

Annuals and exhibitions Part three: Richard West's series

Greetings Where do Greetings (and now Occasions) stamps fit into the scheme of things? Collectors must really decide for themselves whether they are definitives or special issues (or indeed a separate category). However, from the 1992 series, with its designs on the theme of 'Memories', these stamps have been made available in presentation packs.

The Greetings stamps were produced only in booklets: so initially were the self-adhesive stamps. The 'experimental' booklet of 1993, containing 20 of the 1st class self-adhesive stamp, was also available in a presentation pack.

Although no longer produced, the humble postage due, which had not changed in design from inception up to decimalisation, saw three different designs since 1971. Presentation packs have been available for all the three different designs (when a 7p value was added to the 1971 series, this was also included in the packs).

Annual packs Back in 1967 it was decided to offer the year's special issues in one pack, which was designated at the time as a Gift Pack. It was issued on 27 November, so that it could also include the year's Christmas stamps.

The concept was repeated the following year, although in 1968 the Gift Pack was produced in both an English and a German language version, and did not include the year's Christmas stamps.

However, in 1968 the situation was made slightly more complicated by the addition of a further item, called the Collector's Pack. This was available from 16 September, and contained special issues of both 1967 (from the British Discoveries and Inventions set) and 1968 (up to the British Paintings series).

After 1968 the Gift Pack was dropped, but the Collector's Pack remained, for many years still containing issues which overlapped two years, albeit one pack continuing where the previous had stopped. This practice continued until 1971; thereafter, from 1972 onwards, the Collector's Pack contained just the sets issued in the particular year.

In 1983 the format of these annual packs changed to a standard A4 size, but the change of name, from Collector's Pack to Year Pack, did not take place until 1994. They continue to be offered at the end of each year.

In 1969 and 1970 the packs were also made available with either German or Japanese translation insert cards; from 1971 to 1974 only German cards were provided.

Back in 1978, in preparation for the London 1980 international stamp exhibition, the Post Office issued its first miniature sheet. Similar sheets were also issued in 1979 and 1980 for the 1980 exhibition, and again in 1988, 1989 and 1990 for the 1990 exhibition. However, the Collector's (Year) Packs did not at first include the miniature sheets: the situation changed in 1990 with the miniature sheet issued that year.

From 1994 Greetings stamps (issued in booklets) were, perhaps surprisingly, included in the Year Packs.

Year Books In 1984 came yet a further development, the Year Book. This is a bound volume, giving much background information to each set of special stamps issued during the year, each issue having its own 'chapter'. The stamps are provided, ready for mounting within the appropriate chapter.

Referring back to the miniature sheets produced to support the Stamp World London 90 exhibition, the Year Book for 1988 did include the miniature sheet that combined the four Edward Lear stamps, but it did not include the separate stamps. However, from 1989 the miniature sheets were included in their own right.

From 1995, luxury versions of the Year Book have been made available bound in leather.

In many instances, collectors like to have items which are absolutely pristine, in other words as originally issued. In the case of the Year Books, this means leaving the book with its cellophane protection intact: such books have never been opened and examined. A dilemma for many collectors occurred in 1998. The intention had been

continues with more special packs produced by Royal Mail

From top: 1967 Gift Pack, 1969 Collector's Pack, and 1998 Yearbook.

1967 Postage Stamps Special Issues

£1



Collectors Pack 1969

British Pictorial Stamps



To tell a story that's compelling and convincing requires tremendous skill under any circumstances. To spin a magical tale of another, parallel world populated by its own distinctive peoples, brimming with adventure, governed by unfamiliar yet credible rules and values, and then to offer all this up to the exacting scrutiny of the young reader must be one of the ultimate challenges facing any writer.

For at least two centuries British authors have risen to the challenge of creating parallel realities. Every generation has seen writers emerge to create magical worlds which have enthralled millions of children and their parents. The very best of this writing manages amazing longevity, continually finding new, eager and appreciative audiences many decades after first editions become collector's items.

The genre can trace its roots back to the early eighteenth century and such extraordinary works as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* which carries the reader on a mystical journey through a parallel world of strange lands. The glorious sense of other-worldliness, the exhilaration and ingenuity of invention, the lavish attention to detail and occasional dash of anarchy all combine to melt away reality and allow young readers freedom and escape from the adult world. And these are the elements that occur time and again in the classic works celebrated in this year's Magical Worlds stamps which mark the centenaries of Lewis Carroll's death and C S Lewis's birth.

Carroll's extraordinarily vivid and surreal world created in the Alice books never fails to delight its audience and is as fresh to read and enter into today as when it was first penned. In common with so many of the best children's storytellers, Lewis Carroll, the *son de plume* of Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, found a voice that was somehow exactly in tune with the young audience while avoiding the common pitfall of being patronising.

Like so many children's storytellers, Carroll was clearly a complex character – he was revered as a brilliant mathematician and he lectured on the subject at Oxford. He had one eyebrow noticeably higher than the other, and perhaps his preoccupation with symmetries, in his learned mathematical works and his children's books, tells us something about his fascination with the looking-glass. Both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* are intricate constructs filled with parody and puzzles and surreal nonsense poems which manage to appeal on different levels to adults and children alike. However, what really marked it out from other children's fiction at the time was that, unlike most Victorian works, it contained no whiff of instruction and moralising.

As Carroll wrote: "I can guarantee that the books have no religious teaching whatever in them – in fact they do not teach anything at all." The books were not just an instant success, they changed children's literature – and our imaginations – forever. In the year that has marked the centenary of his death, Carroll's severely neglected and overgrown grave in Guildford has been restored in



As a child in Belfast, C S Lewis's imagination for storytelling developed when he created his fantasy world of 'Narnia'.



Between the 1930s and '50s, Oxford became a hub of creativity where C S Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien and poet and writer writer Charles Williams were among the friends, many of them Oxford dons, who formed an informal literary group called The Inklings. They shared an intellectual fascination for language and a love of the ancient tradition of storytelling. On Thursday evenings they would meet in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen College to read out their latest work. Here The Lord of the Rings first captured an audience. Tolkien, for example, admitted being indebted to Lewis's encouragement: "only from him did I ever get the idea that my 'stuff' could be more than a private hobby."

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that the lowest value of the Christmas set should be a 13p value. The stamps had been printed, and Year Books were made up with the 13p stamps. A decision was then made to increase postal rates, and that the lowest value should be 14p. Replacement stamps were printed: the intention was that the 13p values in the Year Books be substituted with the 14p. However, some Year Books failed to have the stamps changed, and so exist with the 13p Christmas stamp. All examples of the 13p Christmas have come from Year Books, but how do you know if your Year Book contains the error of value unless you break open the cellophane? If your book turns out to contain the 14p, you have reduced the potential 'value' of your book in vain.

As with Year Packs, Year Books continue to be made available each year.

Before leaving special books, it is appropriate to mention *Snowdon Shepherd*, written by Keith Bowen, designer of the Wintertime stamps of 1992: the books were sold with a set of the stamps included.

Christmas packs In 1986 an experiment was tried of producing the 13p Christmas stamp in small sheets of 36 (two panes of 18 separated by a gutter), for sale in special packs. The idea was again tested in 1987, but not continued thereafter (now, of course, the inland rates Christmas stamps are available in booklet form).

The 1986 packs exist with a bar code sticker additionally affixed to the back, for limited test sales through non-Post Office outlets.

Further Gift Packs In 1994, the opening of the Channel Tunnel was marked by both the British and French Post Offices, the same stamp designs being used by both countries. A Gift Pack was made available, which contained joint first day covers of the stamps from both countries, the Souvenir Book (already mentioned), a joint presentation pack, and a 'black print' of the stamp designs.

Similar Gift Packs were offered for the 1994 Christmas stamps (including a presentation pack, first day cover and set of stamp cards), and in the

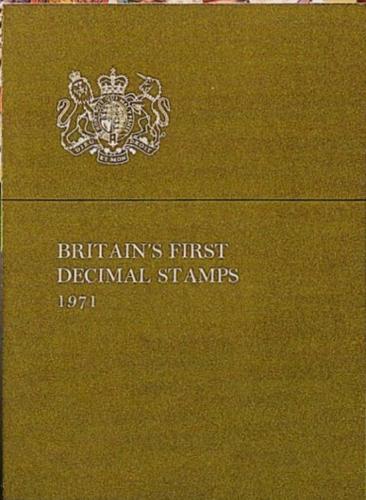
following year for Cats and the Centenary of The National Trust. The NT pack included a brochure on The National Trust, a presentation pack, and a set of stamp cards, with the stamps affixed to the picture side and cancelled on the day of issue.

Special issues To save any confusion, when mentioning special issues for which no presentation pack was provided last time, there were three further single stamp issues for which no pack was provided. These were for the 80th birthday of the Queen Mother (1980), the London Economic Summit Conference (1984) and the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference (1986).

Exhibitions It's amazing how we keep looking back at those four initial packs produced in 1960. They were sold at the international stamp exhibition which was held in London that year, and during a sales tour undertaken by the Post Office in North America. In 1971 a similar situation arose. A sales tour was undertaken of Scandinavian countries, and two packs were produced. The first, with a green cover, contained one of each of the newly-issued low value decimal definitives (up to 9p). It was also felt desirable to have a 'special issue' available in a similar pack, but as it had been decided sensible to have a pause in the release of new 'specials' during the period of the change of currency (fortuitous, as it happens, as this was also the period of a long postal strike), no decimal currency special issues had yet been released. Therefore the pack which was produced, this time with a red cover, contained one each of the 1970 (pre-decimal) Christmas stamps.

Also in 1971, the NABA stamp exhibition was held in Switzerland: for this a special pack was produced which contained both the low values and the four high value decimal definitives. A second pack contained a set of the first decimal postage due labels.

For the international exhibition staged in Brussels in 1972, Belgica 72, a very attractive souvenir pack was produced. Focusing on British stamps



From top: 1994 Christmas Gift Pack, 1986 Christmas stamps in a folder containing 36 of the 13p value, and the pack for a 1971 Scandinavia tour containing newly-issued low-value decimal definitives.

with a religious theme, it featured not only the issued stamps, but also illustrated many of the unadopted designs. This pack included the 1971 Christmas series depicting stained glass windows and the 1972 Village Churches series.

Back in 1978, racing driver Alain de Cadenet was helping promote British stamps, particularly overseas. For the American Philatelic Society Convention held in Indianapolis in 1978 a simple pack was produced, containing a set of the Horses stamps and the Cycling series – transport with not quite the speed that Alain de Cadenet was used to.

Often these ‘presentation souvenirs’ were produced by agents acting for the British Post Office overseas, and were sometimes released without prior consultation with those at Post Office Headquarters in London. Such was the case with the international stamp exhibition held in Tokyo in 1981. A folder containing one of each of the two Royal Wedding stamps was produced. While the bulk of the text was in Japanese, on the reverse appeared the inscription ‘British Post Office’, sufficient to give the item the impression of being officially sanctioned. As a result many collectors wanted to acquire the folder.

Examples were therefore made available from the Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh. However, it was realised that the original Japanese text made reference to Prince Charles standing on a box for the photograph seen on the stamps to be taken: this was never officially confirmed. The folders sold through the Bureau were consequently a reprint, on which all such reference to the ‘box’ was removed.

At the international exhibition in Copenhagen in 1987, Hafnia, packs of the Studio Pottery issue were being assembled on the British Post Office stand. An insert card placed in the packs noted this.

For an exhibition held overseas, that in 1997 in Hong Kong, just prior to the hand-back, was unusual in that Royal Mail marked the event with a commemorative label stamp book. The British Post Office naturally had a stand, at which two souvenirs of particular interest were sold. One was a folder containing the ‘Hong Kong 97’ book-

let pane: this had just a plain cover carrying suitable text. Far more colourful was the folder containing another commemorative label booklet pane, this time for The Queen’s 70th birthday: the covers featured a montage of tourist sights of London. Both these folders were inscribed inside with the text ‘The Marketing Department, British Post Office’.

The most recent ‘international’ in London was, of course, The Stamp Show 2000. The exhibition souvenir (featuring the Machin colour palette by Jeffery Matthews) and the miniature sheet (including a 1953 Coronation design) were made available in presentation packs. One might also describe the admission ticket, which consisted of a folder in which was placed the appropriately inscribed ‘Millennium Timekeeper’ miniature sheet, as a ‘pack’. However, these were not only sold at the ‘international’, but were made more widely available.

Of particular interest, however, was the presentation pack containing a block of four of the Penny Black which was printed from a special plate created using the original die held by the Post Office. This reproduction Penny Black was created specifically for the exhibition, and demonstrations of its printing were a highlight of the exhibition.

These packs and folders in no way reflect the total participation of the British Post Office at stamp exhibitions. Often a special item is produced for sale primarily at the exhibition, including the range of exhibition cards produced during the 1980s. However, as these are not in the style of presentation packs or folders, they are outside the scope of this article.

In addition to postal administrations, it is quite usual for stamp printers to be present at stamp exhibitions, not only demonstrating their skills but also often producing souvenir items. However, these are rarely in the form of presentation packs. An example may be found for Philympia held in London in 1970; Harrison and Sons had printed the three Philympia stamps which were to publicise the event, and made the three available in a souvenir folder sold from their stand at the exhibition. *To be continued* ●

