

The International Year of Disabled People, 1981

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This issue was in support of the UN-proclaimed International Year of Disabled People. The designs by John Gibbs were this artist's first for stamps and were essentially practical, each one pinpointing a method for combatting a disability.

The four stamps were 14p, 18p, 22p and 25p covering, respectively, the basic inland letter rate; the European basic letter rate (before the special EEC rate now applicable); the basic Zone B rate (for the Americas, Africa and the Near East); and the basic Zone C rate (for the Far East

and Australasia).

The four designs dealt with specific disabilities as follow: **14p**, blindness – guide dog set against a graduated background suggesting the darkness of blindness into light under guidance; **18p**, deafness – the four pairs of hands together spell out the word “deaf” in British sign language as used by deaf and dumb people; **22p**, patient-propelled wheel chair – symbolising independent mobility for a chair-bound patient, even when ascending an incline; **25p**, the triumph of the armless artist – painting with the foot, a tribute to the Association of Mouth and Foot Artists, each one of whom is without the use of arms.

Philatelic press comment on the issue included the observation, in the *Philatelic Magazine* (February 1981), that the Post Office had missed an opportunity to issue a colourful set of charity stamps bearing a premium in aid of those whose difficulties the stamps themselves underlined. The magazine recalled the sober two-toned blue 4½p + 1½p stamp of January 1975, the only occasion that the British Post Office has issued a postage stamp carrying a premium over face value specifically to raise funds for charity. That stamp, with its silhouette of a wheelchair patient, received minimal official promotion because the Post Office was not keen on the idea and the extra accounting such a stamp would generate. Sales of that stamp had eventually totalled 7,000,000 and produced a net figure of £53,000 after agreed expenses had been deducted. This, plus a donation of £4,000 was shared between about 12 nominated charities, who themselves had spent money on advertising the stamp. Nobody can say what would have happened to the 1981 IYDP issue had each stamp carried a charity premium, but the actual sales were: *14p*, 43,061,000; *18p*, 10,466,000; *22p*, 10,037,000; *25p*, 9,688,000.

Printing was in photogravure by Harrison and Sons Limited, in sheets of 100 (2 panes of 50), perf. 15 x 14, on phosphor-coated paper backed with PVA Dextrin gum.

Minor constant printing flaws occur in several positions of sheets of all values but only three more prominent flaws are worth noting. They are: *14p*, dark grey spot on right show (row 3, stamp 1, no dot cylinder); *18p*, colour smear almost adjoining base of the right-hand thumb on the second of the two upper pairs of hands (row 6, stamp 3, no dot cylinder); *25p*, white nick in paint brush handle just above the white section (row 5, stamp 10, dot cylinder).

