

Business Customised Stamp Sheets: Update One

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In the *Bulletin* for August of last year appeared the first listing of Business Customised Stamps (BCS sheets). These sheets are produced at the request of business customers - mainly the philatelic trade. In the intervening months, several new sheets have appeared and this update picks-up where the initial article left off.

These sheets have now started to appear on self-adhesive paper stock, as happened with the personalised Smilers last October, so a new column has been added, as has a column for the main supplier of each sheet, with contact details in a block at the foot of the listing to assist readers wishing to obtain any of the sheets.

Readers may be aware of a sheet produced for the 70th anniversary of Basingstoke Philatelic Society, which is currently being sold for around £45/£60 (circa 150 sheets printed). Note that this is *not* a BCS sheet, having been produced with lasered labels by Royal Mail as part of the Personalised Smilers service on the flowers design blank label base-stock, hence their exclusion from this listing.

Occasionally, collectors of BCS material have the opportunity of buying proof material from the producers of these sheets. Two recent examples have centred on Rushstamps' sheets, where they offered for sale the 2003 *Rushstamps Anniversary* pair of Walsall Security Printers bromides showing the stamps in an imperforate form (£150) and the second offer was for similar items but related to the *Collect British Stamps* sheets (£250). Only two sets of each were provided by the printers to the customer and these are legitimate proof items. However, readers should be aware that it is sometimes possible to get hold of images taken from CD-ROMs of the final artwork (also imperforate), but produced for press publicity purposes and later printed-off on any quality home printer in any quantity. These are of some interest to specialists, but are of little financial value, being so easily replicable.

Thanks to an eBay purchaser, it is possible to illustrate the two versions of the first BCS sheets produced as part of the initial trials, as commissioned by Eagle Coaches of Bristol to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the company. These are rarely offered (prior to a recent sale, I had only ever seen one pair sold since they were first issued five years ago) and the vendor states that there are only four other sheets on the open market, as the remainder of the surviving sheets are known to be held by the Eagle Coaches founding family. Eagle is believed to have been one of a few companies to initially have trialled the concept of BCS sheets, but no other sheet types have so far surfaced. An Eagle pair sold in December 2005 for very high figures. Both the Hallmark and Cartoons stamp versions were each at a fairly steady £180 until the closing seconds when successive late bids pushed the final price up to £645 per sheet.

My thanks to Graham Cooke, Graham Eyre, Allan M Grant, Graham Howard, Ian Gordon, John R Vincent and Ken Weatherill for keeping me advised of new issues and for updating me on older sheets.

In recent months I have received several communications from readers of this feature indicating that they would like to collect BCS sheets, but they believe that the average new-issue price is higher than can be justified in the philatelic market. Each sheet costs the producer circa £7.00, excluding artists' design fees, advertising costs and any image or logo licencing costs that may be incurred for numbered sheets of 10 and where the print run is 1000 to 1999. They generally sell for £20-£30 (or, in Australian money, A\$47.52-A\$71.28 - read on) when first issued.

I have previously stated that memorabilia collectors have created a ready market, have spare cash and that they are probably responsible for continuing to drive the price of these items ever upwards. There is an argument that BCS sheets are an attractive collectable that would have a greater philatelic market if printed in larger quantities (which would cost the producer less per sheet) and if sold at a more acceptable price.

I thought that it might be interesting to compare British sheets with those of Australia, where AusPost, originator of personalised stamps, has offered a similar business service to that of Royal Mail since the year 2000. An SES (Special Event Souvenir) sheet primarily comprises a landscape (or sometimes portrait) format A4-sized sheet of 10 (mostly) or 20 stamps (rarely) with a tab and border design that is customised or designed to suit an event or occasion. The Australian stamps are always to the left of the label, unlike in Britain where the reverse is true.

They have a firm following among collectors, where entertainment, transport and sports appear to be the favourite subjects depicted, in much the same way as Royal Mail's BCS offering. The main difference is that there are two series because AusPost is also a creator of these sheets.

Print runs tend to be around 10,000 copies for most AusPost items, which are exclusively marketed by them via their Bureau at A\$15.95 (£6.71), but can even be as low as 800 copies. Privately commissioned business sheets, which are generally not sold by AusPost, are usually in smaller runs, where the normal minimum print run for these customers is set at 500 sheets. However and mainly when there is a sponsorship deal involved, there have been smaller runs - in one case only 25 sheets. Business customers, including some quite recently, have sold sheets from A\$11.95 (£5.03) up to around A\$120 (£50.51), where the print-run was one-tenth of the average British sheet and had a railway-related theme. The larger runs are generally priced at around A\$45 (£18.94) when first released.

Perhaps there is not really much difference in stamp dealer mark-ups on either side of the world and I guess the phrase 'the market price will prevail' is a truism in any free economy.

Thanks to Craig Chappell for verifying the Australian portion of the text above. Craig, who is a Stamp dealer and philatelic writer on P-Stamps (the Australian name for Smilers), will send a copy of his latest personalised stamps list to *Bulletin* readers who write to PO Box 521, Clayfield 4011, Australia, or email him at craigchappell@bigpond.com.au.

Another company illustrates over 30 examples of the Australian sheets in colour at <http://shop.lvovsky.com/stampsnstuff/stamps/SESsheets.htm> for those readers interested in looking at some Australian SES sheets.

CATALOGUE LISTING

This list has not been produced from any official records, as the sponsor details are a matter of commercial confidentiality, so other sheets probably remain unrecorded – especially if they were not produced for, or made available to, the philatelic market.

Reports of missing sheets, updates to information for recorded sheets or details of forthcoming issues would be welcomed at glennmorgan@hotmail.com, please. Of special interest is the issue date and name of the printer, which is rarely made available and it never appears on the sheet margin. The exact order in which sheets were issued within any year is not feasible, as there is rarely an exact date of issue. Where a First Day of Availability (FDOA) date is known it is shown. For convenience, each sheet in this listing is now numbered sequentially.

<u>Theme</u>	<u>Design</u>	<u>FDOA</u>	<u>Stamp</u>	<u>Qty.</u>	<u>Price</u>	<u>Printer</u>	<u>Gum</u>	<u>Supplier</u>
61 Football	Liverpool: Champions of Europe	July 05	UF10P	2005N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
62 Movies	Hammer Films: Frankenstein	July 05	P10P	1000N	£30	Cartor	WA	SC
63 Television	Dr Who: The 5 th Doctor Peter Davison	July 05	P10P	1000N	£30	Cartor	WA	SC
64 Television	Dr Who: Latest Series The Monsters	July 05	H10P	1500N	£30	Cartor	WA	SC
65 Movies	Captain Scarlet	Aug 05	P10P	1000N	£30	Cartor	WA	SC
66 Aviation	Farewell Concorde 1969-2003	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£30	Cartor?	WA	BE
67 Bikers	Carl Fogarty, world champion	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£30	Cartor	WA	SC
68 Comics	'The Dandy'. Main characters	Sep 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
69 Comics	'The Beano'. Main characters	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
70 Comics	Dennis the Menace and Gnasher	Sep 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
71 Football	Chelsea FC, Heroes 2004/05 season	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
72 History	Gunpowder Plot 400 th anniversary	Sep 05	UF10P	1605N	£20	Cartor?	WA	AB
73 Philately	Autumn Stampex: Nelson and Trafalgar	14.09.05	WE10P	3000U*	£10	Cartor?	WA	ST
74 Shipping	20 th Ann. Titanic wreck discovery 1	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
75 Shipping	20 th Ann. Titanic wreck discovery 2	Sept 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
76 Animals	Cats	Oct 05	UF10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
77 Aviation	Red Arrows 40 th anniversary	Oct 05	H10P		U £30	Cartor?	WA	WE
78 Childhood	Teddy Bears	Oct 05	B10P	1000N	£25	Cartor?	WA	BE
79 History	1936: Year of the Three Kings	Dec 05	UF10P	1936N	£20	Cartor?	WA	AB
2006								
80 Royalty	80 th Birthday of Queen Elizabeth II	01 Jan	UF10P		£	Cartor?	WA	WE
81 Aviation	30 th Ann. of Concorde's first flight (1)	21 Jan	UFS10P	1000N*	£45	Cartor?	SA	BU
82 Philately	Spring Stampex: Brunel and thematics	22 Feb	HC10P		U £10	Cartor?	WA	ST
Forthcoming								
Military	The Victoria Cross - 150 th Anniversary	April	UF10P	500N	£30	Cartor?	WA	AB
Aviation	30 th Ann. Of Concorde's first flight (2)	26 May			N £20	Cartor?	SA?	BU

* Sheet is numbered as having had 1976 copies printed, but only 1000 were eventually produced.

NOTES

Stamps Key: B = 'Teddy Bear' stamp (1991 Greetings), H = 'Hello stamp (2002 Occasions), HC = Hallmark Cheers (Hallmark Occasions), P = Planets' stamp (1991 Greetings), UF = 'Union Flag' stamp (2001 Flags and Ensigns MS), UFS = 'Union Flag' stamp (2005 small-sized Flag from stamp book), WE = 'White Ensign' stamp (2001 Flags and Ensigns MS). The number after the letter(s) records how many stamps are in the sheet; while P = Portrait and L = Landscape sheet format.

Qty.: The number of sheets produced. A letter 'N' following the quantity indicates that each sheet bears a unique serial number and a print run figure. A 'U' indicates an unnumbered sheet.

Price: This is the approximate price for the sheet, based on recent dealer listings and online auction realisations. Many lower (and higher) prices are charged. Prices quoted are for unsigned versions and where signed are available, add £5-£25 depending on signatory.

Printer Key: A question mark (?) after printer name indicates uncertainty.

Gum: WA=Water Activated, SA=Self-Adhesive.

Enquiries: For current prices, postage and availability of these sheets contact the main suppliers, as marked in end column.

AB sheets - Adrian Bradbury, 3 Link Road, Stoneygate, Leicester LE2 3RA, or visit www.bfdc.co.uk

BE sheets - Benham, Freepost, RLXU-CXUT-HZJH, The Benham Group, Kelvedon Park, London Road, Rivenhall, Witham, CM8 3HB (UK readers only) or Benham, Unit K, Concept Court, Shearway Business Park, Folkestone CT19 4RG.(overseas readers), call 08708 500 654, email benham@benham.co.uk or visit www.benham.co.uk

BU sheets – Buckingham Covers, 135 Sandgate Road, Folkestone CT20 2BY, call 01303 850688, email sales@buckinghamcovers.com or visit www.buckinghamcovers.com

RS sheets - Rushstamps (Retail) Ltd, PO Box 1, Lyndhurst SO43 7PP, email enquiries@rushstamps.co.uk or visit www.rushstamps.co.uk

SC sheets - The Stamp Centre, 79 Strand, London WC2R 0DE, telephone 0207 240 3778 or visit www.scificollector.co.uk

ST sheets - Stampex sheets are only available at the shows, or subsequently from stamp dealers.

WE sheets - The Westminster Collection Ltd., telephone 08708 500 505 or visit www.westminstercollection.com

Many of the above listed and earlier sheets are also available from The Benham Group and Rushstamps (Retail) Ltd (see above for details of both companies) and from The Stamp Bureau (email thestampbureau@gmail.com or visit www.thestampbureau.com)

(1960 words)