

Bulletin Poll *A selection of voters' views,* by Glenn H Morgan FRPSL

Last month saw the publication of the results of the annual *Bulletin* stamp poll designed to find the favourite stamp set and single from the 2005 issues and to announce the *Bulletin* author with the most votes. This month, voter's comments that accompanied some of their forms are recorded.

General Comments Unlike last year, the general comments were incredibly negative. "I must say that by the time 1 November was reached I was glad to philatelically draw breath", "they are just churned out and are never seen on mail", "another year of dreadful, meaningless, rubbish designs most of which were incomprehensible", "not a vintage year, but by no means the worst, either", "a disappointing year" and "let's hope that 2006 has more original stamp designs, as 2005 has been yet another disastrous year. Take a look back to the 1970s when stamp designs stood out as real miniature works of art!" were several of the views expressed by voters. "Once again too many stamp issues for one year – and in too many formats. No fewer than three issues were not part of the planned programmes, but later additions".

The way that some stamp designs had been cropped was noted by one reader, citing stamps 32 and 41 in particular. There was "a plea for a 2nd class stamp in every issue" and one voter concluded "not an easy choice – so many of the 'stamps' are totally unsuitable to this job".

A reader was in reflective mood when he stated "will Royal Mail ever surpass *The Penny Black* or the *Machin* for quiet, efficient symbols of good taste and effectiveness? These two adhesives say more about Britain than all the coloured labels – and there are FAR TOO MANY of *them* each year".

Royal Mail has steadily increased the number of miniature sheets available to collectors and readers picked-up on this point: "miniature sheets were strictly limited to one every few years. Now they are appearing like wallpaper. No doubt this is the Post Office's way of generating more income" and "overall there were far too many MS. Jane Eyre had a miniature sheet as well as a Prestige book which for a dreary issue would kill off the new collector before he had begun" were typical comments about this point.

Once again the opportunity was taken by readers to complain about the fact that the (well-liked) MS for *Trafalgar* (and the recent 2006 *Brunel* issue) did not fit on its Stamp Card and "can I ask that this specific point be brought to the attention of the Stamp Advisory Committee.

Alternatively stop producing MS cards” summed-up views. Perhaps Royal Mail product managers could take note, as this is an annual objection from its customer base.

One disillusioned reader advised us that he “...stopped buying British stamps after the Millennium disaster issue and you haven’t enticed me back yet!”

By way of balance, I will let three voters have the final say when they state that 2005 was “overall a pretty good year and next year looks even better!”, “I’ve noticed a marked improvement in the design of British stamps over the last year” and “...congratulations on a very good year. No ‘duds’ at all”.

.....
Specific Issue Comments Taking each issue in turn, the comments shown below consist of many of those provided, so if there is a negative emphasis on a particular issue, this is the slant from voters and not from me.

Farm Animals “Would have been better if photographs had been used, like last year’s woodland animals set”, “why no indication of the breeds depicted?”, “probably not to everyone’s taste” and “absolutely dire” were the comments made about this interesting and distinctly different artistic treatment of British farmyard animals.

These stamps brought back to me happy childhood memories of my Mum reading story books comprising thick, shiny cardboard pages with rounded corners, so the comment “sweet, but as if from an infants first reader” is probably about right.

British Journeys: South West England This set scored particularly well in voting this year when compared with the previous sets in this series. The “...views of my home area touched my nostalgic vein and as they showed such stunning views, I’ve voted them number one”, but “too dull” and “uninspiring” were responses from those perhaps less familiar with the views depicted. Last year the allegedly unnatural colours used were objected to, which was successfully addressed with this part (and the 2006 concluding set) of the series.

Jane Eyre This issue failed to inspire many positive comments and “...truly hideous”, “appalling”, “dismal”, “awful”, “ugly and dull”, “a set of ugly old women”, “...one of the worst designs ever inflicted on us” and “Jane Eyre was plain, not grotesque, and the set was very disappointing” summed-up most feelings.

However one reader thought “I am guessing that not too many people will have liked these dark sketches, but I did. It prompted me to dig out the book and read it again... and *Wuthering Heights*, too”.

Magic! Surprisingly, the only responses to this issue, which had utilised innovative interactive effects, were “uninventive” and “magic is a

wonder, full of surprises. I had hoped an artist might have expressed these qualities”.

Royal Wedding “...as nice a design as Princess Anne’s” was, I assume, a compliment, and “Charles and Camilla looked great on Stamp 28. It was nice to see someone in the Royal Family look so happy” summed-up the positive views of one of our American readers, as did “the Royal Wedding stamps should have been issued as singles, not just as a MS, as they deserved to be used postally more”

“On close inspection one wonders if the designer was a Camilla fan. Can I put the 30p stamp up for ‘the stamp with the greatest number of chins ever portrayed on a Royal person’ for a Guinness record?” was an amusing, albeit disrespectful, response that came all the way from a reader living in Thailand.

World Heritage Sites “...a very good choice to show the essence of both countries” and “uninspiring” were two conflicting views. Almost everyone who voted for this set also voted for the *British Journey South West England* stamps and one reader believes that Royal Mail has “got scenery (stunning or gentle) off to a tee”.

Trooping the Colour This was a high-scoring issue that resulted in just the one note-worthy comment, where a voter asks “why do we have a photograph of a guardsman who appears to be blowing his nose in his glove (stamp 38)?” Take another look; he certainly could be seen to be lacking a handkerchief!

Motorcycles “Nice, but monotonous”, “all look the same” and “boring and repetitive”, were three anti-comments, but this was balanced with “the BSA makes a lovely simple composition – a classic motorcycle” and a long-term biker stated that the stamps “reminded me of the splendid sights and sounds of the single cylinder machines’ *dum, dum, dum, dum* throb as they burnt past you on the A4!”.

Changing Tastes in Britain Based on the voting alone, this set was almost universally disliked. “Good to see the return of original artwork rather than photographs with labels” and “I loved the child-like simplicity of the stamps, except that it was difficult to work-out the food/drink being depicted” were the closest things to generous observations. “These were quite ghastly – like banana republic labels”, “pointless and gaudy” and “worst set of the year – appalling” were more typical responses.

Picking-up on the healthy eating campaign underway by government and consumers alike, one reader asked “why was someone eating chips ever illustrated? It would have been far better to have portrayed healthy foods which children and adults are encouraged to eat”. This is an interesting point, as such a depiction would have fitted perfectly into the ‘changing tastes’ theme, as more of us comply with the Five-a-Day crusade.

Classic ITV Considering that we are allegedly a nation of TV watchers, it was surprising that this issue did not score higher and that only two views on the issued stamps were expressed, which on the one hand was “horrible posters” and on the other “has every attribute that I’d look for in a set; lettering in keeping with the subject depicted, Queen’s head and value distinct and well placed, with the *Inspector Morse* stamp very cleverly done”.

The absence of a *Coronation Street* stamp despite this being the result of an open vote by TV viewers that favoured *Emmerdale*, “seems to border on the criminal”.

The Ashes “Winning the Ashes, great though it was, did not justify an issue, nor the use of pictures of living persons” and “...truly embarrassing. The Australian’s usually win and they’ve never bothered to issue four stamps because it’s such a regular occurrence. What next?” were quite strong views expressed against this issue.

Trafalgar Royal Mail was on to a winner with its commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar issue, but even here a couple of anti-comments were received. “An issue well worth celebrating - I liked it a lot”, “magnificent” and “the cream of the crop” summed-up most voter’s opinions.

The only complaints were “even the Trafalgar stamps were the second worst issue and only the comic book characters from Alderney were worse. They should have been bigger and should have shown much better battle scenes. The Commonwealth issues were superb” and “a splendid opportunity was missed with the Trafalgar set; the same width, but greater height, would have shown the paintings to maximum advantage”.

Christmas The final issue of the year seemed to meet the demands of those who felt that another secular issue was inappropriate and that it was “so lovely to have a Nativity issue once again”.

Not all agreed with the treatment though, and “why so politically correct?”, “let’s go back to non-religious subjects” and “worst issue ever” were comments made by readers. “As Hindu’s are upset with the 68p stamp, may Christian’s be upset that the most used Christmas stamp, the second class, shows brown faces?” was an extreme and possibly ill-informed view from one lady reader.

The numerous comments made, especially the negative ones, proves that Royal Mail does not really stand a chance of satisfying all of its customers, all of the time, despite going to great lengths to produce an interesting and varied special stamps programme each year. Let’s also not forget that people are more likely to take the opportunity to complain when it is presented, rather than praise!

I close with a reminder for Royal Mail received from a Merseyside reader who states “you are supposed to be running a postal service, not selling collector’s items”.

.....
Special thanks to all who returned the voting form, particularly those overseas readers who responded from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong SAR, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Macao SAR, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand and USA.

(1840 words)