

Royal Mail news Comedians stamps • Self-adhesive stamps • NPM exhibits • Overseas stamp book • Lighthouses aerogrammes



Technical details

Printers Walsall Security Printers Ltd
 Process Offset lithography
 Size 41 x 30mm
 Sheets 100
 Perforation 15 x 14
 Phosphor One band 20p • two bands others
 Gum PVA

Comedians Five stamps featuring some of Britain's best-loved comedians go on sale at post offices and philatelic outlets on 23 April.

The **20p** stamp (basic inland 2nd class letter rate) features the incomparable Tommy Cooper (1922-84). Born in Caerphilly, he was a Horse Guard for seven years before entering show business. He starred at the Windmill and Palladium before becoming a TV favourite in 'It's Magic'. He was an accomplished magician although his act combined skill with total buffoonery. His large frame and gormless face meant he had had only to walk on stage to make audiences laugh. His catch phrase 'Just like that' is still part of the language. He died on stage at Her Majesty's Theatre, making people laugh to the very end.

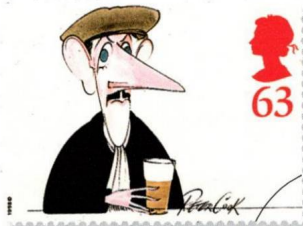
Eric Morecambe (1926-84) features on the **26p** denomination (inland 1st class and EU basic weight letters). Born Eric Bartholomew in Morecambe, Lancs, he became a song and dance man age 12 and shortly after met Ernest Wiseman (Ernie Wise) and the famous Morecambe and Wise double-act was born. Their radio and TV shows were enjoyed by millions and their Christmas shows from 1961 to 1978 were a national institution (the shows are still repeated). Perhaps they will always be best-remembered for 'sending up' the guests, such as Glenda Jackson and Andre Previn, on their shows and for the good-natured baiting of Des O'Connor. Eric's line 'What do you think of it so far?' will long be remembered. He suffered from heart problems in his last years and died hours after a stage show. His death covered the front page of most national newspapers.

Joyce Grenfell (1910-79), shown on the **37p** stamp (airmail postcard rate), was the niece of Nancy Astor, the first woman MP to take her seat in the Commons. Despite largely American parentage, she was, writes Maureen Lipman 'the quintessential comic Englishwoman. She was a gifted writer as well as performer on stage, radio, TV and film. She is best remembered as the toothy, gallumping Miss Gossage ('Call me Sausage') in the St Trinian's films and for the memorable exclamation 'George, don't do that' in her monologues. She was very interested in music and was a regular on the TV show 'Face the Music'. She wrote volumes of autobiography and



her published correspondence is much read. Maureen Lipman starred as Grenfell in a recreation of her stage show.

The lugubrious Les Dawson (1934-93), shown on the **43p** stamp (airmail letters basic rate), was born at Collyhurst, near Manchester and after numerous jobs and national service entered show business, playing a piano in a Paris brothel, and touring the northern clubs. He came to the attention of a wider public in 'Opportunity Knocks' and went on to star in 'Sez Les' and the game-show 'Blankety Blank'. His stage/TV act included the hilarious playing the piano out of key, the 'Cissie and Ada' conversations (with Roy Barraclough), and many good-humoured, if politically incorrect, mother-in-law jokes. He was also an accomplished writer. He symbolised, says Maureen Lipman, 'a ferrety, pigeon-fancying, cloth-capped bygone North'. Towards the end of his life he remarried and a daughter was born shortly before his sudden death. Crowds of fans lined the streets of Lytham to watch his funeral cortege pass.



The final stamp, **63p** (airmail letters, second weight step) features Peter Cook (1937-95), a noted alternative comedian. Born in Torquay, he became president of the famous 'Footlights' group at Cambridge and came to national fame in 'Beyond the Fringe', 'That was the Week That Was' and in his partnership with Dudley Moore. The stamp shows him as the bizarre E L Wisty character from the Cook-Moore shows, which ended with the powerful rendition of 'Now is the Time to Say Goodbye'. Cook was proprietor of the satirical *Private Eye* magazine. His last appearance, on the Clive Anderson show, was a tour de force. Years of a bohemian lifestyle undoubtedly led to his early death when he was heralded as the inspiration to many of today's alternative comedians.

THE DESIGNER The stamps were designed by Gerald Scarfe (born 1936), noted for his distinctive satirical cartoons. He worked for *Punch* and *Private Eye* during the 1960s. Exhibitions of his work have been staged in New York, Montreal, Chicago and London. He has written and directed many live action and documentary films for the BBC and Channel 4, and worked, as Art Director, with the animators of 'Hercules', the 1997 Disney animated movie. Gerald Scarfe lives in London.

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets around a week before 23 April, price 25p. Orders for the cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial 'first day of issue' postmark of the Bureau or Morecambe, price £2.64 UK (including VAT) or £2.25 overseas (no VAT), must reach the Bureau by 23 April. Alternatively, collectors may send stamped covers on the day of issue, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, Edinburgh EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Forth Street, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 1AA (for Morecambe postmark), marking the outer envelope 'FD9807' (Bureau), or 'FD9808' (Morecambe).

Posting boxes will be provided at main post offices for collectors to post covers for local (mostly non-pictorial) 'first day of issue' handstamps. Sponsored special handstamps will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from the Bureau (£10 UK/Europe; £21.75 elsewhere).

Covers may be posted bearing just the 20p Comedians stamp for any philatelic postmark in use on 23 April; the normal 1st class rule is waived for the day •

COMEDIANS ON STAMPS This is our first set devoted to this subject, but a few earlier British stamps have featured comedians and comic actors. Peter Sellers (1925-80) and Charlie Chaplin (1889-1977) featured on the 17p and 29p stamps of the 1985 British Film Year set, and Stan Laurel (1890-1965) on one of the 1990 'Smiles' greetings stamps.

Tony Hancock was depicted on a special handstamp used in May 1996 to commemorate the unveiling of a statue of him by another giant of British comedy, Sir Harry Secombe. Bob Hope, born in London, and the Scottish comedian Sir Harry Lauder were shown on Scottish aerogrammes in 1979 and 1989. The 'Fat Lady' seaside humour shown on the 1994 Picture Postcards stamps was the stock-in-trade of Les Dawson.

British comedians have been honoured by other nations: Chaplin, Laurel and Sellers have been depicted on stamps from several countries, and Sidney James, long remembered for his partnership with Tony Hancock, featured on a stamp from Ghana in 1997 •



New format self-adhesive stamps Following the trial sale of rolls of 100 self-adhesive stamps at post offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland, rolls of 200 self-adhesive stamps will be available from 6 April. The stamps – 1st and 2nd class – will now be in normal upright format as other definitive stamps. The rolls will be supplied in dispenser boxes. Printing, in gravure, is by Joh Enschedé Stamps of the Netherlands. The stamps have elliptical perfs on vertical sides; the 1st class stamp has two phosphor bands, the 2nd class one band. The rolls will be on sale at post offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland only.

Collectors will be able to obtain single stamps or strips from the British Philatelic Bureau. Post offices and philatelic outlets, other than the Bureau, will sell the stamps only in complete rolls. No first day facilities will be available •