

# The 1953 Karsh Definitives of Queen Elizabeth II

▼ CHARLES J.G. VERGE

Work on the first Canadian definitives portraying Queen Elizabeth II (Scott Canada 325-329) was started immediately after the death of her father, King George VI, in February 1952. It took more than a year for the stamps to be produced and they were issued May 1, 1953 (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The first definitive stamp portraying Queen Elizabeth II.

Within the first week of her reign Post Office officials met to select a photo of the Queen from which a model of the stamp could be made. They settled on one of the four photographs taken by world-famous photographer, Yousuf Karsh of Ottawa (Figure 2). While the Canadian Bank Note Company (CBNC) began preparing the model, the selected photograph was sent, via the External Affairs Department, to the Queen for her approval, which she duly granted.

The artists at CBNC produced three models based on two Karsh photographs. Post Office officials chose one of these and suggested some changes (Figure 3). Although Karsh liked the model, he felt the Queen's hair should be toned down. The National Gallery of Canada objected to the word "Canada" in the original model that had been outlined in white because it gave a cluttered effect.



Figure 2: The four Karsh photographs from which the selection was made.

Officials at the National Gallery also pointed out that, for artistic purposes, the stroke through the cent "c" should be perpendicular rather than slanted. The final model was adopted on April 28, 1952, after discussion as to whether the royal monogram should read ER or EIIR.

The former won the day and crowned ERs appear at the upper left and upper right corners of the stamp. It is likely that the discussion was the same that was heard throughout the British Commonwealth at the time. It even affected Scotland. If the Renaissance Queen Elizabeth I had never reigned over Scotland or most of Canada then how could the new queen be Elizabeth II.

Next came the long and exacting process of engraving the master metal die exactly the size of the 4-cent stamp. The first proof of the master die was completed on August 28 and the final die proof was approved on October 30. Die proofs of the 4-cent were

prepared in 22 colors from which the colors for each of the five stamps were selected. The 1, 2, 3 and 5-cents dies were made from the master die sometime later. This part of the process was completed on Jan. 20, 1953.

The stamp image from the dies was transferred to printing plates by a siderographer after which the plate was hardened, bent and chromed for the presses (Figure 4).

Plate proofs were then made. Figure 5 shows a CBNC worker grinding red pigments in an ink mill to produce the red ink used to make the carmine rose color for this stamp.

The next step in the process is for printed plate proof sheets to be closely examined for flaws, small imperfections and scratches. When found, these are removed from the master plate prior to the printing run (Figure 6). Printing of the stamps was done on a rotary press that produces approximately 1,000 sheets of stamps an hour.

These were the presses that also printed Canadian currency at the time (Figure 7). In the 1950s, the final step in the



Figure 3: A modeler touches up the final model.

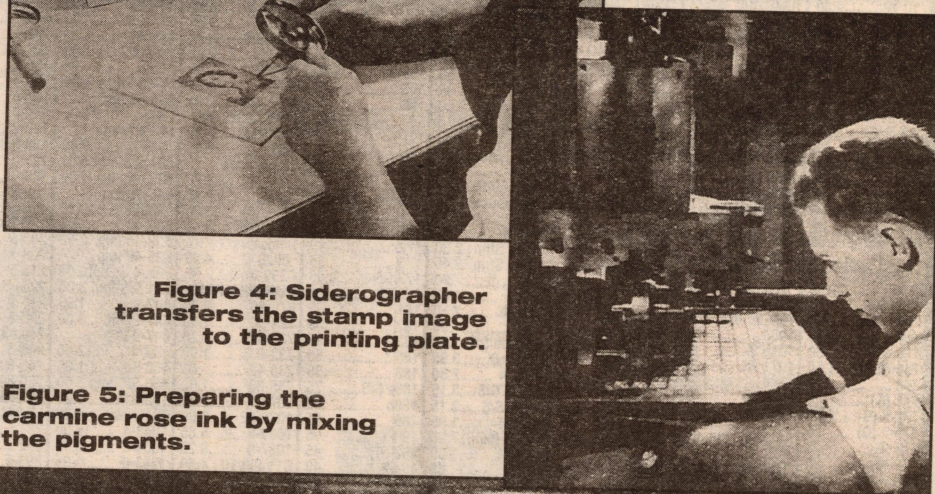
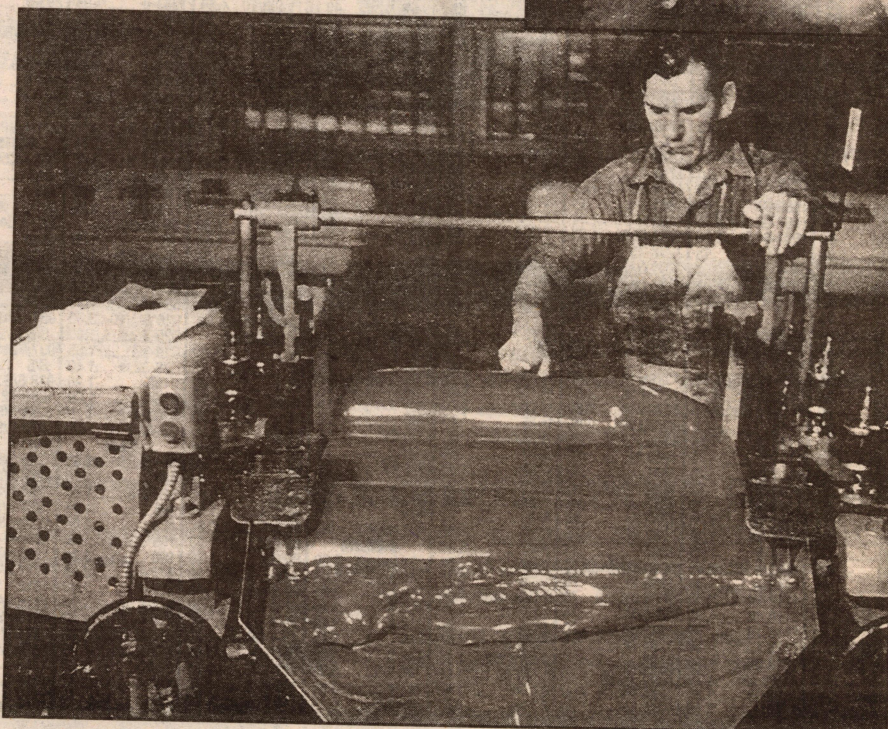


Figure 4: Siderographer transfers the stamp image to the printing plate.

Figure 5: Preparing the carmine rose ink by mixing the pigments.



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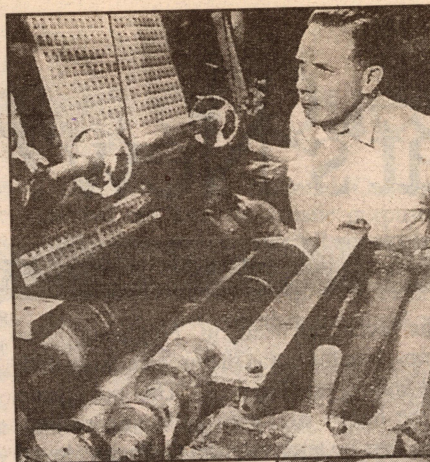
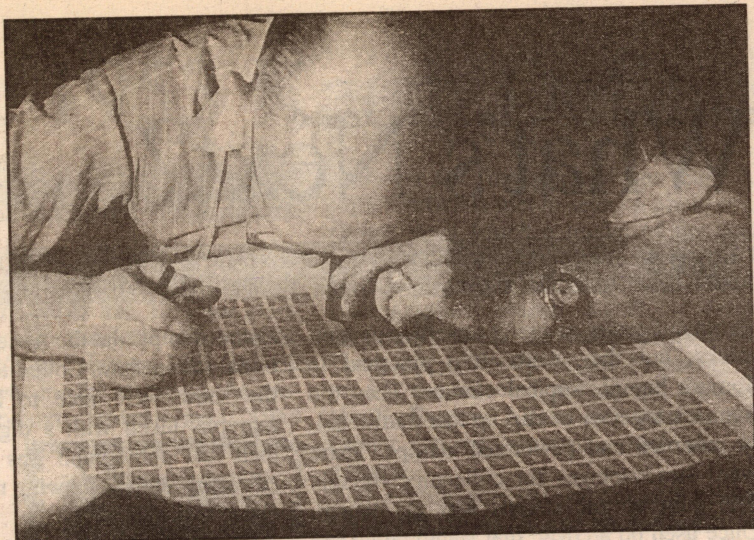
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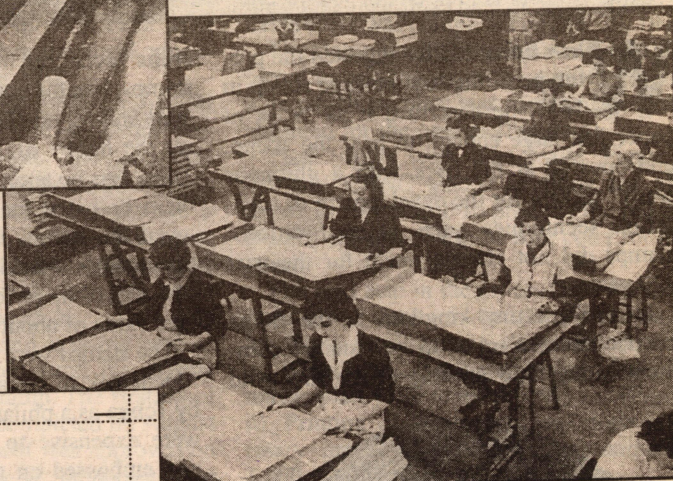


**Figure 6:**  
Examining  
the proof  
sheet for  
flaws and  
imperfec-  
tions.



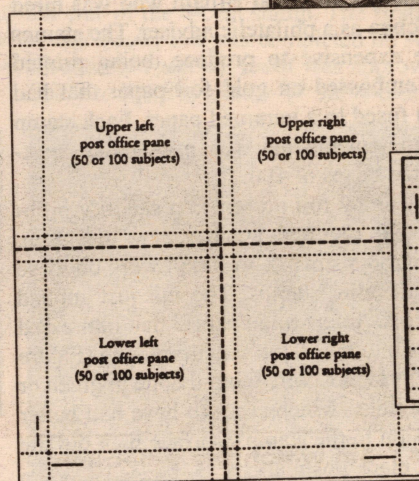
**Figure 7:** Printing of the 1953 Karsh definitives on a rotary press also used to print Canadian currency.

**Figure 8:**  
Examining the  
final printed  
sheets before  
preparing them  
for sale.



# Karsh Definitives - Technical Data

Value	Quantity Printed	Plates	Other formats
1 cent	166 million	1-3	Booklet and Official-G overprint, (plates 1-2).
2 cent	338 million	1-6	Official (plates 1-4); Coil and Precancel (sheet and coil).
3 cent	332 million	1-4	Booklet; Official (plates 1-3); Coil and Precancel (sheet).
4 cent	406 million	1-6	Booklet; Official (plate 1-2, 4); Coil and Precancel (sheet in 4 types).
5 cent	109 million	1-3	Official (plate 1-2) and Precancel (sheet in 3 types).



**Figure 9:** Sheet  
and pane format  
for all five val-  
ues of the Karsh  
definitives.

process was for the printed stamps to be checked for flaws before they were perforated and assembled in packages and stored in the vaults until distributed to post offices around the country (Figure 8).

The stamps were not popular and were quickly replaced in 1954 with a series based on a photograph by Dorothy Wilding. However, even during this short period of use, they were produced in large quantities and several plates were used.

Figure 9 shows the sheet and lower left pane formats. These are taken from D. Robin Harris's 1998 monograph *Karsh, Wilding and Cameo Definitives*. The imprint information is found only once on each pane of 100 or at all four corners of the printed sheet of 400. Each sheet had one control number in the lower left margin.

There were no major varieties in the issue with only a 6mm down perf shift known on the 4-cent Official. The 2, 3 and 4-cent coils were issued July 30, July 27 and Sept. 3, 1953, respectively.

Jump strips of four varieties exist with or without cutting guidelines for all three values. Six booklets were issued between July 6 and Oct. 20, 1953. Three came with English covers and three with bilingual covers. They sold for 25-cents each, although the stamps in the booklet amounted to a face value of 24 cents. The English and bilingual covers are different for each booklet and each cover has three different post office promotional messages.

All photographs used in this article were taken in March 1953 by Bert Beaver, staff photographer for *Weekend Picture Magazine*.

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Vertical perfs shifted to right. All MNH

337 var1  
1c Violet Brown

340 var1  
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341 var1  
5c Bright Blue

US\$ 27.25

US\$ 27.55

US\$ 20.65

## 1952-1966

### Karsh, Wilding, Cameo Definitives

D. Robin Harris, Nov 1998, 216 pages, 8½x11

#### 1952-53 Karsh 1954-62 Wilding 1962-66 Cameo Definitives

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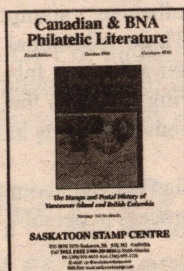
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