

ROYAL MAIL BUSINESS CUSTOMISED STAMPS

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Royal Mail's interesting SmilersTM photostamps come in three distinct series and this article covers the type intended for sale directly to companies or organisations, rather than members of the public. It is appropriate to firstly record brief details of the other two types to help readers distinguish each series.

For those unfamiliar with the product range, Smilers sheets comprise A4 portrait or landscape sheets of water-activated or self-adhesive stamp paper with either 10 or 20 Greetings / Occasions stamps. These stamps each have a label attached to them, which bears either text or imagery and the marginal area of the sheet is decorative.

Personal Smilers The first sheet was launched at The Stamp Show 2000 and this format continues to be available in regularly updated issues. Orders can be placed by sending a suitable photograph to Royal Mail or by transmitting a digital image via the Internet. In both instances, the Smilers are sent by post to the customer. The ordering process is very slick and a recent order placed by a family member on a Monday was in their hands on the Thursday.

The decorative margins and stamps are pre-printed by a Royal Mail security stamp printer, with the label area left unprinted. The photographic image supplied by the customer is then laser printed by Royal Mail onto the blank label base stock; thus tens of thousands of stamp and label combinations exist. Completeness, i.e. one of every photograph ever used, is clearly impossible and only a representative range is achievable by the collector. It is feasible, though, to collect either one of every basic full sheet design or a single of each stamp design produced with its attached photographic label.

Generic Smilers These sheets are produced to enable philatelic customers to acquire the stamps that appear alongside the photographs in the above series, but without needing to pay for the premium photographic service. Instead, the labels are pre-printed with appropriate generic images and have attractive margins. Sheets sell for 55p above the face value of the stamps included. These have proved to be extremely popular with collectors and, since Royal Mail produced a Smilers album, the prices of obsolete sheets have substantially risen as collectors try to fill their gaps. The star items are the pair of 2001 Christmas Robin and Cracker design sheets with the short-lived 'Consignia' copyright imprint. These were clearly missed by many collectors probably because outwardly they resembled the previously issued version with an imprint of 'The Post Office'.

The decorative margin, stamps and labels are all printed by a Royal Mail security stamp printer. No personalisation of the labels is possible for this series; thus only one version of each printing exists. Completeness is achievable, collectors usually favouring to retain full or half sheets, although some do collect just singles of each possible stamp and label combination.

Business Customised Stamps It is this third series that collectors may be less familiar with as they are not available directly from Royal Mail, so a listing of these sheets forms the main thrust of this article. Aimed primarily at Royal Mail's business customers, where higher volumes of an identical sheet are likely to be purchased, it is suspected that this is potentially a more lucrative market than producing individual sheets for personal customers and one that Royal Mail must surely be anxious to promote. They are not officially called Smilers by Royal Mail, but they clearly are this product in everything but name to the collectors who buy them.

The customer designs the marginal area and labels and the entire sheet is then printed by one of Royal Mail's security stamp printers, including the stamp design(s) chosen by the customer from the range available to them. Completeness of this series is still achievable, with collectors invariably choosing to collect full sheets, as most are quite spectacular when shown as a complete unit. It is believed that all Business Customised Stamps have been printed by litho due to the limited print runs and self-adhesive paper has not been utilised yet.

Prior to launch, Royal Mail research revealed different uses for this third series:

Postage By attaching the stamp with its label to mail it acts as a means of personalising communications. Primarily aimed at smaller print runs, larger mailing quantities can be handled by Royal Mail's equipment on the customer's behalf.

Promotion The labels can be used for displaying special offers, selling messages or gaming mechanics. These could be utilised for on-pack promotions to celebrate anniversaries, for example.

Corporate Gifts and Collectable Products Sheets can be given as gifts to employees, or segments of valued customers. Numbering of sheets is possible and they can be given away or sold loose, or could be framed to give a higher perceived value or potential retail price.

The lowest print run is 500 sheets (5000 stamps) with 50,000 seen as an anticipated maximum. The premium for production above face value is 35% for

500 sheets, down to 12.5% for 49,999 sheets and it appears that 5000 sheets is the maximum produced of any one issue so far.

The first business sheets produced were created for Eagle Coaches of Bristol as part of initial trials to ascertain the potential demand for such a product. The first charity premium label designs were produced by the Royal British Legion and other themes have included TV, sport, transport, military, philately and movies. No doubt many more subjects will be covered in due course.

With some of these sheets (especially sport and entertainment related issues), there is the unusual element whereby philatelists are in direct competition with memorabilia collectors and sports fans. Many sheets (as high as 90%) are sold beautifully framed and are often signed by relevant celebrities and, as a result, the promoter invariably has to pay a great deal of money for licensing of images, signing fees and for placing advertising in the specialised press. (They usually take-out full page, full colour spreads to help generate sales; whereas the philatelic press may promote such items in its news features without charge.) Initial selling prices are fixed by the producers and can, therefore, be upwards of £40 to cover these additional costs.

This is an interesting series of sheets to acquire, with many opportunities for future expansion of collections as word gets around the potential sponsors that the production facility – and the demand – exists. Now is probably the best time to fill those gaps before prices rise even further, especially for many of the earlier sheets.

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Enquiries: Most of the Business Customised Sheets listed below have been produced and / or sold, by a limited number of mainly philatelic companies, who can often supply directly to customers, subject to stock, at current market prices.

Benham (Football) – Web: www.benhamcovers.com e-mail: benham@benham.co.uk

A G Bradbury (Nelson related) - Web: www.bfdc.co.uk e-mail: brad@bfdc.co.uk

Rushstamps (Most sheet types) - Web: www.rushstamps.co.uk e-mail: enquiries@rushstamps.co.uk

Stamp Centre (TV / Movies) - Web: www.scificollector.stamp-centre.co.uk

e-mail: info@scificollector.co.uk

Stampex Limited (Stampex sheets) - Available to show attendees only, or stamp dealers subsequently

Westminster Collection (Royal British Legion) - Web: www.rblstamps.com e-mail: from website

CATALOGUE LISTING

Business Customised Stamps are known to exist in the versions recorded below. It should be pointed out that 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 via the Editor, 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. However, where a First Day of Availability (FDOA) date is known it is shown italicised after the description of the sheet and these entries appear at the beginning of each year's list, followed by the rest grouped by theme.

Excluded from this listing are the Pabay Island, Cancer Research, ABPS Basildon 2004 stamp show, Bagley Wood Railway, Methodist Philatelic Society and similar issues that were all produced using the Smilers photostamps service and not the Business Customised Stamps facility. Most of these issues were sold as a single stamp with attached label and if full sheets are examined they clearly fall outside the scope of this listing.

Theme	Commemorating	First Day of Availability (where known)	Stamps ¹	Qty ²	Price ³	Printer ⁴
c2001/2002						
Vehicles	Eagle Coaches of Bristol - stamps type one		C10P	low U	£150	Q
Vehicles	Eagle Coaches of Bristol - stamp type two		HT10P	low U	£150	Q
2002						
Football	Manchester United: 100 th season	<i>6 March</i>	HT10P	2002N	£65	Q
Football	Arsenal's: Heroes 2002/2003 Season	<i>c.March?</i>	HT10P	2002N	£30	Q
Football	Liverpool: Anfield's Heroes 2002/2003 season	<i>c.March?</i>	HT10P	5000N	£30	Q
Football	Manchester Utd: Ten Stars of Old Trafford	<i>c.March?</i>	HT10P	5000N	£30	Q
Football	Norwich City: Centenary Canary Legends	<i>c.March?</i>	HT10P	2002N	£30	Q
Football	Rangers: 10 Ibrox Greats	<i>c.March?</i>	HT10P	1000N	£33	Q
2003						
Football	Arsenal Centurions: Scorers of 100 or more goals	<i>Early 2003</i>	HT20L	2000N	£35	Q
Philatelic	Spring Stampex: 50 th Anniversary ⁵	<i>28 February</i>	H10P	2250U	£23	D ⁶
Philatelic	Autumn Stampex: 50 th anniversary ⁵	<i>17 September</i>	B10P	2912U	£13	W
Rugby	World Cup: England Rugby Heroes 2003	<i>10 October</i>	HT20L	2003N	£55	W?
Rugby	World Cup: England Rugby World Champions	<i>8 December</i>	HT20L	2003N	£75	W?
Football	Tottenham Hotspur: Spurs Hall of Fame		HT10P	2000N	£28	W?
Football	Manchester City: Maine Road Greats		HT10P	2003N	£28	W?
Philatelic	Rushstamps: 45 years - blue background		FG(x5)+FI(x5)10P	1500N	£11	W
Philatelic	Rushstamps: 45 years - maroon background		HC(x5)+HT(x5)10P	1000U	£11	W
2004						
Philatelic	Spring Stampex: British Gibraltar ⁵	<i>25 February</i>	L10P	2791U	£12	W
Philatelic	Collect GB Stamps: Stamp Show Sheets	<i>c.March</i>	E(x2)10P	1500U	£10	W
Philatelic	Collect GB Stamps: QV High values-£1 PUC	<i>c.March</i>	E(x2)10P	1500U	£10	W
Rugby	World Cup: England Heroes of the Final - sheet 1 of 2	<i>April</i>	HC10P	2003N	£19	W?
Rugby	World Cup: England Heroes of the Final - sheet 2 of 2	<i>April</i>	HC10P	2003N	£19	W?
Television	Gerry Anderson's Thunderbirds Puppets	<i>April</i>	H10P	2500N	£18	W?
Television	Dr Who: The Companions - 10 assistants	<i>Mid-year</i>	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	W?
Television	Dr Who: The Companions - 10 further assistants	<i>Mid-year</i>	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	W?
Television	Dr Who: The Daleks ⁷	<i>Mid-year</i>	P10P	2000N	£40 ⁸	W?

Television	Dr Who: Tom Baker, the 4 th Doctor	Mid-year	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	W?
Military	60 th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings	June	UF10P	U	£30	W?
Movies	Elvis Presley - red background	5 July	L10P	2500N	£20	W?
Movies	Elvis Presley - green background	5 July	L10P	2500N	£20	W?
Movies	Elvis Presley - blue background	5 July	L10P	2500N	£20	W?
Movies	Elvis Presley - purple background	5 July	L10P	2500N	£20	W?
Philatelic	Collect GB Stamps: High Values 1867-1955	c. August	S10P	1000U	£10	W
Philatelic	Autumn Stampex: British Stamp Competitions ⁵	15 September	UF10P	1825U	£10	W
Television	Dr Who: Katy Manning	Autumn	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	W?
Television	Red Dwarf cult TV series	Autumn	P10P	1000N	£30 ⁸	W?
Naval	Trafalgar. Nelson on label painted by L F Abbott	21 October	UF		£15 ⁹	W?
Football	Arsenal: Heroes 2004-2005 Season		UF10P	2004N	£20	W?
Football	Chelsea: Heroes 2004-2005 Season		UF10P	1000N	£20	W?
Football	Manchester United: Heroes 2004-2005 Season		UF10P	1000N	£20	W?
Formula 1	Jordan Racing 1991-2004		HC10P	950N	£20	W?
Movies	Spider-Man comic book character	HT(x3) + HC(x7)	10P	2500N	£25	C
Movies	X-Men United comic book characters	HT(x3) + HW(x7)	10P	2500N	£30	C
Olympics	Legendary Gold Medal Winner Sir Steve Redgrave		UF10P	4950N	£20	W?
Olympics	Ten Great British Gold Medal Winners		UF10P	4950N	£20	W?
Railways	175 th Anniversary of the Rainhill Trials		UF10P	2004N	£20	W?

2005

Television	Dr Who: Colin Baker, the 6 th Doctor	Early 2005	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	C
Television	Dr Who: Sylvester McCoy, the 7 th Doctor	Early 2005	P10P	1000N	£40 ⁸	C
Naval	200 th Anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar	14 February	UF10P	1805N	£20	C
Philatelic	Spring Stampex: Rotary Centenary ⁵	23 February	H10P	2250U	£10	C
Military	Route to Victory with £1 RBL charity premium	7 April	UF10P	U	£8	C?
Military	End of WW2 with £1 RBL charity premium	7 April	UF10P	U	£8	C?
Railways	History of British Steam Locomotion 1822-1866	May	UF10P	1000N	£25	C?
Railways	History of British Steam Locomotion 1870-1894	May	UF10P	1000N	£25	C?
Railways	History of British Steam Locomotion 1897-1923	May	UF10P	1000N	£25	C?
Railways	History of British Steam Locomotion 1923-1938	May	UF10P	1000N	£25	C?
Railways	History of British Steam Locomotion 1938-1960	May	UF10P	1000N	£25	C?
Television	Dr Who: the new 9 th Doctor and assistant	May	H10P	1500N	£25 ⁸	C
Television	Dr Who: United Nations Int'l Taskforce (UNIT)	May	P10P	1000N	£25 ⁸	C
Naval	History of Lord Nelson	August	WE10P	1805N	£20	C?

Planned Issues

Philatelic	Autumn Stampex ⁵	14 September 2005	10P	U	£10	C?
Television	Gerry Anderson's 'Captain Scarlet' Puppets	2005		N	£	C
Television	Bagpuss cult children's TV series	2005		N	£	C?
Television	Dr Who: Peter Davison, the 5 th Doctor	2005		N	£ ⁸	C?
Television	Dr Who: Paul McGann, the 8 th Doctor	[when?]		N	£ ⁸	C?

(Further details of these and later new issues will appear in Stamp Scene when information becomes available)

NOTES

1 Stamps Key:

B	'Teddy Bear' stamp (1991 Greetings)
C	'Cartoons' set of ten (1996 Greetings)
E	'Entertaining Envelopes' set of 5 (2004 Occasions)
FG	'Flower: Gentiana' stamp (1997 Greetings)
FI	'Flower: Iris' stamp (1997 Greetings)
H	'Hello vapour trail' stamp (2002 Occasions)
HC	'Hallmark: Cheers' stamp (2001 Occasions)
HT	'Hallmark: Thanks' stamp (2001 Occasions)

HW	'Hallmark: Welcome' stamp (2001 Occasions)
L	'Love' stamp (2002 Occasions)
P	'Planets' stamp (1991 Greetings)
S	'Smiles' set of ten (1991 Greetings)
UF	'Union Flag' stamp (2001 Flags and Ensigns MS)
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.

- 2 **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.
- 3 **Price:** This is the current approximate price for the sheet, based on recent stamp dealer listings and e-Bay auction realisations. Many lower (and higher!) prices are charged and bargains are still to be had.
- 4 **Printer Key:** C - Cartor; D – De La Rue; Q – Questa; W – Walsall. A question mark (?) after printer code letter indicates uncertainty as to whether this printer information is correct.
As many as 7500 stamps from each Stampex issue are given away as singles to visitors at each show. The figures in the body of the listing relate to the number of sheets left after breaking-up and damage. (This is not the only instance where large quantities of stamps are intentionally removed from sheets by the producer, as various other issues have been used on promotional mailings, First Day Covers or commemorative covers.)
- 5 Despite De La Rue being recorded as the printer of this sheet, it seems likely that as they had purchased the House of Questa in 2002, they would have let the Questa factory print this sheet, for the tooling and expertise would have been at Byfleet.
- 6 This sheet bears an inscription that 1000 were printed. This is an error, as 2000 were actually produced.
- 7 Prices quoted are for unsigned versions. For signed, add £5-£25 depending on person(s) signing.
- 8 Only known on cover selling at price shown for stamps with attached label and a Gibraltar Trafalgar coin in an edition of 9,500. Business Customised Stamp sheets not available to collectors so far.

(2670 words)