

BRITISH MINIATURE SHEETS

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The miniature sheet format (often abbreviated by collectors and cataloguers as 'MS') is frequently believed to be a modern phenomenon, but they go back at least 80 years with Luxembourg and France being two of the first countries to produce them. Miniature sheets were defined in the *Bulletin* of March 1978 by James Watson as 'a small sheet containing a single stamp, pair, block or strip of stamps with inscribed and/or decorative margins, issued as a commemorative souvenir for collectors' and this definition still holds true today, although the word 'collector' is less applicable due to these sheets also now appealing to non-collectors, especially when sold in descriptive and illustrated presentation packs.

For many years, these items were looked upon with derision by collectors (and still are by some) and were mainly issued by the so-called 'unrespectable' countries, such as certain African states. However, time marches on and attitudes change, so there has been a large increase in the number of these miniature sheets in the past few years as part of Royal Mail's annual Special Stamps new issue programme.

The format has until recently remained fairly static around the world, i.e. a square or rectangular outer shape. This is changing though, with turtles, flags and any other shape you can imagine being produced. I wonder how long it will be before a sheet is issued by Royal Mail in, say, the outline shape of the Victoria Cross medal?

It was felt that a listing within the *Bulletin* of all those sheets issued and planned would help readers to complete their collections. The production of the first Miniature Sheet Year Collection in 2005 is bound to have stimulated sales and interest in these items, as will have the latest Royal Mail album designed to house the sheets (both are available from Tallents House). Readers may recall the impact that the introduction of a Smilers album had on prices as collectors tried to fill their gaps.

Sheets 1 to 6 each bore a premium above the face value of the stamps in favour of either the London 1980 or Stamp World 1990 (SW90) stamp exhibitions. Royal Mail did not use miniature sheets as a means of allowing collectors to help fund The Stamp Show 2000 (TSS2000), although did give substantial financial support in the form of funds, staff time and use of internal resources instead. Later sheets have all been sold at face value.

Sheets are sometimes additionally sold in presentation packs costing more than face value to cover the outlay of production for the accompanying information sheet, protective mount and sleeve. There is an inconsistent policy, though, over whether a presentation pack is produced. Generally, if the stamps in the MS are also released as sheet printed stamps at the same time, a pack is not issued.

Almost the reverse policy is applied to the stamp cards, where if there are sheet printed equivalent stamps released at the same time, an MS card is issued, but if the stamps are only available in an MS format, a card does not appear. However, there were cards for the *Flags and Ensigns* and *Castles High Values*.

Forthcoming issues already announced for 2006 are listed, although extra sheets may be produced if there is a need to 'fast-track' an issue for unforeseen reasons. In 2005, three sheets were fast-tracked and these were for the *Royal Wedding, London 2012* and *Ashes* win, where Royal Mail considered that these events or successes deserved philatelic recognition.

Creation of stamps in a MS format is a quicker production method for the printers as they only have to print one item instead of perhaps four individual stamps, and they can be distributed to Post Offices quicker. The Princess Diana memorial issue, which comprised a seven-tenant strip of stamps and was fast-tracked, was probably created in this format for this reason.

Miniature sheets are also probably perceived by most people to be a more attractive souvenir item than the sale of loose stamps would be.

Unfortunately for collectors of 'used' material and for the general public, this means that individual stamps from miniature sheets are rarely used on genuine (as distinct from philatelic) mail.

CATALOGUE LISTING

<u>No./Date</u>	<u>Issue details</u>	<u>(MS sales figures)</u>	<u>Printer (Process)</u>	<u>Gum</u>	<u>Price:</u> <u>Mint</u>	<u>Price:</u> <u>Pack</u>	<u>Card</u>
<u>1978</u>							
1 1 Mar	London 80: Historic Buildings	(sales?)	Harrison (G)	WA	£0.60	n/a	n/a
<u>1979</u>							
2 24 Oct	London 80: Rowland Hill	(5,230,000)	Harrison (G)	WA	£0.60	n/a	n/a
<u>1980</u>							
3 7 May	London 80: London Views	(3,557,000)	Harrison (G)	WA	£0.75	n/a	n/a
<u>1988</u>							
4 27 Sep	SW90: Edward Lear	(2,770,352)	Harrison (G)	WA	£2.50	n/a	n/a
<u>1989</u>							
5 25 July	SW90: Ind'l Archaeology	(1,141,300)	Harrison (G)	WA	£2	n/a	n/a
<u>1990</u>							
6 3 May	SW90: Penny Black ann.	(1,991,550)	Harrison (G)	WA	£2	n/a	n/a
<u>1999</u>							
7 11 Aug	Solar Eclipse	(528,225)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£10	n/a	n/a
8 14 Dec	Millennium Timekeeper	(2,150,600)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£12	£15	£12
8a Mar 2000?	-do- Sheet (privately?) overprinted in top margin with TSS2000 logo				£15	*1	n/a
<u>2000</u>							
9 22 May	TSS2000: Matthews palette	(417,968)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£10	*2	n/a
10 23 May	TSS2000: Queen's Stamps	(1,116,143)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£8	£50	£10
11 4 Aug	Queen Mother's 100 th b'day	(5,098,171)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£4	£10	£9
<u>2001</u>							
12 13 Mar	British weather	(595,850)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£7	n/a	£5
13 15 May	Double-decker buses	(861,670)	Questa (L)	WA	£4	n/a	£9
14 22 Oct	Flags and Ensigns	(1,888,170)	Questa (G)	WA	£3	£10	£10
<u>2002</u>							
15 2 May	50 years of jet aviation	(607,200)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£4	n/a	£4
16 21 May	Football World Cup	(1,123,980)	Walsall (G)	WA	£2.50	£3	£4
17 24 Sep	Astronomy	(1,176,800)	Questa (G)	WA	£2.50	£3	£4
18 5 Dec	Wilding Definitives 1	(532,790)	De La Rue (G)	WA	£3.50	£40	n/a
<u>2003</u>							
19 20 May	Wilding Definitives 2		De La Rue (G)	WA	£4	£6	n/a
20 18 Sep	British transport toys		Enschedé (G)	WA	£3	n/a	£3
21 19 Dec	Rugby World Cup win by England		Walsall (L)	WA	£3	£4	n/a
<u>2004</u>							
22 13 Jan	Classic railway locomotives		De La Rue (L)	WA	£14	n/a	£5
23 13 Apr	Ocean liners		De La Rue (G)	WA	£5.50	*3	£4
23a	-do- Error of value MS with 53p SS <i>City of New York</i> stamp instead of 57p. Estimate £3000. Note that the 7 th Stamp Card depicting the MS also exists with the wrong face value.						
24 25 May	Royal Horticultural Society		Enschedé (L)	WA	£5	n/a	£4
25 5 Oct	Scottish Parliament building opening		De La Rue (G)	WA	£4	n/a	n/a
26 2 Nov	Christmas (Briggs' Father Christmas)		De La Rue (G)	WA	£4.50	n/a	£3

2005

27	24 Feb	Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre	Walsall (L)	WA	£5	n/a	£3
28	22 Mar	Wilding Castles high values	Enschedeé (I+L)	WA	TH	TH	TH
29	8/9 Apr	Royal Wedding of The Prince of Wales	Enschedeé (L)	WA	TH	TH	n/a
30	7 June	Trooping the Colour anniversary	Walsall (L)	WA	TH	n/a	TH
31	5 July	End of World War Two	Enschedeé (G)	WA	TH	n/a	n/a
32	5 Aug	London 2012 Host City	Walsall (L)	WA	TH	TH	n/a
33	6 Oct	'Ashes' cricket win by England	Cartor (L)	WA	TH	TH	n/a
34	18 Oct	Battle of Trafalgar anniversary	Cartor (L)	WA	TH	n/a	TH
35	1 Nov	Christmas (Madonna and Child)	De La Rue (G)	WA	TH	n/a	TH

2006

36	23 Feb	Isambard Kingdom Brunei (engineer)	Enschedeé (L)	WA	TH	n/a	TH
	1 Mar	Opening of Welsh Assembly building					
	11 May	Opening of the new Wembley Stadium					
	6 June	'World Cup Winners' 40 th anniversary					
	? Aug	70 th anniversary of the three Kings					
	21 Sep	Victoria Cross (military medal)					
	7 Nov	Christmas					

Notes:

**1 No conventional presentation pack was issued, but this overprinted sheet was exclusively available for sale within TSS2000 Show Pass Wallets. Price now: £20*

**2 No conventional presentation pack was issued, but the sheet was sold in a translucent folder that unfolds in the shape of a Maltese Cross, containing a cancelled sheet on a postcard and mint MS. Price now: £65*

**3 No conventional presentation pack was issued, but the sheet was sold for £75 within a Presentation Case containing the MS and silver medals. Price now: £85*

Key:

Gum – WA = Water Activated, SA = Self-adhesive. The present listing reveals that all sheets have been printed on water activated gum so far, although it is assumed that self-adhesive gumming will one day be utilised, hence the column in readiness.

Printing Processes – (G) = [photo]Gravure, (I) = Intaglio [recess], (L) = [offset] Lithography.

Price – An approximation of what the miniature sheet is currently selling for. Substantial discrepancies to these prices can be found, both higher and lower. Miniature sheets have been available mint as loose sheets, while others were additionally sold in the standard presentation pack format.

TH – Item still available at the original new issue price from Royal Mail Tallents House.

Card – For more recent issues a stamp card (previously called PHQ cards) has sometimes been issued that depicts the miniature sheet. In certain instances the item is too large to fit onto the card for postmarking, which is a source of disappointment for some collectors. The price quoted is for a mint set of cards when there are also sheet printed stamps in the set.

n/a against any entry indicates 'not available' in that format.

(1607 words)