

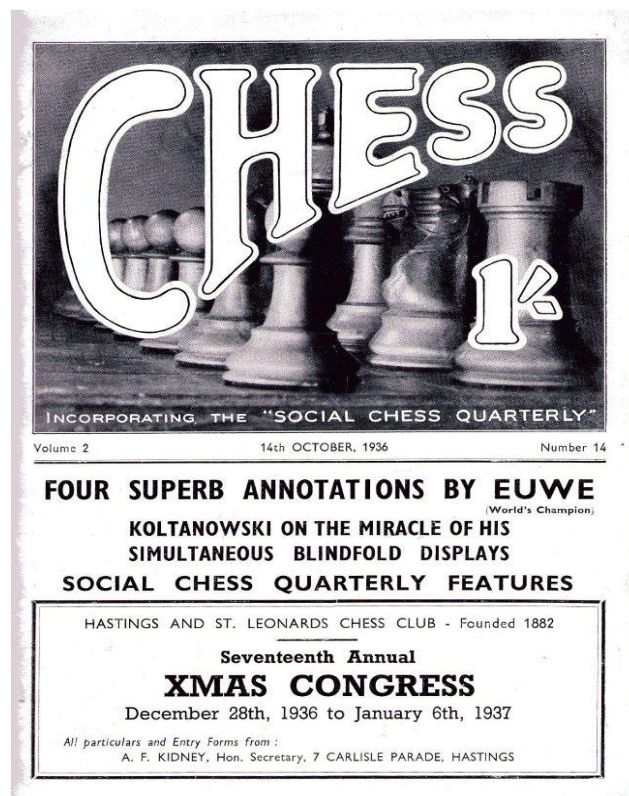
# The Meter Stamps of 'Chess' Magazine

by Miles Patterson

The idea of postage printed by machine, rather than using stamps, was put forward in Germany around 1895. A machine was patented in the USA in 1899. The first limited trials were in Norway in 1900 to 1905, although they weren't very successful. The first successful and sustained use was in New Zealand, starting in 1904. Postage meters were first licensed in the UK in 1922.

In thematic collecting, postage meter stamps offer another means of illustrating the theme. A study of meter stamps can be quite as interesting and challenging as one of stamps or postmarks. Having collected several meter stamps used by a UK chess magazine, I found that a little research shows how the various meter stamps and slogans used over the years can be woven into the story of the magazine itself, particularly in more recent years, when its ownership changed hands a couple of times.

'Chess', a monthly periodical (Figure 1), was founded in 1935 by Baruch H Wood, a strong English chess player, as a less formal alternative to the long running 'British Chess Magazine' (founded in 1881). Wood's approach was more 'chatty' than in traditional chess magazines, with photographs and cartoons. The business was based in Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, the major city in central England.



**Figure 1:** An early issue of 'Chess' magazine.

The onset of the Second World War made things very difficult for the new business, including affecting the availability of paper for printing. In fact, when war broke out, Wood was stranded with the English team in Buenos Aires at the Chess Olympiad; keeping the magazine going fell to his wife. When he managed to get back to England, Wood had a full time war job (he had an MSc in Chemistry and did research on food flavourings to improve the quality of rations) as well as running the magazine. In spite of the difficulties, the magazine and its associated chess book and equipment business was successful, due mainly to the prodigious amount of time and effort put in by Wood himself.



**Figure 2:** Neopost LV machine GviR

The magazine soon started using Neopost postage meters (Figure 2), with the simple slogan 'Chess, Sutton Coldfield, England'. The July 1937 issue of the magazine was the last to give the address for all communications as 'Masonic Buildings, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, England'. Subsequent issues give simply 'Chess, Sutton Coldfield, England' (note the meter slogan uses this form), which Wood always maintained in his magazine, was 'sufficient address' (presumably all Post Office staff in England knew where Sutton Coldfield was – and all Post Office staff in Sutton Coldfield knew where the 'Chess' business was).

Early meter machines were 'Fixed Value' (FV), which had single piece dies for the value/country block, so a different value required replacement of the whole die with another, while retaining the town/date and slogan dies. Meters like those in Figure 2 were 'Limited Value' (LV) machines, which were introduced by Neopost from about 1930. Instead of the whole value/country die being replaced, a limited number of value segments could be inserted into an aperture in a blank country die, by means of a dial or lever. Some of the LV machine meter stamps, such as Figure 2, show the breaks in the lower frame either side of the value, characteristic of an LV machine (in an FV meter, the frame lines would be continuous) although on some LV machines there are no breaks. This LV mechanism also explains the poor impression of the '2d' value in Figure 2, compared with the rest of the meter stamp; obviously the value segment was not seated perfectly.

The numbering of early Neopost meters was started from N1, independently in each town. In effect this was a user's licence number, as additional or subsequent machines used the same number. Thus 'Chess' was the second Neopost meter licence holder (N2) in Sutton Coldfield. This numbering system started around 1926 and the

magazine started in 1935, so 'Chess' may have been using meters from the start, or at least before or during the war, although 12 February 1946 is the earliest I have seen. (Or perhaps Neopost meter sales in Sutton Coldfield were particularly slow.)



**Figure 3:** Neopost LV machine EiiR.

'Chess' continued using the N2 Neopost meters up to at least November 1961, now of course with the EiiR cipher (Figure 3) rather than GviR. There could have been a number of different actual meter machines used by 'Chess' with the N2 identification, perhaps retaining the old dies. Also, new dies could have been used in old meters, as other dies wore out. The EiiR cipher could have been used on an old machine or with a new machine. It would be interesting to find out when the switch from GviR to EiiR was implemented by 'Chess'. The King died on 6 February 1952 and Queen Elizabeth's coronation was 2 June 1953. The official first day for use of the EiiR cipher was 1 May 1953, although some may have been dated 24 April. A 'Chess' meter stamp dated 13 June 1953 still shows, not surprisingly, GviR (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Neopost LV machine GviR, used in reign of QE2.

Contemporary Meter Stamp Bulletins, issued by the Meter Stamp Study Group in the UK, provide some interesting information on the EiiR changeover. In Scotland, some GviR meters continued for quite a while, with new GviR dies being issued on request. The reason apparently was that Scottish Nationalists objected to the designation of the Queen as Elizabeth the *Second*, because the 16<sup>th</sup> century Elizabeth never ruled over Scotland and thus the new Queen was Elizabeth the *First* of the United Kingdom. However, the Post Office turned down any requests for a plain 'ER' cipher. (In some cases in England, it was perhaps just laziness, rather than political beliefs; instances of GvR – George the Fifth – ciphers were still being recorded in 1959 and EviiiR – Edward the Eighth – in 1962!)



**Figure 5:** Roneo Neopost 'Frankmaster' machine.

By November 1963, 'Chess' was using a new meter, NH838 (Figure 5). The new numbering system identified not the user, but the individual machine. These machines were the first Neopost 'Multi-value' (MV) machines, where each digit of the value required is set by dials (eg 0-9, ½, -). This machine and numbering system had been introduced by Neopost in 1955, although other manufacturers had already introduced them, so 'Chess' had probably not had a new meter machine for at least that long. The 'Chess' slogan has been updated a little but the message is the same. The value die of these meters no longer has the EiiR cipher, but a completely new and quite decorative design, known as the 'Emblems' (or 'Floral Emblems') design, the emblems being the rose of England, the thistle of Scotland, the shamrock of Ireland and the daffodil of Wales.



**Figure 6:** Neopost 405/505 machine.

By 1971, there was another new meter, RN438, and a change of design for the value die to a more modern utilitarian design. The non-postal value of this example (Figure 6) may indicate it was a test. Alternatively, it could just have been produced as a favour. Currency decimalisation in UK was implemented on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1971 and this seems to be the most likely reason for acquiring this new machine.



**Figure 7:** Neopost 405/505 machine. Change of 'Warwickshire' to 'West Midlands'.

RN438 was used until at least September 1974. That year, however, the counties in England were reorganised and Warwickshire became 'West Midlands'. The next meter, RM1600, was in use by 1976 and featured a change to the postmark element to show the new West Midlands name (Figure 7).



**Figure 8:** Neopost 405/505 machine.

A similar meter, RR53114 Figure 8, was then used from at least May 1982 to at least March 1985.



**Figure 9:** Hasler 'Mailmaster' machine.

Next there was a change from Neopost to a Hasler machine, HF15558, (Figure 9) in use by January 1986. The Hasler HF (plus five digits) series of machines had the year of manufacture (this does not necessarily mean the year of issue) encoded into the second of the five digits. The first '5' in the meter number corresponds to 1985.

Then, in 1988, after over 50 years running the magazine, Wood sold the business, probably due to age and ill health, to Robert Maxwell's publishing company, Pergamon. The HF15558 meter was retained but with a new slogan (Figure 10).



**Figure 10:** Hasler 'Mailmaster' machine. Change of ownership to 'Pergamon'.

Amid controversy over his business dealings, Maxwell died in mysterious circumstances in 1991. This triggered a collapse of Maxwell's business empire. In the turmoil, 'Pergamon Chess' became 'Maxwell MacMillan Chess' and was moved from Sutton Coldfield to Maxwell's business operations in Oxford. It would be nice to see some meter stamps from the brief Oxford-based period to see if they changed the slogan or the town/date dies.



**Figure 11:** Hasler 'Mailmaster' machine. Change of ownership to 'Chess & Bridge'.  
(with 'W1' postal district error?)

In 1992, 'Chess' was sold to a private consortium and moved to Euston Road, London NW1 (August 1992 was the first issue under new management). Again the HF15558 meter was retained but the slogan changed to that of the new company - 'Chess & Bridge' (Figure 11). Curiously, the town/date die contains the location 'W1' not 'NW1' as in the address. The two postal districts NW1 and W1 are adjacent and Euston Road is close to the border, but the error (if it is an error), is difficult to explain. The slogan also reflects the growing use of the internet, by providing an email address, and crams in a large amount of information, with full address, telephone, fax and email, as well as symbols representing the two main areas of the business.

The last meter used by the magazine shows a change back to Neopost machines, with N1300916. The slogan has gone to the opposite extreme, being

simplified to all you need to know in this Internet age – the web address (Figure 12). The town/date die now shows the correct postal district, NW1.



**Figure 12:** Neopost 'IJ25' digital inkjet machine (with correct postal district – NW1).

That is the end of the story chronologically, because the company informed me that they no longer use postage meters. It is not the end of the story of the 'Chess' meters, however; there are several gaps to be filled (see Table 1), in terms of earliest and latest use of the various meters. Indeed, there may be additional meters used that are not recorded here. Anyone who can help with further information is kindly asked to contact me at: mp19370@gmail.com.

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**References:** International Postage Meter Stamp Catalogue, UK Meter Stamp Study Group (1950-84) Bulletins, 'Meter Stamps of Great Britain 1972' by John C Mann.

**Table 1:** Summary of 'Chess' Magazine Meter Stamps

Meter	Slogan	Confirmed Dates of Use
N2 GviR Neopost LV	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	23 Nov 45 to 13 Jun 53 (‘Checkmate’ catalogue gives use until 1954?)
N2 EiiR Neopost LV	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	15 Feb 56 to 28 Nov 61 (‘Checkmate’ catalogue gives use starting in 1954?)
NH 838 Roneo Neopost ‘Frankmaster’ 305	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	25 Jun 62 to 13 Mar 69 (Checkmate catalogue illustration)
RN 438 Neopost 405/505	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	15 Sep 70 to 24 Sep 74 (‘Checkmate’ catalogue gives use 1969 to 1975?)
RM1600 Neopost 405/505	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	17 Jun 76 to 10 Mar 80 (‘Checkmate’ catalogue gives use from 1975?)
RR 53114 Neopost 405/505	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	22 Apr 81 to 28 Mar 85
HF15558 Hasler ‘Mailmaster’ F204/F1204	Chess Sutton Coldfield England World Chess Specialists	17 Jan 86 to 3 Mar 88
HF15558 Hasler ‘Mailmaster’ F204/F1204	Pergamon Chess West Midlands	13 Apr 88 to 14 May 91
HF15558 Hasler ‘Mailmaster’ F204/F1204	Chess & Bridge (with address etc)	13 May 96 to 13 Sep 97
N1300916 Neopost ‘IJ25’	WWW.CHESS.CO.UK	31 Jul 07