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Royal Mail news Children's TV stamps • Celebrity stamp launches • Robert Burns exhibition • New stamp books • NPM news • Bureau's 30 years in Edinburgh

Big stars of the small screen Stamps featuring much-loved characters from children's television programmes go on sale at post offices, and philatelic outlets on 3 September. The issue commemorates 50 years of children's television.

The **20p** stamp (basic inland 2nd class rate) features **MUFFIN THE MULE**, bought by puppeteer Ann Hogarth in 1934 and made his television debut in 1946 after working with circus puppets. His talents were quickly recognised by the BBC and he was given a prime time slot on *Children's Hour*. His co-star was Annette Mills, sister of actor Sir John Mills. Muffin continued on TV until 1957. A Muffin video was launched in 1989.



The stamps were designed by Tutsells, their first commission for Royal Mail, and printed by Joh Enschedé of the Netherlands, their second set of special stamps for Royal Mail.



SOOTY is the star of the **26p** value (basic inland 1st class and EU rate). The famous bear was discovered by the late Harry Corbett in a toyshop in Blackpool in 1948. Corbett bought the glove-puppet for about 7s 3d (36p) to entertain his three children. Initially the bear was called Teddy but his name was changed to Sooty after Corbett's wife brushed soot on his ears. Corbett and Sooty made their TV debut in 1952, being joined by Sweep the dog five years later. Since Harry Corbett's death, his son Matthew has worked 'hand in glove' with his partner. In May this year the rights for Sooty were sold by Matthew to City bank Guinness Mahon Development Capital for some £1.4 million. The company aim to promote the bear through international television, and merchandising. According to recent press reports about 60 people depend on Sooty for their livelihood, he once squirted water at the Duke of Edinburgh, and footballer George Best is his greatest fan. A special postmark was used in February 1992 to mark Sooty's 40th birthday.

The **31p** stamp (Europe, non-EU countries, rate) depicts Troy Tempest from **STINGRAY** – a puppet science fiction programme which made its TV debut in 1960. Tempest was modelled on American actor James Garner, and it is said that another character, Lord Titan, was inspired by Lord Olivier who was depicted, with Vivien Leigh, on the 25p 100 Years of Going to the Pictures stamp in April.



Technical details

Printers Joh Enschedé
Security Printing

Process Photogravure

Size 41 × 30 mm

Sheets 100

Perforation 15 × 14

Phosphor 20p: one phosphor band ● 26p-43p: two phosphor bands ● Blue fluor in phosphor

Paper OBA (Optical Brightening Agent) free

Gum PVA



Characters from the popular programme **THE CLANGERS** feature on the **37p** stamp (overseas postcard rate), the invention of Oliver Postgate and Peter Firmin. They were also responsible for *Noggin* (shown on 1995 Greetings stamp), *Bagpus*, *Pogles' Wood*, *Ivor the Engine*, and the irresponsible Basil Brush.

The **43p** stamp (basic airmail letter rate) features **DANGERMOURSE**, a rodent 007 which has enjoyed more than 200 adventures. It is amazing to consider that a half-hour cartoon needs 30,000 different paintings – all drawn and coloured by hand.



The first show for children was broadcast 50 years ago – *For The Children*. The first programme included an item about stamp collecting. The programmes were initially broadcast on Sunday afternoons but later expanded. The programmes of the 1950s and 60s are now regarded as classics and still have a cult following: *Andy Pandy*, *The Flowerpot Men*, *The Woodentops*, *Play School*, *Thunderbirds*, *The Magic Roundabout*, and *Jackanory*. A new generation were brought up on *John Craven's Newsround* (first regular news programme for children), *The Muppets*, and *Grange Hill*.

Perhaps the best-known of all remains *Blue Peter* which started in 1958. It regularly features British stamps and three sets have been designed as a result of Blue Peter competitions: 1966 and 1981 Christmas and 1992 Green Issue.

The 50th anniversary of the BBC was marked by three stamps in a Broadcasting Anniversaries set in 1972. The 75th anniversary will be the subject of the 1997 prestige stamp book. Alexandra Palace from where early BBC broadcasts were made, featured on a 20p value in the 1990 Europa set. Sooty becomes the third famous bear to have starred on TV to appear on British stamps: Rupert and Paddington having featured on Greetings issues. John Logie Baird, inventor of television, featured on a Scottish aerogramme in 1988.

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets around a week before 3 September, price 25p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial 'first day of issue' postmark of the Bureau or Alexandra Palace, London, price £2.26 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £1.93 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for first day covers must be received at the Bureau by 3 September 1996.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers on the day of issue, for these cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, Edinburgh

EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Mount Pleasant, London EC1A 1BB (for Alexandra Palace). The outer envelope should be endorsed 'FD9623' (Bureau), or 'FD9624' (Alexandra Palace).

First day posting boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive local (mostly non-pictorial) 'first day of issue' handstamps.

Collectors are reminded that it will be in order to affix just the 20p stamp from this issue to covers to receive all special cancels ('first day of issue', sponsored and philatelic counters), in use on 3 September. The minimum 1st class rule is suspended on this day as the set includes a 2nd class rate stamp. This concession applies only to the 20p stamp from this issue; otherwise 1st class postage must be affixed.

PRESENTATION PACK AND STAMP CARDS A presentation pack (price £1.90) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from the Bureau, Post Office Counters philatelic outlets, and main post offices. The pack contains amusing comments on children's TV by Basil Brush – aided and abetted by Ivan Owen. Boom-Boom! ●

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – the Royal Mail's magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe; £21.75 Rest of World (Airmail).



Celebrity Stamp Launches Pictured here are actress Joanna Lumley and Rosena Robson, Royal Mail Manager Special Stamps, at the London launch of the 100 Years of Going to the Pictures stamps in April. Actor Sir Ian McKellen launched the stamps in Scotland. Also shown are George Best, with Royal Mail's Steve Griffiths, at the launch of the Football Legends stamps at Chelsea Football Ground on 8 May.

Women of Achievement stamps – colours The cylinders and colours are as follows. 20p: P37 (phosphor) 2A (dull blue-green) 1B (brownish grey) 1C (black) ● 26p: P38 (phosphor) 2A (dull mauve) 1B (brownish grey) 1C (black) ● 31p: P38 (phosphor) 1A (bronze) 1B (brownish grey) 1C (black) ● 37p: P38 (phosphor) 1A (silver) 1B (brownish grey) 1C (black) ● 43p: P38 (phosphor) 1A (gold) 1B (brownish grey) 1C (black) ●