

# Collecting Open Value Post & Go Stamps

By John Gray

The introduction of NCR Post & Go machines in UK post offices allows the printing of Open Value (OV) Post & Go stamps for individual letters or packages. John Gray guides collectors through the bewildering array of different OV stamps that can be obtained from NCR machines.

Post & Go machines, or self-service postal kiosks, have been a feature of selected post offices throughout the UK since October 2008, when the first machines were installed at The Galleries Post Office in Bristol. The first Post & Go machines, made by Wincor Nixdorf of Paderborn, Germany, enabled customers to buy Royal Mail Post & Go stamps and labels for a restricted range of postal services. The Wincor Nixdorf machines are currently being replaced by new Post & Go machines produced by the NCR Corporation, which was founded as the National Cash Register Company in Dayton, Ohio, in 1884. The first two NCR Post & Go machines were installed in Harpenden Post Office and were active from 28 February 2014. Eventually, all the Wincor Nixdorf machines will be replaced with NCR machines, and NCR machines are currently being installed in additional post offices as part of a programme of improvement of Post Office services. The NCR Post & Go machines are able to produce Post & Go stamps for a much greater range of Royal Mail and Parcelforce services than the Wincor Nixdorf machines, with only a few services still requiring counter service.

The NCR Post & Go machines are able to produce non-value indicated (NVI) stamps, like the Wincor Nixdorf machines, but have the added capability of producing a wide range of open value (OV) stamps for most of the services offered by Royal Mail and Parcelforce. The NCR Post & Go machines use a thermal print head to print various inscriptions on the thermally sensitive paper of the blank Post & Go stamps, which are printed in gravure by Walsall Security Printers and supplied in rolls of 1500 stamps. Stamp rolls for use in NCR machines have a larger core than rolls used in Wincor Nixdorf machines, so the rolls are not interchangeable between the two sorts of Post & Go machines. Old stocks of stamps produced for Wincor Nixdorf machines are reported to have been rewound on the larger core for use in NCR machines.

Two Post & Go stamps for the 1st class letter service from an NCR machine at Cambridge City Post Office are shown in Fig 1. The stamp on the left is the NVI stamp for letters up to 100g., with inscriptions similar to that of the Wincor Nixdorf machines, although with different fonts. It can be obtained by touching the 'Buy Stamps' or the '1st class stamp (up to 100g)' icons on the screen of the NCR machine. The stamp on the right is the OV stamp for the 1st class letter service and was bought by touching the 'Post an Item' icon on the screen. This leads



Fig 1 Non-value indicated (NVI, left) and open value (OV, right) 1st class stamps from an NCR Post & Go machine, showing the different inscriptions. Both stamps have the same four-part numeric code on the bottom line

to a series of screens requiring the letter to be weighed, its destination country entered and the required postal service chosen. For many of the Royal Mail services available, the number of screens to be negotiated can be bewildering and a majority of customers still require assistance from Post Office staff. The 1st class OV stamp illustrated was purchased for a letter weighing 8g. destined for a location within the UK. Although the stamp was produced specifically for the individual weighed letter, and would normally be affixed to that letter and posted straightaway, it can be taken away and used at a later date on any other letter up to 100g.

The OV 1st class stamp illustrated has the service indicator 1L (1st class letter) printed in a large bold font at the top left of the stamp. A two-character code (B4) in a smaller font on the next line indicates the service and the VAT status of the service. The upper-case letter is a Royal Mail service code and is the same as used on Horizon labels produced by counter staff in post offices. The number indicates the VAT status of the service, which in this case is VAT-exempt. Below the VAT code is the price paid (£0.62) and the weight of the letter, with a four-part numeric code on the bottom line. This numeric code is the same as on the NVI stamp and includes the location code of the post office (008113, Cambridge City Post Office), the machine number (67), the session number (12368 or 12369) and the transaction number (01). The VAT status of the chosen service can be discerned by inspection of the receipt (see central region of Fig 2); 1st class within the UK is VAT-exempt (E). Other services are charged VAT at the standard rate (S), currently 20 per cent, or are zero-rated for VAT (Z). This notation on the receipt is helpful in understanding the various numeric VAT codes printed on all OV stamps. For Royal Mail services, VAT-exempt services are indicated by the number 4, zero-rated services by 5, and standard-rate VAT services by 6. For Parcelforce services, zero-rated services are



Fig 2 A receipt for the OV 1st class stamp shown in Fig 1. The VAT rate (E) for the 1st class stamp is shown in the centre of the receipt, with the abbreviations for the VAT rates shown underneath

indicated by the number 8 and standard-rate VAT services by 9.

The aim of this article is to provide a guide to all the OV stamps that can currently be obtained from NCR Post & Go machines, so that collectors can make informed decisions about which, if any, of the OV stamps to collect. A full list is provided in Table 1, with details of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce services, the inscriptions and VAT codes on the stamps and the number of weight classes for each service. This information helps define the total number of different stamps obtainable from the machines (excluding



variations in weight within each weight class). I calculate that the purchase of one stamp for each service, VAT code, weight class and destination zone would result in a total of 479 different Post & Go stamps. This can be reduced to 64 stamps if only one stamp for each service and VAT code is purchased, ignoring the different weight classes and destination zones, or to 35 stamps if only 1 stamp for each service is purchased, ignoring the different VAT codes, weight classes and destination zones.

## Royal Mail UK services

The NCR Post & Go machines are able to provide OV stamps for most of the services provided by Royal Mail, and it is helpful to have access to detailed information on the available services. This can be obtained from the Royal Mail website ([www.royalmail.com](http://www.royalmail.com)) or from a small booklet entitled *Our prices Your handy guide to our UK and international parcel and letter service prices* available at most post offices. The latest version with prices valid from 31 March 2014 was updated in May 2014 (booklet RMOP11).

## UK Standard services

Royal Mail provide 1st and 2nd class delivery services for letters, large letters, small parcels and medium parcels within the UK and Channel Islands, and OV stamps are available for each of these services. As shown in Fig 3, the OV designations on the stamps are 1L, 1LG, 1SP or 1MP for the 1st class services, and 2L, 2LG, 2SP or 2MP for the 2nd class services. Items for delivery to the Channel Islands are zero-rated for VAT, and therefore cost the same as the VAT-exempt services within the UK. However, OV stamps for services to the Channel Islands have VAT codes including the number 5 for zero-rated (see the 1st class stamps in Fig 3). A set of stamps for Royal Mail standard services for just one weight class, but with the two VAT codes, would consist of 16 stamps.

## UK Confirmed services

The Royal Mail Confirmed services provide a signature on delivery for letters, large letters, small parcels and medium parcels within the UK and Channel Islands. The OV stamps have the same 1L, 1LG, 1SP or 1MP identifiers for the 1st class services, and 2L, 2LG, 2SP or 2MP for the 2nd class services as the standard services, with the addition of 'Signed For' in a smaller font on the same line as the VAT code (Fig 4). As with the standard services, delivery is VAT-exempt within the UK and zero-rated for the Channel Islands, giving the same set of VAT codes as the standard services. The Signed For services each cost £1.10 more than the Standard services and require that a bar-coded label with a return address is affixed to each letter or parcel. This requires intervention from post office staff to approve the purchase of the stamp and to ensure that the item is posted correctly. Post office staff have tightened up considerably on allowing collectors to purchase and keep Signed For stamps without posting the item, and in many post offices it is no longer possible to obtain and keep unused stamps for the Signed For services. However, a collection of used Post & Go stamps for these services is entirely



Fig 3 OV stamps for Royal Mail's Standard 1st and 2nd class services for letter (L), large letter (LG), small parcel (SP) and medium parcel (MP). The 1st class stamps in the top half of the figure have the VAT code 5 for delivery to the Channel Islands. The 2nd class stamps in the bottom half have VAT code 4 for UK delivery



Fig 4 OV stamps for Royal Mail's Confirmed 1st and 2nd class services for letter (L), large letter (LG), small parcel (SP) and medium parcel (MP). All stamps have the 'Signed For' designation on the same line as the VAT code. The 1st class stamps in the top half of the figure have the VAT code 4 for UK delivery. The 2nd class stamps in the bottom half have VAT code 5 for delivery to the Channel Islands



possible, and may be of greater value for students of postal history. Used or unused, a collection of Signed For stamps will consist of 16 stamps, if stamps with both VAT codes are included.

## UK Guaranteed services

Royal Mail Special Delivery services guarantee next-day delivery by 1p.m. or 9a.m., with guaranteed delivery on Saturday for an extra charge of £3. Special Delivery by 1p.m. is VAT-exempt for the UK and zero-rated for the Channel Islands, giving two different VAT codes (Y4 and Y5) on stamps with the designation SD1 (Fig 5). Stamps for Special Delivery by 1p.m. on Saturday have the addition of 'Sat G'tee' in a smaller font on the same line as the VAT code. In the UK, VAT at the standard rate (20 per cent) is included in the price of this service, giving a VAT code of Y6. However, Special Delivery by 1p.m. on Saturday in the Channel Islands is zero-rated for VAT (VAT code Y5) and is cheaper than UK delivery. A similar disparity exists in the price of the Special Delivery by 9a.m. service between the UK and the Channel Islands. Deliveries within the UK include VAT at 20 per cent, whereas deliveries to the Channel Islands are zero-rated for VAT. The SD9 and SD9 'Sat G'tee' stamps for the UK have VAT code Y6, whereas the stamps for the Channel Islands have VAT code Y5 (see Fig 5). All of these services require the postcode of the delivery address to be uploaded via the touch screen and a Special Delivery label attached to the item and scanned by the NCR machine. Intervention from post office staff is required to reset the touch screen to allow completion of the purchase of the stamps, which have the first part of the postcode of the delivery address printed on the stamp (see Fig 5). There are eight basic stamps (all shown in Fig 5) if stamps with different VAT codes are included.

## Royal Mail International services

A change to Royal Mail's International services occurred after the introduction of the first NCR machines, resulting in changes to the service indicators on the stamps for some services from 31 March 2014. The services currently available are considered first in the sections below, with the very short-lived stamps for the superseded Aisured and International Signed For services considered later. Stamps for the International Economy service, previously known as surface mail, are not available from NCR Post & Go machines.

## International Standard services

International Standard was previously known as Airmail, and is indicated by the designations the letter 'A/Letter' or 'A/Sml. Parcel' on the OV stamps available from NCR machines (Fig 6, top two stamps). The service is available for letters up to 100g. and small parcels up to 2kg. Letters and small parcels to Europe are VAT-exempt and stamps have the VAT code H4, whereas letters and small parcels to other locations worldwide are zero-rated for VAT and stamps have the code H5. Two different sets of prices are charged for small parcels to different locations outside Europe, called World Zones 1 and 2 by Royal Mail, but apart from the price there are no differences between the designations or VAT



Fig 5 OV stamps for Royal Mail's Guaranteed services for Special Delivery before 1p.m. (SD1), before 9a.m. (SD9) and with guaranteed delivery on Saturday (Sat G'tee). The first part of the postcode of the delivery address is printed on the same line as the item weight. Stamps on the left are for delivery to a Cambridge address; stamps on the right are for delivery to a Jersey address



Fig 6 Current OV stamps for Royal Mail International services: Standard (A), International Tracked & Signed (ITS), International Tracked (IT) and International Signed (IS). Stamps on the left are for letters; stamps on the right are for small parcels



codes on the stamps; they are both designated 'A/Sml.Parcl H5'. Although intended for immediate use on the weighed item, these stamps do not require any intervention by post office staff and can therefore be removed for later use. There are just four basic stamps with different designations if the different VAT codes are included.

## International Tracked and Signed services

ITS (International Tracked & Signed) provides a fully tracked service with signature on delivery and online confirmation for delivery of letters and small parcels to 43 destination countries. OV stamps have the designation 'ITS/Letter' or 'ITS/Sml.Parcl' (Fig 6, second row from top). The ITS service costs £5 more than the corresponding International Standard service. As with the International Standard service, letters and small parcels to Europe are VAT-exempt and stamps have the VAT code H4, whereas letters and small parcels to other locations worldwide are zero-rated for VAT and stamps have the code H5. There are no differences in the designations on stamps for small parcels to World Zones 1 or 2; they are both ITS Sml.Parcl H5. Completion of the purchase of ITS stamps requires attachment of a bar-coded Registered label to the item, scanning of the label by the NCR machine and intervention of post office staff to reset the touch screen. There are four basic stamps for the ITS services if both VAT codes are included.

## International Tracked services

The IT (International Tracked) services, previously known as Airsure, are available to 33 destination countries and offer a fully tracked service with online confirmation of delivery. The services are available for letters up to 100g. and small parcels up to 2kg, and the corresponding stamps have the designation 'IT/Letter' or 'IT/Sml.Parcl' (Fig 6, third row from top). The service to destinations within the European Union include VAT at 20 per cent (VAT code R6), whereas services to non-EU European countries (such as Switzerland) and to countries in World Zones 1 and 2 are zero-rated for VAT (VAT code R5). There are four basic stamps for the IT services, if both VAT codes are included.

## International Signed services

The IS (International Signed) services, previously known as International Signed For, are available to 190 destination countries and provide tracking within the UK and a signature taken on delivery. OV stamps have the designation 'IS/Letter' or 'IS/Sml.Parcl' (Fig 6, bottom row) and are available for the same range of letters and small parcels as the other international services. The IS service is VAT-exempt for items to Europe (VAT code H4), although the service is available only to countries that cannot support ITS and IT services. In Europe, the IS service is available only for mail to Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia and Spain. The IS service to countries in World Zones 1 and 2 is zero-rated for VAT, and the stamps show the VAT code H5. The purchase of OV stamps for the IS services requires that a bar-coded label is attached to the item and post office staff have to reset the touch screen



Fig 7 Previous OV stamps for Royal Mail International services Airsure (AAX Letter and AAX Sml.Parcl) and International Signed For (A ISF Letter and A ISF Sml.Parcl). These OV stamps were available for a six-week period between 14 February and 29 March 2014

## The Royal Mail services known as Airsure and International Signed For were renamed when changes to postal services were introduced on 31 March 2014. Airsure became International Tracked, and International Signed For became International Signed

and ensure the item is correctly handed over to post office staff, as with other signed-for items. There are four basic stamps for the IS service, if the two VAT codes are included.

## Airsure and International Signed For services

The Royal Mail services known as Airsure and International Signed For were renamed when changes to postal services were introduced on 31 March 2014. Airsure became International Tracked, and International Signed For became International Signed. OV stamps for the Airsure and International Signed For services were available from NCR machines for a period of about six weeks (from 14 February to 29 March 2014). Stamps for the Airsure services have the designation 'AAX/Letter' or 'AAX/Sml.Parcl' (Fig 7, top), and show the VAT codes R6 for items to Europe (20 per cent VAT) or R5 for items to non-EU European destinations and World Zones 1 and 2 (zero-rated for VAT). Stamps for the International Signed For services have the designation 'A/ISF Letter' or 'A/ISF Sml.Parcl' (Fig 7 bottom) and the VAT codes H4 (VAT exempt) for items to Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia and Spain or H5 (zero-rated for VAT) for items to World Zones 1 and 2. There are four basic stamps for each of the Airsure and International Signed For services, if the two VAT codes for each service are included.

## Parcelforce Worldwide services

Parcelforce Worldwide is the division of Royal Mail that handles large parcels not exceeding 1.5m. long and 30kg in weight to be delivered within the UK and worldwide. The UK services are all Express tracked services; there is no 2nd class service for large parcels. Parcelforce Worldwide offer a range of services with different delivery-time targets for delivery worldwide, but stamps for the globaleconomy and globalexpress services are not available from NCR Post & Go machines.

The globalvalue service offers delivery of large parcels from four working days to nine delivery zones around the world. This service is not available for deliveries within the UK, but is available for items delivered to the Channel Islands. Stamps for the globalvalue service have the designation 'PS' (believed to stand for Parcelforce Standard) and a VAT code of '78' or '79'. The globalvalue service to the Channel Islands is zero-rated for VAT and the OV stamp has the code '78', whereas items posted to destinations worldwide are charged VAT at 20 per cent and stamps have the code '79' (Fig 8, top row).

The more expensive globalpriority services offer delivery from three working days to the same nine delivery zones around the world. As with the globalvalue service, globalpriority is available for items delivered to the Channel Islands, but VAT is charged at 20 per cent so there is only one VAT code on OV stamps for the globalpriority service worldwide. The stamps have the designation 'GP' and the VAT code '79' (Fig 8, bottom row).

Parcelforce Worldwide offers five different Express services for deliveries within the UK. VAT is charged at 20 per cent on all these services. The Express48 service offers delivery within two days in the UK. Stamps for this service have the designation '48' and VAT code '79' (Fig



8, second row from top). The Express24 service offers next-day delivery by the close of business and stamps have the designation '24' and VAT code '79' (Fig 8, second row from top). The ExpressAM service offers next-day delivery before 12 noon and stamps have the designation 'AM' and VAT code '79' (Fig 8, third row from top). The Express10 and Express9 services offer next-day delivery before 10a.m. and 9a.m., respectively, with the designations '10' and '9' on the OV stamps (Fig 8). As with the other Express services, the stamps for the Express10 and Express9 services have the VAT code '79'. All of these services require a destination postcode and address to be uploaded from the touch screen and a Parcelforce bar-code label, with the designation '48', '24', 'AM', '10' or '9', attached to the parcel. The label must then be scanned on the NCR machine and the parcel handed over to the post office staff. The first part of the destination postcode appears on the OV stamp (see Fig 8). Saturday delivery is available for all these Express services at an extra cost of £9, but there is no indicator for Saturday delivery on the stamps, unlike the 'Sat G'tee' lettering printed on the Special Delivery stamps (see Fig 5).

### What should I collect?

I hope this article has helped to define exactly how many different OV stamps can be obtained from NCR Post & Go machines. The number of different OV stamps is overwhelming and most collectors will need to make decisions on exactly what they collect, influenced, no doubt, by financial considerations. Post & Go stamps for Parcelforce Worldwide services are particularly expensive: the minimum price is £9.65 for delivery of a 0.5kg parcel to the Channel islands by the globalvalue service and the maximum price appears to be £372.75 for a 30kg parcel to world zone 12 by the globalpriority service. Of course, these are the prices paid by the purchaser of the Post & Go stamps and such expenditure can be avoided by collecting used examples.

If a collection of mint/unused Post & Go stamps is desired there are a number of approaches followed by different collectors:

#### 1. OV stamps corresponding to the NVI stamps found in Collectors' strips dispensed by Post & Go machines.

Currently, this would include OV stamps equivalent to the 1st class up to 100g., 1st Large up to 100g., Euro 20g., World 10g., Europe up to 60g., Worldwide up to 20g. and Worldwide up to 60g. stamps, together with the 2nd class up to 100g. and 2nd Large up to 100g. stamps. The minimum set of eight OV stamps would cost £8.68 for each individual underlying Post & Go design (Machin head, Union flag, Christmas robin etc). The set could be extended to 13 stamps by including OV stamps for both of the Euro 20g. and World 10g. services and 1L, 1LG, 2L and 2LG stamps with different VAT codes. The extended set would cost £12.46.

#### 2. OV stamps for UK and International Standard services.

These stamps can all be purchased and used at a later date; intervention by post office staff is not required to complete the purchase. The minimum set would consist of ten stamps



Fig 8 OV stamps for Parcelforce Worldwide services: globalvalue (PS), Express48, 24, AM, 10 and 9 and globalpriority (GP). The globalvalue stamp at the top left is for delivery to Jersey; the stamp at the top right is for delivery to the Republic of Ireland. The Express service stamps are all for delivery to a Cambridge address. The globalpriority stamp at the bottom right is for delivery to a Jersey address

**As with the globalvalue service, globalpriority is available for items delivered to the Channel Islands, but VAT is charged at 20 per cent so there is only one VAT code on OV stamps for the globalpriority service worldwide. The stamps have the designation 'GP' and the VAT code '79'**

(1L, 1LG, 1SP, 1MP, 2L, 2LG, 2SP, 2MP, A Letter and A Sml.Parcl) and would cost £23.83 at current rates. If stamps with both VAT codes for each service were collected the cost for 20 different OV stamps would be £48.26.

#### 3. OV stamps for all Royal Mail and Parcelforce services.

The minimum set would consist of 35 stamps to include all the OV designations shown in Table 1. The minimum cost of these stamps would be just under £280, due to the high relative cost of stamps for the Parcelforce services. If stamps with all different VAT codes were included, the number of stamps would rise to 64, and the cost would rise to just over £480. Many of these stamps will be increasingly difficult to obtain in a mint state because of the instructions to post office staff to ensure the stamps are affixed to the items to be mailed.

These are just three possible options (or six if different VAT codes are collected) for a collection of NCR OV stamps. Obviously, collectors must make up their own minds on what to collect, but I believe decisions have been difficult to make because of a lack of knowledge of the full range of OV stamp available. I hope this article has helped to resolve that problem. However, please bear in mind that consideration needs to be given to what OV stamps to collect for Post & Go issues of six designs, such as the recent British Flora sets. If you want to collect your chosen OV stamp set on each of the six individual designs, the cost rises six-fold!

Table 1. Open Value (OV) stamps available from NCR Post &amp; Go machines. The OV designation, VAT codes, number of weight classes and the minimum price for stamps are given for each of the Royal Mail and Parcelforce Worldwide service

Service	Description	OV designation	VAT codes	No. weight classes	Lowest price at 31.03.14
UK Standard 1st Class	Letter	1L	B4, B5	1	£0.62
UK Standard 1st Class	Large Letter	1LG	C4, C5	4	£0.93
UK Standard 1st Class	Small Parcel	1SP	D4, D5	2	£3.20
UK Standard 1st Class	Medium Parcel	1MP	D4, D5	5	£5.65
UK Standard 2nd Class	Letter	2L	E4, E5	1	£0.53
UK Standard 2nd Class	Large Letter	2LG	F4, F5	4	£0.73
UK Standard 2nd Class	Small Parcel	2SP	G4, G5	2	£2.80
UK Standard 2nd Class	Medium Parcel	2MP	G4, G5	5	£5.20
UK Confirmed 1st Class	Letter Signed For	1L Signed For	B4, B5	1	£1.72
UK Confirmed 1st Class	Large Letter Signed For	1LG Signed For	C4, C5	4	£2.03
UK Confirmed 1st Class	Small Parcel Signed For	1SP Signed For	D4, D5	2	£4.30
UK Confirmed 1st Class	Medium Parcel Signed For	1MP Signed For	D4, D5	5	£6.75
UK Confirmed 2nd Class	Letter Signed For	2L Signed For	E4, E5	1	£1.63
UK Confirmed 2nd Class	Large Letter Signed For	2LG Signed For	F4, F5	4	£1.83
UK Confirmed 2nd Class	Small Parcel Signed For	2SP Signed For	G4, G5	2	£3.90
UK Confirmed 2nd Class	Medium Parcel Signed For	2MP Signed For	G4, G5	5	£6.30
UK Guaranteed	Special Delivery by 1pm	SD1	Y4, Y5	6	£6.40
UK Guaranteed	Special Delivery by 1pm with Sat Guarantee	SD1 Sat G'tee	Y5, Y6	6	£9.40 /£10.68
UK Guaranteed	Special Delivery by 9a.m.	SD9	Y5, Y6	4	£15.15 /£18.18
UK Guaranteed	Special Delivery by 9a.m. with Sat Guarantee	SD9 Sat G'tee	Y5, Y6	4	£18.15/£21.18
International Standard	Letter	A Letter	H4, H5	4	£0.97
International Standard	Small Parcel	A Sml.Parcl	H4, H5	9	£3.20/£3.80
International Tracked & Signed	Letter	ITS Letter	H4, H5	3	£5.97/£6.28
International Tracked & Signed	Small Parcel	ITS Sml.Parcl	H4, H5	9	£8.20/£8.80
International Tracked	Letter	IT letter	R5, R6	3	£5.97/£7.16
International Tracked	Small Parcel	IT Sml.Parcl	R5, R6	9	£8.20/£8.80
International Signed	Letter	IS Letter	H4, H5	3	£5.97/£6.28
International Signed	Small Parcel	IS Sml.Parcl	H4, H5	9	£8.20/£8.80
Parcelforce Worldwide	gobalvalue	PS	78, 79	9	£9.65/£16.68
Parcelforce Worldwide	globalpriority	GP	79	9	£35.40
Parcelforce Worldwide	Express48	48	79	7	£11.99
Parcelforce Worldwide	Express24	24	79	7	£16.49
Parcelforce Worldwide	ExpressAM	AM	79	7	£21.49
Parcelforce Worldwide	Express10	10	79	7	£31.49
Parcelforce Worldwide	Express9	9	79	7	£41.48