

Inland Waterways

20 July 1993



Four stamps commemorating the great “canal mania” of the late 18th century go on sale at post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau, Collections, and philatelic counters on 20 July 1993.

1793 was one of the busiest years of the great age of canals. Right across the country, hundreds of miles of inland waterways were planned, surveyed or under construction. Canals had been operating successfully since the 1740s, but 1793 was important because it saw the granting of parliamentary authorisation for the Grand Junction Canal, the main artery in a system of waterways running from the manufacturing heart land of the Midlands to London and the Thames. Exactly a century later, canal-building in Britain effectively came to an end with the completion in 1893 of the Manchester Ship Canal.

The values cover the inland 1st class and EC basic rates (24p), Europe, non-EC basic rate (28p), world-wide postcard rate (33p), and basic airmail letter rate (39p).

The **24p** stamp shows narrow boats on the Grand Junction Canal, which was authorised by Parliament in 1793 as a new trunk route between Birmingham and London. The **28p** denomination features Humber keels on the Stainforth and Keadby Canal, whose Act was passed in 1793. Via the River Trent, it gave access to the Yorkshire coalfield.

The **33p** value shows horse-drawn boats on the Brecknock and Abergavenny Canal, which was given the go-ahead in 1793 but not completed until 1812. The **39p** stamp features fishing boats and “puffers” on the Crinan Canal, a short cut from Scotland’s west coast that received Parliamentary approval in 1793.



Today the inland waterway system is one of our greatest leisure amenities. These stamps remind us of the importance of canals in the period of Britain’s industrial revolution in the later 18th century, leading to our becoming the “workshop of the world” during the Victorian era.

The Designer

The stamps are the work of Tony Lewery who was born in Brighton in 1941 and studied painting at Brighton College of Art from 1957 to 1961. He was always messing about in boats on the beach from a very early age, but he only discovered the

Royal Mail Mint Stamps



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further inland than — up to Ironbridge for instance, and e Shrewsbury. But d ion of locks and n navigation, rivers and dangerous pl vulnerable to floo alternative was to these were often and unsuited to heavy vehicles. The Industrial Revolution gathered momentum, there was a desperate need for a better way of moving bulk commodities such as coal or grain over long distances, where transport costs were high in relation to the intrinsic value of the load. The answer was to build canals.



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draw revenue from tolls imposed on other users. And, at first, the shareholders made a handsome profit. Many of the early canals were engineered by James Brindley, a great pioneer of waterway-building, who followed the contours as much as possible to minimise the expense of civil engineering works. With the expansion of industry, however, faster journey times were demanded, and the later waterways took a more direct line. The new breed of canal engineers, men like Thomas Telford or John Rennie,

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Most had families ashore to the end of the trip. But in the 1840s the new network of railways was putting great pressure on the canals. Turn-round times had to be faster, rates (and earnings) were cut, periods away became longer and longer. As an economy measure, many bargemen left their homes and moved on to their boats permanently, taking their families with them. Children worked beside the adults, opening and closing lock gates or leading the horse; there was no time for schooling. It was probably among these that the tradition first began of decorating the boats' cabins with roses and castles, which added further fascinating variety to the styles of boat painting.

World War, the canal carriers struggled on in the face of an ever-lengthening list of closures until the 'big freeze' of the 1962-3 winter finished them off. The canals' ice never came back. Although traffic the kind of bread-and-butter work that brought our canals into being has now been lost to them for ever.



In their heyday Britain's waterways were busy with commercial traffic of many kinds. This is the Lagan Canal near Belfast, which opened on New Year's Day, 1794.



James Brindley 1769-1834 Thomas Telford 1757-1835

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he first canal in the British Isles was authorised by the Irish Parliament in 1729. Carrying Tyrone coal to the port of Newry, it opened in 1742. It took some years, however, for British entrepreneurs to catch up with the rest of Europe and realise that, with man-made waterways to bring in raw materials and take out finished goods, manufacturing could develop in areas away from the navigable rivers. Long-standing regional monopolies would thus

built long flights or 'staircases' of locks to change levels. If this was not possible, they might tunnel through a hill or excavate a cutting. Canals would cross valleys on embankments or aqueducts. It is this second generation of canals which has left the most visible mark on the landscape. They were built by the famous 'navigators' or navvies, iron-hard heroes raised on beef and beer. Picks, shovels and wheelbarrows were all they needed. Curiously enough, the



The Engine Arm Aqueduct on the Birmingham Canal at Smethwick.

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Britain's 3,000 miles (4,800 kilometres) of navigable inland waterways today form one of our principal leisure resources. It is only through such usage that they have managed to survive as a living feature of the landscape rather than as a collection of museum pieces and monuments.



Painting the registration number on an FMC motor boat.

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ifferent kinds of vessel, too, were used around the country — trows

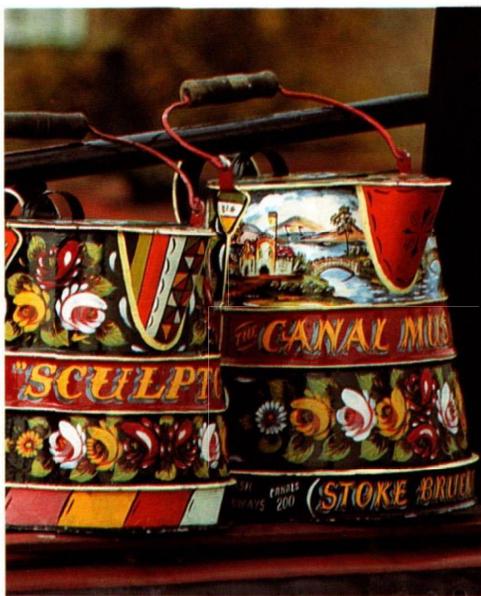


covers our canals.



Mrs J Robinson
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inland waterway system in 1963. He immediately became a totally devoted enthusiast, living and working on the canals, and studying the traditional painted decorations in particular. In 1974 his book *Narrow Boat Painting* came out, and it has remained in print ever since – still the standard work on this traditional art. Since then he has become something of an artistic jack-of-all-trades, and earns a living with a variety of jobs that include painting and signwriting, lecturing, graphic and theatre design and, of course, canal boat restoration and decoration. Recently his research time has been devoted to the broader field of British folk and popular art and he has written two more books, one on signwriting in 1989 and a larger book on popular art in 1991.



The designs for these stamps developed from a series of mural panels he painted for the National Waterways Museum in Gloucester in 1988; these featured some of the regional styles of boat decoration on Britain's inland waterways. The "roses and castles" tradition of the colourful narrow boats of the Midland canals has become the best-known style, as these canals have become popular for pleasure boating instead of trade, but most other barge canals and rivers developed their own localised tradition of decoration as well. Tony's research into these various styles of paintwork still continues, and the intention is to include this work in a greatly expanded version of the boat painting book.

Technical Details

Printers: The House of Questa
Process: Offset – lithography
Size: 41 x 30mm, horizontal
Sheets: 100
Perforation: 15 x 14
Phosphor: Two bands per stamp
Gum: PVA
Presentation Pack: No 239, price £1.55
Stamp Cards: Nos 154 A-D, price 21p each



First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the Bureau, Collections, and philatelic counters around a week before 20 July, price 21p.

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 Gloucester, price £1.82 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £1.55 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for first day covers must be received at the Bureau by 20 July 1993.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers, on the day of issue, for the Bureau or

Gloucester cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT, or Midland Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, BIRMINGHAM B1 1AA. The outer envelope should be endorsed "Pictorial First Day of Issue postmark".

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, 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 Bulletin* – 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).



Canals 200

Canalside festivals with gatherings of colourful historic narrowboats, country crafts and family entertainments and open days are being organised on canals and at museums throughout the country to celebrate two centuries of canals.

Canals 200 is a nationwide campaign devised and directed by British Waterways, which runs the country's canals, to mark the bicentenary of the "Canal Mania" of 1793.

Canals made the Industrial Revolution possible. Two centuries on, recreation has replaced commerce and the waterways are now treasured for their rich variety of landscapes and historic buildings, and as reserves for wildlife.

For more information
please write to:

Customer Services
British Waterways
Willow Grange
Church Road
WATFORD WD1 3QA

Tel: (0923) 226422



Posting Boxes

141. Scottish Boxes

We feature this month two boxes in the beautiful Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The first illustration, submitted by F T Last of East Lothian, shows a Victorian wall box set in a rock alongside the road at Red Point, south of Gairloch in Wester Ross. Mr Last tells us "it really is in a remote area servicing a number of crofters – sheep far outnumber the human population".



The second illustration shows an Edward VIII box on the quayside at Tobermory on the Isle of Mull. The box bears a sign pointing the way of the town's post office. The picture was submitted by Gilbert Price of Perthshire. Edward VIII posting boxes were featured in Nos 17 and 80 in this series, published in the *Bulletin* of May 1980 and February 1986. About 130 boxes exist with the cipher of King Edward VIII who reigned for less than a year (20 January-10 December 1936).

I have on file a considerable number of photographs and transparencies sent in by readers for this "Posting Boxes" feature – enough to last for the next few years. I regret I cannot accept any more and should be grateful if readers would not send any more in. Thank you. Editor.

Readers interested in letter boxes are reminded of the existence of the Letter Box Study Group – details of which can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to the Secretary: Sally Jones, 43 Miall Road, Hall Green, BIRMINGHAM, B28 9BS.