

THE WORLD OF ONLINE PHILATELY

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Smilers – Customised Stamp Sheets www.smilers-info.com

The screenshot shows the homepage of the website. At the top, the title "Smilers - Customised Stamp Sheets" is displayed in blue, with the tagline "everything for the GB Smilers® collector...". A navigation menu on the left includes links for Home, Catalogue, Smilers Store, Smilers News, New Issues, Have Your Say, Smilers Notes, Personalised Stamps, Dealers, and Contact Us. The main content area features a "Welcome to smilers-info.com" message, a "What's New ..." section with links to "New Issues", "generic, business, commemorative" and "themed customised smilers" sheets, and "Smilers Packs" and "Universal Mail's" personalised stamps. A "Smilers Search" box is located at the bottom left. On the right, there are statistics for "Visits" (31,159) and "Vis. today" (18). Below the statistics, there are two featured items: "Royal Mail Future Issues!" with a photo of a person in a red uniform standing in front of a display of "CASTLES OF ENGLAND" stamp sheets, and "Smilers For Kids - Wild Cherry" with a photo of a stamp sheet featuring children and a cherry tree. A "Smilers Sales Lists" link is also visible at the bottom right.

Smilers sheets have now become an accepted stamp format that will have been around for a decade come May next year. Interest in these items does not appear to be reducing and the steady stream of new sheets helps to maintain the interest of collector and non-collector alike.

This website has a sub-title of “Everything for the GB Smilers Collector...” and it would be difficult to disagree, although it is increasingly offering more than just GB, for it now incorporates the Isle of Man issues, a listing of worldwide personalised stamp issuing countries (around 20), and a collector’s guide to the groundbreaking Australian issues.

The “Customised Stamp Sheets of Great Britain” catalogue (£19.95) covers the years 2000-early 2007 and it is the many subsequent sheets that are the main focus of this website. The domain owners have clearly amassed a vast amount of information on Smilers since the catalogue was launched and this site is the first and logical place to get hold of information about more recent and forthcoming issues.

Sheet listings are split into eight separate categories, namely Generic (c.72 sheets issued in total since 2000), Customised (112), Themed (340), Business Customised (225), Commemorative (6), Isle of Man (13), Kids Packs (4) and the recent Universal Mail UK hang-sell sheets (10). Every sheet is illustrated and as much detail as is available is also incorporated against each entry.

The “Smilers News” section gives hot-off the-press information on the world of Smilers collecting and is added to regularly. Much of the information never makes it into the mainstream philatelic press and is therefore archived at the end of each quarter to provide an ongoing record.

The other feature that I recommend is the “Smilers Notes”. These are a series of information sheets in PDF format that provide background information on one particular aspect of Smilers collecting. Nineteen of them have been produced so far, the most recent being on the Elizabeth Hurley charity sheets auctioned by Royal Mail on eBay in March of this year. Others include details

of Smilers publicity material, the four Beatles sheets that were not approved for issue by Apple Corps Ltd and the Cancer Research Presentation Packs of 2003.

The site also includes sales lists for the British and Australian sheets and the opportunity of purchasing the catalogue, a list of 15 dealers who sell Smilers, FAQs, a site search engine, a "Have Your Say" page, while contact details of the webmasters complete this extensive site.

This is a professionally designed website that does much to provide a positive image of the hobby of stamp collecting to the outside world; it is easy to navigate and has been viewed by over 30,000 visitors. You must bookmark www.smilers-info.com if Smilers sheets are of interest to you and thematic / topical collectors would do especially well to check out the listings, as many themes have been covered on the labels.

(500 words)