

Edward Lear

6 & 27 September 1988

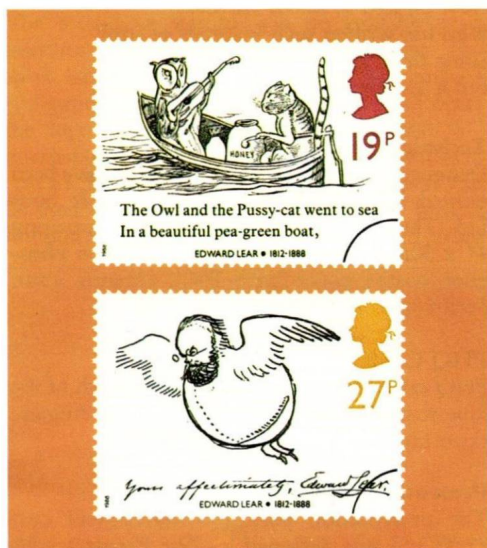


Four stamps will be issued on 6 September to commemorate the centenary of the death of Edward Lear, perhaps the best-known writer of nonsense verse. The stamps all feature drawings by Lear and are inscribed EDWARD LEAR 1812-1888. The stamps, illustrated here, are shown for the values it is proposed to introduce on 5 September; at the time of going to press these rate increases have not received the approval of the Post Office Users' National Council.

The final value, **35p** (Airmail Zone C) reproduces Lear's drawing for the limerick beginning "There was a Young Lady whose bonnet, Came untied when the birds sate upon it; ..."

All four stamps are printed in black on cream paper with The Queen's portrait in red (19p), yellow (27p), green (32p) and blue (35p). The four stamps are also being issued in miniature sheet format – see below.

These stamps are not the first to show Lear's



The **19p** stamp (for first class mail) features his illustration of his most famous verse and reproduces the first two lines: "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat went to sea, In a beautiful pea-green boat, ..."

The **27p** value (Airmail Zone A) bears a self-portrait of Lear as a bird (1864) and a facsimile of his signature – "Yours affectionately, Edward Lear".

The **32p** stamp (Airmail Zone B) reproduces a Lear drawing of a cat, based on his own pet, Foss. The drawing is from an alphabet work and is so described – "C was a lovely Pussy Cat; its eyes were large & pale; And on its back it had some stripes, and several on his tail."

artistic ability – his painting of a Bewick's Swan was reproduced on the 31p stamp in the Linnean Society set issued on 19 January.

Edward Lear

Edward Lear was born in north London in 1812, the twentieth of 21 children; his father was a stockbroker. He was largely brought up by his sister Ann and his early years were frequently plagued by illness. Nevertheless he had a sense of fun and his sisters taught him to play the piano, draw and paint.

At age 15 he began to earn his living by selling sketches to stage coach passengers in the yards of coaching inns and a year later he

became an ornithological draughtsman. This led to a commission from the Zoological Society of London to make drawings of the exotic parrots in the Regents Park Zoo. The drawings were included in the book *Illustrations of the Family of Psittacidae, or Parrots*, published when Lear was just 19. In 1832, the President of the Zoological Society, Lord Stanley (later 13th Earl of Derby), a noted amateur zoologist, asked Lear to prepare drawings of the birds in his menagerie at his family home at Knowsley Hall near Liverpool. This work took six years and it was there that Lear wrote and illustrated the first of his limericks for the children of the household. Many of the verses are illustrated with birds and animals whose form Lear understood so well.

The detailed work involved in drawing birds put a strain on Lear's eyesight and the climate of the north west did not help his asthma and bronchitis. Assisted by Lord Derby, he went to live in Rome, an international centre for artists; he lived abroad, with frequent visits to England, for the rest of his days. Most of his work was landscape painting; many of his paintings of Italy and Greece were exhibited at the Royal Academy in London.

Happily his art and travelling did not curtail his enthusiasm for writing and drawing nonsense and in 1846, while in England, he published his first *Book of Nonsense* (further editions appeared in 1861, 1863 and 1870). In the same year he was invited by Queen Victoria to give her drawing lessons.

By 1867 Lear realised that he would never really become established as a painter and turned his attention more to verse. Over the next decade he poured his soul into his nonsense verses producing the Owl and the Pussy-Cat, the Jumbles, the Yonghy-Bonghy-Bo and the Dong with a Luminous Nose.

Although he lived alone, apart from his servant Giorgio and his striped cat Foss, Lear had many friends and wrote prolifically to them, usually illustrating his letters with comic drawings. He was a particular friend of Tennyson and composed musical settings of Tennyson's poems. Giorgio died in 1883 and Lear then lived alone with Foss. The cat died at the end of 1887 and was survived by his master by only two months. Lear died, sad and alone, in San Remo on 29 January 1888.

Lear's name will always be associated with the limerick, a form of verse first published in *Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Young Ladies* and the *History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women*

(1820). Limericks are usually of five lines, rhyming a b b a with the third and fourth lines half the length of the others. In Lear's limericks, the first and last lines were often the same.

The centenary of Lear's death was marked by a ceremony at Westminster Abbey on 6 June. Sir Hugh Casson, former President of the Royal Academy, unveiled a plaque to Lear and the audience enjoyed readings from Lear's work. The plaque refers to Lear's two careers as "painter and poet". The naturalist Sir David Attenborough described Lear as an "enchanter of children", the Dean of Westminster referred to him as a "...sad, funny, original, lonely, high-spirited, lovely, child-like man".

Lear's work and character is perhaps best summed up in his own words from *Nonsense Songs* (1871):

How pleased to know Mr Lear!
Who has written such volumes of stuff!
Some think him ill-tempered and queer,
But a few think him pleasant enough.

Technical Details

Designed by The Partners, the stamps have been printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons Ltd. They are of horizontal format, measuring 41 x 30mm, printed in sheets of 100 on phosphor coated paper with PVA Dextrin gum. Perforation is 15 x 14.

PHQ Cards

PHQ cards (Nos. 113A-D) featuring each of the four stamps will be available from 22 August, price 15p each.

Presentation Pack

The presentation pack (No. 193) will cost £1.35 and was designed by The Partners with text by Lear's biographer Vivian Noakes. The pack includes illustrations of Lear's drawings, mostly comic.

First Day Cover

The first day cover design shows Lear's signature in the form of a Victorian book plate. It costs 16p. Two pictorial postmarks will be used for the first day cover service, one at the British Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh and one at London N7 (Lear was born in north London).

A first day cover service will be provided by the Bureau with the official Royal Mail cover addressed to the destination required with the four stamps cancelled with either postmark.

Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned not later than 6 September.

Customers requiring only the special pictorial postmarks may obtain them under the reposting facility by sending on the first day of issue a stamped addressed envelope under an outer cover endorsed "Special First Day of Issue handstamp" to:

'British Philatelic Bureau' 20 Brandon Street
EDINBURGH EH3 5TT

'London N7' Philatelic Duty
Northern District PO
Upper Street
LONDON N1 1AA

Miniature Sheet

The four Lear stamps will be available in a miniature sheet format from 27 September. The sheet has a surround resembling the marbled end-papers found in Victorian books and bears the logo of the "Stamp World London 90" international stamp exhibition. The sheet will cost £1.35 which includes a premium which will be used to finance the exhibition, to be held at London's Alexandra Palace from 3-13 May

1990. Two further exhibition miniature sheets will be issued, one next year and one in 1990. The sheet has been printed in photogravure by Harrison & Sons Ltd using cylinders 1A 1B 3C 3D 1E 1F 1G; these numbers do not appear on the issued sheets.

A first day cover will be available, price 17p. This features the front cover of the book *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, with open pages showing some of Lear's drawings.

A first day cover service will be provided with special pictorial postmarks at the British Philatelic Bureau and London N22 (postal district for Alexandra Palace). Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned by 27 September. On the first day of issue, collectors may send their own covers bearing the miniature sheet for postmarking to:

'British Philatelic Bureau' 20 Brandon Street
EDINBURGH EH3 5TT

'London N22' Special Postmarks
Customer Services
Wood Green Sorting Office
1A Buckingham Road
LONDON N22 4TU



Edward Lear
VERSE FOR CHILDREN
ROYAL MAIL FIRST DAY COVER

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