



Northern Ireland Prestige Stamp Book

The 1994 Prestige Stamp Book, to be issued on 26 July, is devoted to Northern Ireland, continuing the series which began with the "Scottish Connection" book in 1989, "London Life" in 1990, and the Welsh book in 1992.

All too often we only hear bad news about Northern Ireland but the Province has a wealth of beautiful scenery, interesting towns, cultural activities and friendly people. The prestige book highlights some of the best aspects of life in Northern Ireland. The book contains 12 pages of text and illustrations, four stamp panes and two postcards, one of which will be of particular interest to postal stationery collectors.

The text is arranged under five section headings covering history, the Ulster way of life, its industrious people, famous sons and daughters, and the capital city, Belfast.

About 7000 BC nomadic boatmen from Scotland first colonised the province; the Celts settled in the 17th century BC. In AD 432 Patrick returned to Ireland as a Christian missionary, he is now the patron saint of all Ireland. In the 6th century St Columba sailed from Ulster to Iona from where he and his monks evangelised Scotland. The Normans settled along the eastern seaboard, building castles such as that at Carrickfergus – well-known to collectors of British stamps.

In the early 17th century the colonisation of Ulster by English and Scottish started, thus began the Protestant majority in the north east.

The native Irish supported the Catholic King James II in his attempt to recover his throne – an attempt defeated at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. Great Britain and Ireland were united by an Act of 1800. In 1922 the island of Ireland was divided with separate parliaments established in Belfast for Northern Ireland and in Dublin for the Irish Free State (later Republic of Ireland). Since 1972 the government of Northern Ireland has been administered by a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with offices in both Belfast and London.

Belfast is a busy city not unlike Glasgow, Liverpool or Dublin. Outside the capital most people live in small market towns. Northern Ireland is noted for its low traffic density making driving on its roads a pleasure. Away from Belfast traffic jams are almost unknown – any delays are most likely caused by farm vehicles!

Sport plays a major part in the life of many Northern Ireland people. Boxing is a popular sport and the Province has produced many notable champions. Gaelic football teams in the north are now recognised as a match for any team south of the border. The Province has many rivers and lakes so angling is, not surprisingly, a popular pursuit. Music and dance play a significant part in peoples' lives – a wide range of musical instruments can be heard in pubs and village halls throughout Northern Ireland. Ulster people enjoy their food – the prestige book gives details of some of the

culinary delights such as soda and treacle tarts, wheaten bread, sweet bannocks and barnbracks.

The Ulster economy is based on a hard-working population rather than rich natural resources. Linen-making, an old Irish craft, developed from the 17th century; two centuries later Belfast was nicknamed "Linenpolis" (Linen City). Shipbuilding and ropemaking were also important – by 1900 Belfast was the world's leading centre for ships and ropes. Today's economic activities include aerospace, chemicals and electronics as well as more bespoke industries such as pottery, crystal, and the oldest industry of all – whiskey distilling. In the village of Bushmills is to be found the world's oldest distillery, said to date from 1276.

Ulster folk have played important roles on the world stage. Several US presidents came from Ulster stock, as did frontiersman Davy Crockett. John Ballance and William Massey respectively became Prime Ministers of New Zealand and Australia. Numerous Ulstermen and women are noted in the arts – Seamus Heaney, Sir John Lavery, Siobhán MacKenna, Kenneth Branagh, Liam Neeson and Heather Harper to name just a few. Northern Ireland sportsmen include George Best, Pat Jennings and Willie John McBride.

Nearly a third of Northern Ireland's people live in Belfast which was granted city status in 1888. In the 1920s 10 per cent of the city's population were engaged in ship building. Amongst the ships constructed there was the ill-fated *Titanic*. The prestige book, containing many illustrations of Ulster life, costs £6.04 – the value of the stamps and stamped postcard contained within.

Northern Ireland has its own Postal Board based in Belfast, under the chairmanship of Mr Danny Carty. Postal services come under the control of Mr John Mackay, General Manager for Scotland & Northern Ireland. A new Returned Letter Centre for the whole of the UK has recently been opened in Belfast. In Royal Mail's London offices the Director Consumer Services, Mr Kevin Doherty and the Senior Product Manager – Stamp Books, Jane Ormrod, are both from Northern Ireland.

Stamp Panes

The book contains four panes of stamps, as follows:

1. 4 x 30p Prince of Wales Investiture stamps (as issued 1 March 1994) showing Mourne

Mountains. Standard (non-elliptical) perforations.

2. Pane of six containing 1 x 6p, 1 x 19p, 4 x 25p national definitives. 6p and 25p with two phosphor bands, 19p band left.

3. N. Ireland 2 x 19p phosphor band left, 4 x 25p 2 bands, 1 x 30p 2 bands, 1 x 41p 2 bands, and pictorial label.

4. N. Ireland 1 x 19p phosphor band left, 1 x 25p, 1 x 30p and 1 x 41p all with two bands.

All national and N. Ireland stamps and the book itself have been printed by the House of Questa Ltd (litho), the pane of HRH Investiture stamps has been printed by Harrison & Sons Ltd (photogravure). The national/N. Ireland stamps all have elliptical perforations on the vertical sides.

Stamp Variations

The book will yield three new individual stamp variations:

19p olive green litho with phosphor band left

25p salmon pink litho with 2 bands, printed Questa

6p lime green litho with 2 bands

A 25p with 2 bands, printed in litho by Walsall, was issued in £1 stamp books in November 1993 and January 1994. Existing 6p stamps with 2 bands (from sheets) are printed in photogravure by Enschedé; the current 19p sheet and coil stamps have centre phosphor band and are photogravure-printed by Harrisons.

Postcards

The book contains two tear-out postcards, both show the Giant's Causeway – 40,000 symmetrical columns, mostly hexagonal, formed 55 million years ago from molten lava. The first of the two cards bears an imprinted stamp – as the 22p adhesive stamp issued in 1981 (SG1158) but updated to 35p to cover the current airmail rate for overseas postcards. This card also carries an imprinted airmail label (etiquette) and the reference "Royal Mail Air Card No PHQ52d(94A)". The 52d number refers to the 1981 card reproducing the 22p stamp.

The second card is without the imprinted stamp and airmail label and has the reference "Royal Mail Card No PHQ52d(94B)". The stamped card will be of particular interest to postal stationery collectors.

First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail First Day Cover envelopes will be available from main post



offices, the Bureau, Collections, Post Shops Plus, and Philatelic Counters around a week before 26 July, price 25p each. The cover shows an illustration of the Giant's Causeway.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service - collectors may order the Royal Mail First Day Cover bearing the mixed pane with pictorial label cancelled with a pictorial "First Day of Issue" postmark of the Bureau or Belfast, price £2.88 (incl VAT) to UK addresses, £2.45 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for serviced covers must reach the Bureau by 26 July.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers, on the day of issue, for the Bureau or

Belfast cancels to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT (Bureau cancel) or Scotland/N. Ireland Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, George Square, GLASGOW G2 1AA (Belfast cancel). The outer envelope should be endorsed "Pictorial First Day of Issue postmark".

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, non-pictorial "First Day of Issue" handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin*.