

Memories on mail Personalised Smilers, by Glenn Morgan

THE introduction of Royal Mail Smilers (*Gwenau* in Welsh language literature) at The Stamp Show 2000 is well documented. It started a fascinating series of unique sheet formats, still rarely seen by many collectors despite their wide availability via normal Royal Mail channels such as post offices, Tallents House and the internet, at special events and through photo booths in supermarkets, post offices and shopping malls up and down the land. Some national newspaper competitions have also promoted the service by offering sheets as prizes and these have, for example, included images of glamour model Katy Price (Jordan) on labels for *Daily Star* winners.

There have been over 50 sheet combinations so far, and they have often commanded a much lesser price than perhaps their real scarcity would warrant when they have come up for sale in on-line auctions, although they are now catching up and sometimes exceeding Generic Smilers prices, especially in recent months. It has not been possible to even guess at prices for each sheet listed here, as they vary wildly from just a few pounds to many hundreds, and are sold so infrequently once they are no longer available at new-issue price from Royal Mail.

Periods of sale have been difficult to verify and, while an issue date is generally made available to collectors, a withdrawal date is rarely announced. Some sheets are available for personalising for only a few weeks, while others have already been available for around four years. Regular calls to the help line for updates on availability mean that this listing is probably as accurate as is feasible.

The mail-order personalisation service operated intermittently at first from October 2000, customers posting images to either Edinburgh or, for a brief period, Coventry. From 29 November 2002, images could be submitted online in digital form via a website (at www.royalmail.com/smilers). Self-adhesive stamps in pictorial definitive format have been available from October 2005 by post and from January 2006 online, with the few remaining larger-format stamps only being available by mail order after the latter date.

New trend There is a new collecting trend where dealers, philatelic societies and individuals use self-adhesive personalised Smilers to create limited edition commemorative sheets (as few as 25 copies) for selling to collectors. Philatelic events such as the Washington, Torquay and Belgica exhibitions, plus Derby PS commemoration, 400th anniversary of the Union Flag, 90th anniversary of the Sopwith Camel, etc are typical of the many that have appeared. They have attracted a strong following and appear to be prevailing over BCS sheets, especially now Royal Mail can personalise the margins with unique imagery and text, rather than just personalising the labels.

Understandably, no sheets have been available on Tallents House stock lists and will not be listed in the *Bulletin*, because they are created by the same service that lets you have a picture of Rover the dog on them, and nobody would expect those to be listed! Look out for these sheets in online auctions and stamp dealer listings if interested. They are an attractive way of obtaining recent sheets listed on the following pages, such as the private Fifth Anniversary of Smilers, which used the 'A Bear called Paddington' sheet.

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I must express my thanks to Mike Shepherd for making this article possible. Mike has specialised in these issues for some time now, and his extensive records were kindly put at my disposal to act as the basis for its contents. This information has been cross-checked and merged with my records, *Bulletins* that have appeared since the scheme was first launched and Royal Mail publicity literature (Caution should be exercised in using these as a source, because perforation types, border colours used, se-tenant combinations, etc are sometimes different to the issued versions, due to mock-ups being utilised prior to proof approval and printing of stamp stocks.)

This is believed to be the first complete published list of this material and, despite extensive checking, there is always the chance that readers can add to, correct or expand upon the information and your input is encouraged. ►

Catalogue listing

Year	No	Stamp issue	Stamp(s)	Format	Issued	W/drawn	Gum	Printer	Process
2000	P1	The Stamp Show 2000 ¹	Mixed × 10 different Smiles	10P	22.05.00	26.06.00	WA	Q	G
	P2	Christmas (Post Office ©)	1st Christmas cracker	10L	03.10.00	29.12.00	WA	Q	G
	P3		19p Robin in post box	20L	03.10.00	29.12.00	WA	Q	G
2001	P4	Occasions: hallmarks	New Baby	20L	01.05.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P5		New Home	20L	01.05.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P6		Love and Romance	20L	01.05.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P7		10 Cheers & 10 Thanks	20L	01.05.01	sold out ⁵	WA	Q	L
	P7a		Reprint (light grey, not silver)	20L	?	.12.04	WA	W?	L
	P8	Smiles (Royal Mail logo)	Mixed × 10 different Smiles	10P	03.07.01	early 02	WA	Q	L
	P9		Laughing Policeman	10P	03.07.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P10		Mona Lisa	10P	03.07.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P11		Clown	10P	03.07.01	late 01?	WA	Q	L
	P12		Dennis the Menace	10P	03.07.01	.10.02?	WA	Q	L
	P13		Teddy Bear	10P	03.07.01	.10.02?	WA	Q	L
	P14	Christmas (Consignia ©)	1st Christmas cracker	10L	09.10.01	11.01.02	WA	Q	G
	P15		19p Robin in post box	20L	09.10.01	11.01.02	WA	Q	G
2002	P16	Occasions	New Baby (Consignia)	20L	23.04.02	on sale ⁶	WA	Q	L
	P17		Moving Home (Consignia)	20L	23.04.02	on sale ⁶	WA	Q	L
	P18		Love: (Consignia)	20L	23.04.02	sold out ⁵	WA	Q	L
	P18a		(RMG plc © 2002)	20L	late 02	sold out ⁵	WA	W?	L
	P18b		(RMG different screen)	20L	04/05	31.03.06 ²	WA	W?	L
	P19		Hello: (Consignia)	20L	23.04.02	sold out ⁵	WA	Q	L
	P19a		(RMG plc © 2002)	20L	late 02	sold out ⁵	WA	W?	L
	P19b		(RMG different shade)	20L	?	31.03.06	WA	W?	L
	P20		Best Wishes (Consignia)	20L	23.04.02	sold out ⁵	WA	Q	L
	P20a		(RMG plc © 2003)	20L	.03	on sale ⁶	WA	W?	L
	P21	Football World Cup	St George's Flag & football	20L	21.05.02	20.05.03?	WA	Q	L
	P22	Knock, Knock!	Dennis the Menace	20L	01.10.02	late 05	WA	Q	L
	P23		Teddy Bear	20L	01.10.02	31.03.06 ²	WA	Q	L
	P24	Christmas	1st Christmas cracker	20L	01.10.02	.12.04 ³	WA	Q	L
2003	P25	Flower paintings	Flowers × 10 (two sets)	20L	21.01.03	sold out ⁵	WA	Q	L
	P25a		Reprint (diff screen/shades)	20L	04/05	31.03.06	WA	W?	L
	P26	Occasions: Multiple choice	Mixed tick box stamps	20L	04.02.03	.12.04	WA	Q	L
	P27	Crosswords	Cartoons × 10 (two sets)	20L	29.07.03	late 05	WA	Q	L
	P28	Christmas	1st Winter Robins	20L	30.09.03	.12.04	SA	D	L
	P29		1st Spiral Ice sculpture	20L	04.11.03	.12.04 ⁴	SA	D	L
	P30		2nd Star Ice sculpture	20L	04.11.03	.12.04 ⁴	SA	D	L
2004	P31	Occasions: Envelopes	12 Aeroplane & 8 Postman	20L	03.02.04	on sale ⁶	WA	D	L
	P32		8 Kissing, 8 Duck & 4 Baby	20L	03.02.04	on sale ⁶	WA	D	L
	P33	RHS bicentenary	Dahlia	20L	25.05.04	24.05.05?	WA	W	L
	P34	Rule Britannia!	Union Flag	20L	27.07.04	31.03.06	WA	W	L
	P35	Christmas	1st Christmas Delivery	20L	02.11.04	01.11.05	SA	D	L
	P36		2nd Christmas Delivery	20L	02.11.04	01.11.05	SA	D	L
2005	P37	Farm Animals	Farm Animals × 10 (two sets)	20L	11.01.05	10.01.06	WA	W	L

Catalogue listing continued

Year	No	Stamp issue	Stamp(s)	Format	Issued	W/drawn	Gum	Printer	Process
2005	P38	Magic!	Heads or Tails Magic	20L	15.03.05	14.03.06	WA	W	L
	P39	White Ensign	White Ensign	20L	21.06.05	20.06.06	WA	C	L
	P40	Classic ITV 1955-2005	Emmerdale	20L	15.09.05	14.09.06	WA	C	L
	P41	For Life's Special Moments	Red, white & blue definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P42		With Love definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P43		Flying High definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P44		Ready Teddy definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P45		Sunshine definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P46		In the Post definitive	20L	04.10.05	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P47	Christmas	1st Christmas Robins	20L	01.11.05	12.05?	SA	C	L
	P48		2nd Christmas Robins	20L	01.11.05	12.05?	SA	C	L
2006	P49	A Bear Called Paddington	Paddington Bear	20L	10.01.06	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L
	P50	Fun Fruit and Veg	Fruit and Veg x10 (two sets)	20L	07.03.06	on sale ⁶	SA	C	L

Notes and abbreviations

Every stamp is 1st class, except Christmas where a 2nd class is also produced, although not in 2002.

1 Sheets were sold in a red folder at the show. Available from Philatelic Bureau for a further two months after the show. The sheet check code and font is likely to be different on sheets emanating from Edinburgh, but none have been seen.

2 Official withdrawal date as reported in the *Bulletin*, but stock was exhausted at least a month prior to this.

3 These remained available for 'seasonal' personalisation between October and December until the end of 2004. In the

intervening periods blank sheets were returned to the supplier. Availability was not publicised in the following two years; In November 2004 Mike was told by the helpline there was 'no demand' for them.

4 The first class sheet was available continuously over this period, but the second class sheet was 'seasonal', being withdrawn at the end of December 2003 and re-appearing briefly in September 2004.

5 It may be assumed that as the sheets annotated 'Sold out' were all reprinted, stocks of the original printing would have been exhausted prior to introduction of the reprint.

6 Still available for personalised orders. Most now appear to be available for 12 months, except for pictorial definitives, which presumably are intended for long-term use, and the Christmas issues.

Format 10P/10L: 10 stamps in portrait or landscape A4 sheet. 20L: 20 stamps in a landscape A4 sheet.

Gum Water Activated (WA) or Self-Adhesive (SA).

Printer C Cartor, D De La Rue, Q Questa, W Walsall.

Process G (photo)Gravure or L Litho.

RMG Royal Mail Group plc.

