.

A more plausible explanation of the numbers follows: it is likely that a counter clerk removed 10 folded sheets (each comprising 100 stamps) from his/her stock, then removed the vertical selvages, trimmed off the horizontal selvages before affixing the lower selvages of the sheets on to the upper selvages of another sheet. After this had been accomplished the joined sheets would be turned over in order to number the joins on the gummed side. Thus, the sheet joins of stamps in column 1 [the 10th column when viewed from the front] would probably be numbered 90, 80, 70 etc. by the counter clerk down to 10; those in column 2 [the 9th column when viewed from the front] would similarly be numbered 190, 180 etc. The last column (10th) to be numbered would start with 990 and end with 910.



© Mowbray Collectables 2019. May not be reproduced or used without written permission.

Mowbray Collectables, Private Bag 63000, Wellington 6140, New Zealand, ph +64 6 364 8270
email auctions@mowbrays.co.nz, website www.mowbraycollectables.com

However, this does not fully explain why these 3 roll number joins are in the 500 series when the stamps are from the 6th column as viewed from the rear. Perhaps the clerk commenced number on the rear with 9, then 8, down to 1 in the 1st column (viewed from the rear); the 2nd column numbered from 90, 80, etc., so that the 6th column (viewed from the rear) commenced with 590 and continued down to 510. This of course is the 4th column of stamps that contains the **SONS LIMITED**, part of the printer's imprint. The sheets would then be rolled so that the stamp side was visible when dispensed; afterwards the clerk broke off a rolled column of stamps for sale via the counter roll dispenser.

Given that the 14c on 10c Queen Elizabeth II are now known to exist in locally manufactured counter rolls, do the 8c on 4c rose, 17c on 6c rose and 20c on 7c rose surcharges exist in this format also?

David Smitham

***Postscript:** Further details regarding early (King George VI) counter & vending machine rolls are outlined in a separate article.*



© Mowbray Collectables 2019. May not be reproduced or used without written permission.

Mowbray Collectables, Private Bag 63000, Wellington 6140, New Zealand, ph +64 6 364 8270
email auctions@mowbrays.co.nz, website www.mowbraycollectables.com