

Royal Mail News

Robert Burns Stamps

Four stamps commemorating the bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns, Scotland's national poet, go on sale at post offices and philatelic outlets on 25 January 1996.

The stamps feature quotations from four of Burns's best-known works, a poem and three songs.

The **19p** stamp (inland 2nd class basic rate) bears the opening lines of "To a Mouse", one of Burns's best-loved nature poems. The text was taken from the Kilmarnock Edition of July 1786 and reproduces the mixture of fonts used by the printer John Wilson. At the time the Scottish language was in a state of transition, this explains the spelling *sleeket* and the obsolescent *cowran*, later changed by Burns to *sleekit* and *cow'rin* in the Edinburgh Edition (1787). The design is completed by a woodcut illustration of the fieldmouse, whose nest Burns turned up with the plough one wintry day in 1785.

The **25p** value (inland 1st class & EU basic

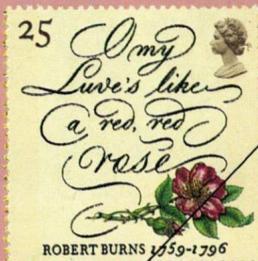
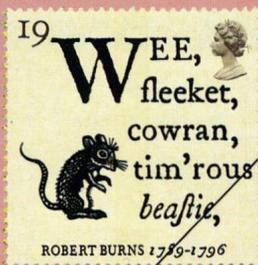
rates) features the title of one of Burns's best-known love songs. The issue of this stamp, in late January, is timely for use on Valentine cards. "O my Luve's like a Red, red Rose" is an amalgam of several old ballads and vividly illustrates Burns's genius for reworking folk material and producing a poetic gem of the first order. Burns's interest in folklore and traditional songs began in his childhood, listening to his mother and an elderly lodger reciting from their fund of ancient songs, jingles and rhymes. This song first appeared in *Selection of Scots Songs*, published in 1794 by Pietro Urbani, and two years later (shortly after Burns's death), in the 5th volume of James Johnson's well-known *The Scots Musical Museum*.

A copperplate script has been chosen for the stamp, closely resembling the style used by Johnson for his elaborate title pages. Below the quotation lies a wild rose in full bloom, with a rosebud alongside.

The **41p** denomination (airmail basic rate, to 10g) features, in bold serifed typeface, the words "Scots, wha hae wi Wallace bled", the opening lines of the song sometimes known as "Robert the Bruce's Address to his Troops at Bannockburn" (1314). In 1787 Burns was deeply moved by his visit to the site of the Battle of Bannockburn. The song was however inspired by the capture, six years later, of Thomas Muir, an advocate of Parliamentary reform, after attempting to escape to Ireland. (Muir was later transported after being found guilty of sedition.) Thus what appears as a patriotic song of the War of Independence of the 14th century was actually a comment on the political struggles of the 1790s.

The lettering used on the stamp is reminiscent of that found on monumental inscriptions. The motif is the figure of Sir William Wallace taken from the stained glass window in the Wallace Monument near Stirling. Purists may cavil at his tartan plaid (a French import about 1471), and the type of sword (not in use till the late 15th century), but there are no authentic likenesses of Wallace and the window is widely regarded as conveying the best impression of the hero based on a description in an epic poem by Blind Harry the Minstrel.

The subject of the **60p** stamp (airmail letters to 20g weight) is something of a paradox. "Auld Lang Syne" is probably the world's most widely sung song, yet has been described as the song nobody knows. Even in Scotland, lines are misquoted, additional words inserted, and





ROBERT BURNS
THE IMMORTAL MEMORY

Royal Mail
Mint Stamps

FAIR fa' yo
Great Chief
Aboon the
Painch, tr
Weel are y
As lang's

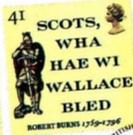


[PLATE 11]

[NOTE 11]
SHOULD auld acquaintance
be forgot,
And never brought to mind?...

may recite the eight verses of *To a Haggis* [NOTE 11]. With great ceremony, the haggis is 'slain' at the lines: *His knife see rufflic Labour dight, An cut you up wi ready slight...* [PLATE 11]. ✦ THE SPECTACLE over, the piper is presented with a deserved glass of Scotch whisky before piping the haggis back to the kitchen to be...

hear a witty speech ribbing the female sex, blending modern observations with BURNS's own sentiments. The foibles and virtues of the ladies are examined, but a tribute is given to end on a conciliatory note. After this, *The Rebel's Auld...*



ROBERT BURNS

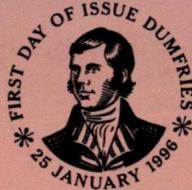
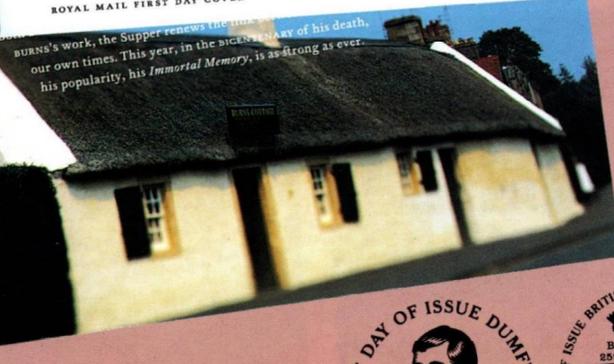
THE IMMORTAL MEMORY



ROYAL MAIL FIRST DAY COVER

Mrs J Robinson
200 Manorbier Road
ILKESTON
Derbyshire
DE7 4AB

BURNS's work, the Supper renews the time of his death, our own times. This year, in the bicentenary of his death, his popularity, his *Immortal Memory*, is as strong as ever.



terrible liberties taken with the world's greatest song of parting. The stamp reproduces in Burns's rather spiky handwriting the opening line: "Should auld acquaintance be forgot" – actually one of the few lines in the song for which Burns cannot claim credit. Burns did not claim the song as his own, but his version differs radically from others. The earliest version was published in 1568, and the phrase "old-long-syne" was first used by Sir Robert Ayton (1570-1638). Burns's final version of the song was published in 1793.

The illustration on the stamp, showing a kilted highlander and a peasant girl dancing, is from the painting "A Highland Dance" by David Allan, now in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh. It is pleasing that it should be reproduced in 1996, marking the bicentenary of the death of Allan, often hailed as "the Scottish Hogarth". Another painting by Allan, "Scottish Highland Family" featured on the eighth Scottish aerogramme, May 1977.

The information published here was supplied by Dr James Mackay, author of a special Bulletin Publication on Burns and Burns stamps – see below.

Technical details

Printer: The House of Questa

Process: Offset-lithography

Size: 35 x 35mm

Sheets: 100

Perforation: 14

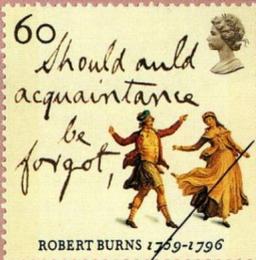
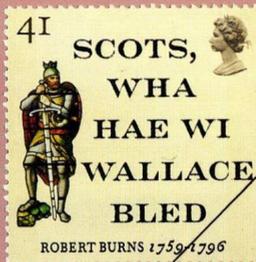
Phosphor: 19p – one phosphor band
25p-60p two phosphor bands

Paper: OBA free (OBA = Optical
Brightening Agent)

Gum: PVA



Robert Burns statue, Victoria Embankment Gardens, London (Photo: John Holman)



First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets around a week before 25 January, price 25p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial "First Day of Issue" postmark of the Bureau or Dumfries, price £2.12 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £1.81 overseas (no VAT). Orders for first day covers must arrive at the Bureau by 25 January 1996.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers on the day of issue, for these cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Guild Hall, 57 Queen Street, GLASGOW G1 3AZ (for Dumfries postmark). The outer envelope should be endorsed "FD9601" (Bureau), or "FD9602" (Dumfries).

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive local (mostly non-pictorial) "First Day of Issue" handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark*

Bllletin – the Royal Mail's magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe; £21.75 Rest of World (Airmail).

Collectors are reminded that it will be in order to affix just the 19p Burns stamp to covers to receive all special cancels ("First Day of Issue", sponsored and philatelic counters), in use on 25 January. This concession to the normal 1st class rule applies only to Burns stamps; covers bearing other issues are subject to 1st class postage.

Plate Numbers

The plates used, seen at time of going to press are:
 19p 2A2A2A
 25p, 41p & 60p 1A1A1A1A1A
 Colours to be announced..

Presentation Pack and Stamp Cards

A presentation pack (No. 264, price £1.80) will be available from the Bureau, Post Office Counters philatelic outlets, main post offices. The text was written by Peter Westwood, Honorary President of the Burns Federation. Stamp cards (25p each) will be available from the Bureau, POC philatelic outlets, and main post offices.

Cards will also be available next July with Burns poem printed on the address side and printed stamp – the 1s 3d from the 1966 issue uprated to the current international postcard rate. Details later.

NPM News

Shown here is one of the new postcards issued by the Museum on 30 October; others feature a Second World War Christmas airgraph and delivering the mail in snowy weather. A set of four cards on the subject of Valentines will be

NPM 1995 Christmas postcard



British Philatelic Bulletin - Vol. 33, December 1995

available from 14 February 1996. Cards are on sale at the Museum shop (25p each), or can be ordered from the British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT (£1 per set).

Readers are reminded that a fine display of Victorian stamps, registration sheets, covers,

UNIFORM Penny Postage

THE FOLLOWING

PETITION

TO THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS,

To Pass this Important Measure without delay.

Lies here for Signatures.

READER,

Sign the Petition without a moment's delay,

BECAUSE

IT MUST BE PRESENTED BEFORE FRIDAY NEXT, JULY THE 12TH.

To the Honourable the Commons in Parliament assembled.

The humble Petition of the undersigned Inhabitants of Westminster.

Sheweth,

THAT, an Englishman having invented the Uniform Penny Postage Plan, your Petitioners feel that the United Kingdom should not be behind France, and Belgium, and Prussia, and the United States, in getting it; they, therefore, humbly pray your Honourable House to give effect to the Uniform Penny Postage, payable in advance, during the present Session of Parliament.

And your Petitioners will ever pray.

PRINTED BY T. DEESELL, RUPERT STREET, BATHURST.

Uniform Penny Postage Petition – Victorian Posts exhibition, NPM

essays and related material is now on show at the National Postal Museum. A report on the exhibition was published in the August *Bulletin* (pages 368-70).

The ground floor area (former London Chief Post Office) is now given over to an interesting display, entitled "Post Haste!" of posting boxes, vehicles and other artefacts. Visitors are given a free souvenir card which they can cachet with six self-inking handstamps provided at strategic points in the display. These cachets feature: Pillar Boxes, Mail by Rail, Sea Mail, Motorised Mail, Air Mail, and Wartime Services. See September *Bulletin* (p.10) for details of the Post Haste! display.

The Museum also includes the famous Reginald M Phillips Collection of British 19th century stamps, and an "All World" Collection –