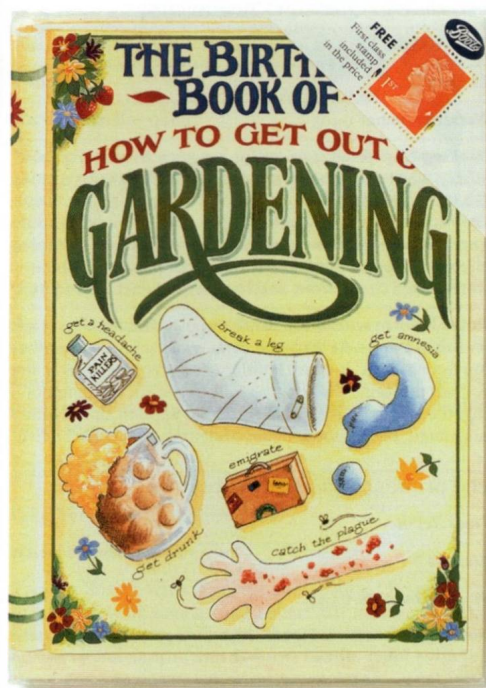


'Boots' greeting card sheets By Glenn H Morgan FRPSL



series of 30 cards, identifiable by the reverse code – m for Male, F for Female and c for Cute, and the envelope colour (yellow, pink and beige respectively). Heavily promoted, cards were sold from display racks in an eye-catching manner.

'Boots Labels' were reprinted before later appearing without branding – the text and logo was instead printed on cellophane where the label was placed. According to official sources, the brand removal was so that any greeting card manufacturer or retailer could use sheets. Indeed, Woolworth's, Comet, MVG, B&Q and Superdrug did subsequently use unbranded sheets in their gift vouchers at Christmas time in 1997-2000. They created a pack that included a £10 or £25 gift voucher, first class sheet and a Christmas card in a cellophane wrapper for £9.99 or £24.99.

The concept fell into disuse at Boots, and they sold off the remaining less popular artworks or commemorations for under 50p. Many collectors loved the labels and mourned their demise, for sheets exist from different printings/printers, had differences in fluorescence and elliptical perforations, and they could be examined at leisure by the thousand prior to purchase, simply by visiting Boots. It is in this way that discoveries were made that would otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Royal Mail sold some printings in packs of 100 labels or as singles, which were still on sale long after they had been removed from Boots stores. The non-Boots version had previously sold out at the philatelic bureau in April 1999, probably due to its use for philatelic overprinting.

The idea of pre-paid greeting cards had failed to fully meet the needs of Boots, not least because the hoped-for increase in sales and profit was not forthcoming. The world had moved on: stamps in books were available at around 55,000 outlets, including Boots. As most customers now carry a stamp book, the concept is unlikely to be resurrected – especially as roughly 70% of all mail is sent second class. These labels remain an interesting chapter in philately and one that can be completed cheaply if basic sheets and a few private overprints are obtained.

'GREETING CARD sheets/labels', 'stamp labels' or 'stamp attachments', as variously referred to by Royal Mail, were introduced by Boots the Chemist during 1994 following research into the best approach. The brief was that Boots wanted to promote sales and increase revenue on its own-brand greeting cards, and to offer postage at the same time as the card, in an attractive and innovative package. Internal trials using cards with stamps inserted, pre-paid stamped envelopes and stamps in glassine bags attached to cards were each considered and subsequently rejected.

Production technology already in use at greeting card manufacturers created the final 'Boots Label' concept: a printed sheet wrapped around the upper right-hand corner of the card prior to shrink-wrapping.

Maintaining secrecy, and therefore competitive advantage, was key, and on 17 August 1994 Boots released this product at 200 stores. There were 90 card designs available initially in three



The original branded (top) and the subsequent unbranded Boots label sheets.

Generic label information

Stamp 1st class flame-red colour with a 25p initial selling price that rose as postage rates increased on the copies sold by Royal Mail to collectors.

Pane size 85mm × 43mm first printing, 85mm × 42mm on subsequent printings.

Gum Poly Vinyl Alcohol (PVA), creamy on first printing and whiter on subsequent.

Phosphor Two 4mm bands with fluor added (fluor type recorded below against each printing)

Rouletting An inverted v-shaped set of rouletting slits appears on all sheets to facilitate folding. A standard style of cutter was used (short slits, longer ties) except for what is presumed to be the final Questa sheet (longer slits, shorter ties).

Perforations 14.75 × 14

Ellipses Mention is made of two kinds of ellipse on Questa printings. These are either type R (Rugby ball-shaped with pointed ends, or Rounded sides) and type S (Straight sides with blunted ends, or Sausage-like).

Printing process Offset-lithography.

Paper OFNP (non-fluorescent coated).

Pack size 100 labels, which were then boxed in an unknown quantity of packs.

Date of issue Where dates are shown in the listings they relate to the first day of availability.

Boots branded sheets

1st printing: Questa, 17 August 1994

Fluor Yellow

Ellipses R

Warrant number Q405

Packing Shrink-wrapped with a pink self-adhesive label affixed worded THE HOUSE OF QUESTA/GREETING CARD/STAMP ATTACHMENTS/ WARRANT Q405, REEL NO 1002/ 1ST CLASS/QUANTITY 100\$. A pale lemon rouletted only unprinted sheet formed a divider between every 100 sheets, effectively appearing as sheet 101 in the pack. Grey boards were placed at the front and back within each sealed unit.

Notes Known with short bands at base, and with inset left and right bands. At least one copy is known miscut, so that 'up to 60g in UK' is missing although the rouletting is in the correct position. Rouletting and vertical slices being done together, as explained earlier, would explain this. Totally unprinted, but perforated and rouletted, copies are known.

2nd printing: Questa, October 1994

Fluor Yellow

Ellipses S

Warrant number Q434

Packing 1 Shrink-wrapped with a pale green-coloured self-adhesive label affixed worded THE HOUSE OF QUESTA/GREETING CARD/STAMP ATTACHMENT/WARRANT NUMBER Q434 REEL NO1110/1ST CLASS/100 LABELS 1 × 25p. A pale lemon rouletted only unprinted sheet acted as a divider between every 100 sheets, effectively appearing as sheet 101 in the pack. Grey boards were placed at the front and back within each sealed unit.

Packing 2 Almost as type one, but with the word NUMBER and NO (after REEL) omitted.

Notes Known missing phosphor, or with short bands at top and with inset left and right bands. Also known on creamy gum instead of whiter, which was possibly left over from the first printing.

3rd printing: Questa, 25 September 1995

Fluor Blue

Ellipses S

Warrant number Unknown

Packing Not available to collectors

Notes Issued sheets are only known in a folded condition, as they were not sold unfolded by Royal Mail in packs or singles to collectors. Known missing phosphor and with right band inset. Clearly this was a late printing, as the unbranded version had already been released before copies of this printing had been found.

Unbranded sheets1st printing: *Questa*, 11 September 1995**Fluor** Blue with long-wave afterglow**Ellipses** S**Warrant number** Q486

Packing 1 Shrink-wrapped with a pale green-coloured self-adhesive label affixed worded THE HOUSE OF QUESTA/GREETING CARD LABEL/WARRANT NO Q486/REEL NO 1166/1ST CLASS/ 100 LABELS 1 X 25p. A pale lemon rouletted only unprinted sheet acted as a divider between every 100 sheets, appearing as sheet 101 in the pack. Grey boards were placed at the front and back within each sealed unit.

Packing 2 Almost as type one, but with s on end of word LABELS making it plural and NO after WARRANT omitted.

Notes Cards were being sold in stores prior to the 11 September official launch date of the philatelically available copies from Royal Mail.

2nd printing: *Enschede*, 29 April 1997**Fluor** Very dull violet tinted blue**Warrant number** Unknown

Packing Shrink-wrapped with an unprinted Kraft paper sheet effectively appearing as sheet 101 in the pack. No printed label was used, hence the lack of knowledge about warrant number.

Notes Better quality, sharper printing than *Questa*'s due to the use of computer-engraved cylinders. The ST of 1ST is thicker on this printing. In fact, when collectors and dealers first saw this sheet, they believed it had been printed by photogravure. First day of availability was given by Royal Mail as 29 April, but collectors had found copies in Boots stores from 20 February 1997, as recorded on covers posted that day. Known with short bands at top and base. This dull violet fluor version was available to collectors from Royal Mail in an unfolded condition in packs and singles.

3rd printing: *Enschede*, 1997**Fluor** Bright violet tinted blue**Warrant number** Unknown**Packing** Not available to collectors

Notes Sheets are only known in a folded condition, as they were not sold unfolded by Royal Mail in packs or singles to collectors.

4th printing: *Questa*, January 1998**Fluor** Blue with long-wave afterglow**Ellipses** S**Warrant number** Unknown**Packing** Not available to collectors

Notes Sheets are only known in a folded condition, as they were not sold unfolded by Royal Mail in packs or singles to collectors.

5th printing: *Questa*, October 1998**Fluor** Blue with long-wave afterglow (*Novaglio*)**Ellipses** S**Warrant number** Unknown**Packing** Not available to collectors

Notes Also known with mixed ellipses – S at left, R at right, probably the result of a single damaged elliptical perforation pin. This means that maybe only one copy in every 55 might exist, as the primary sheet size comprised five columns of 11 labels. (*Enschede*'s primary sheet comprised 40 labels (5 X 8). Unfolded sheets are not known, as they were not made available by Royal Mail to collectors. The rouletting cuts are longer on this, the final(?) *Questa* printing.

6th printing: *Enschede*, c1999/2000**Fluor** Bright blue, almost turquoise in colour**Warrant number** Unknown**Packing** Not available to collectors

Notes A limited availability late printing is known from *Enschede* with a very bright turquoise tint to the fluor instead of violet, which was reported in the philatelic press as available early in 2000 from Kingfisher Group stores in £9.99 gift voucher packs. Unfolded sheets are not known; they were not made available by Royal Mail to collectors.

7th & 8th printings: printer unknown, late 2000

Fluor Type unknown**Ellipses** Type unknown**Warrant numbers** Unknown**Packing** Not available to collectors

Notes For provision with gift vouchers intended for sale in the lead-up to Christmas 2000, it is understood that an order was placed in October by the Kingfisher Group for a new printing of 200,000 sheets and for yet another 50,000 copies in that December. Whether these bear any distinguishing characteristics is unknown. Unfolded sheets are not known, as they were not made available by Royal Mail to collectors.

Privately overprinted sheets

One dealer realised that the space around the stamp could be used to create souvenir definitive sheets by applying text and logos. These are extremely popular, with prices around £3 to £9 each. A listing is given on the following page.

Privately overprinted sheets

Souvenir sheets created by applying text and logos to the space around the stamp. The year, event commemorated and type – Boots (B) or unbranded (U) version.

Stamp show overprints

1995	Singapore 95 (Singapore)	B
	Singapore 95 error: overprint on reverse gum	B
1996	Bangkok 96 (Thailand) 1500 copies	U
	Stamp 96 (UK)	U
	Hongpex 96 (Hong Kong)	U
	Taipei 96 (Taiwan) blue overprint	U
	Taipei 96 colour trial, red overprint. 100 copies	U
1997	Hong Kong 97 (Hong Kong SAR)	U
	Pacific 97 (USA) type 1 'Boots'	B
	Pacific 97 (USA) type 2 unbranded	U
	Moscow 97 (Russia)	U
	Bangkok 97 (Thailand)	U
1998	Stamp 98 (UK)	U
	Israel 98 (Israel)	U
	Ilsapex 98 (South Africa)	U
	Singpex 98 (Singapore)	U
1999	World Stamp Expo 99 (Australia)	B
	IBRA 99 (Germany)	B
	Philexfrance 99 (France)	B
2000	PhilEuro 00 (Belgium)	U
	The Stamp Show 2000 (UK) black overprint	U
	The Stamp Show 2000 (UK) blue overprint	U
	WIPA 2000 (Austria)	B
	World Stamp Expo 00 (USA)	B
	Indonesia 00 (Indonesia)	B
2001	Hong Kong 01 (Hong Kong SAR)	B
	Stamp 01 (UK)	B
	Belgica 01 (Belgium)	B
	Philanippon 01 (Japan)	B
	Hafnia 01 (Denmark)	B
2002	Philakorea 02 (South Korea)	B
	Munich International Stamp Day 02 (Germany)	B
	PhilEuro 02 (Belgium)	B
2003	AmeriStamp Expo 03 (USA)	B
2004	HongKong 04 (Hong Kong SAR)	U
	Essen 04 (Germany)	U
	Singapore World Stamp Championships 04	U
2005	Naposta 05 (Germany)	U
2006	Washington 06 (USA)	U

Publicity overprints

?	North East Philatelic Weekend	U
1998	Rushstamps 40th anniversary logo	U
	Grimsby Philatelic Society 75th anniversary	U
1999	National Philatelic Society centenary	U
c2000	Rushstamps 1d black Collect British Stamps	U
	Rushstamps 2d blue Collect British Stamps	U
2005	DEC Tsunami appeal: India, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand versions (4 sheets)	U
2005	Machin Collectors Club 10th anniversary: Enschedé and Questa versions exist	U

Treasures of the BPMA

Christmas stamps that never were, by Martin Robinson

READERS WILL REMEMBER the five Pub Signs stamps issued on 12 August 2003: The Station, Black Swan, The Cross Keys, The Mayflower and The Barley Sheaf. The 1st class and European rate stamps included the Europa symbol at bottom right, as they represented Royal Mail's contribution to the Europa series, whose theme that year was Poster Art. This was not, however, as things were supposed to be – the original idea had been to illustrate the Europa theme on the annual Christmas stamps, using old Post Office posters as the subject matter. The reasons why this happened will not be generally known until something like 2033, as the minutes of the Stamp Advisory Committee's meetings are subject to thirty-year closure.

Commissioned by Royal Mail, the designers Trickett & Webb selected a series of posters from the BPMA archive and prepared a number of presentation visuals for the SAC. In the end, both the schedule and the concept changed, and the Pub Signs stamps carried the Europa theme whilst the Christmas stamps featured the remarkable ice and snow sculptures of the landscape artist Andy Goldsworthy.

The BPMA has a sizeable collection of original posters, some of which have been reproduced on postcards. Examples include the 'Correct Postal Address' series of five cards issued in May 1994 for the 'Addressing Postcodes' exhibition at the National Postal Museum, and the 'Post Office Savings Bank' set of four cards, issued by Post Office Archives in 1991.

In addition BPMA has all the artwork produced by Trickett & Webb for the proposed issue, both their photographs of the posters and the five sets of stamp-sized visuals based on them for presentation to the SAC. Three of these sets, each of five stamps, are on a 'Post Early for Christmas' theme and feature a whole variety of seasonal images, including Santa Claus, pantomime horses, rob-

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