

## Personalised Smilers®: Your Memories on Mail

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*Prior to recording details of the Smilers sheets that have been available for personalising with photographs, I must express my thanks to Mike Shepherd for making this article possible. Mike has been specialising in these issues for some time now and his extensive records were kindly put at my disposal to act as the basis for what follows below. This information has been cross-checked and merged with my records and those of Royal Mail publicity literature\* and Bulletins that have appeared since the scheme was first launched.*

*This is believed to be the first complete published list of this material and despite extensive checking there is always the chance that readers can add, correct or expand upon the information and your input is encouraged.*

The introduction of Royal Mail Smilers® (or Gwenau® in Welsh language literature) at The Stamp Show 2000 has been well documented. It started a fascinating series of unique sheet formats, still rarely seen by many collectors despite the extensive availability of them via normal Royal Mail channels such as Post Office branches, Tallents House and the Internet, plus at special events and through photo booths in supermarkets, Post Offices and shopping malls up and down the land. Some national newspaper competitions have also promoted the service by offering sheets as prizes and these have, for example, included images of glamour model Katy Price (Jordan) on labels for *Daily Star* winners.

There have been over 50 sheet combinations so far and they have often commanded a much lesser price than perhaps their real scarcity would warrant when they have come up for sale in online auctions, although they are now catching-up and sometimes exceeding Generic Smilers prices, especially in recent months. It has not been possible to even guess at prices for each sheet listed here as they vary wildly from just a few pounds to many hundreds and are sold so infrequently once they are no longer available at new-issue cost from Royal Mail.

Sale periods have been difficult to verify and while the issue date is generally made available to collectors, the date of withdrawal is rarely announced. Some sheets are only available for personalising for a few weeks, while others have already been available for around four years. Regular calls by Mike to the help line for updates on availability mean that this listing is probably as accurate as is feasible.

The mail-order personalisation service operated intermittently at first from October 2000, with customers posting images either to Edinburgh or, for a short time, Coventry. Effective 29 November 2002, images could be submitted online in digital format via the website [www.royalmail.com/smilers](http://www.royalmail.com/smilers). Self-adhesive stamps in pictorial definitive format have been available from October 2005 by post and from January 2006 online, with the few remaining larger-format stamps only being available by mail order after the latter date.

### **A New Trend**

There is a new collecting trend where stamp dealers, philatelic societies and private individuals use the self-adhesive personalisable Smilers service to create limited edition commemorative sheets (as few as 25 copies) for sale to collectors.

Stamp events such as Washington, Torquay and Belgica exhibitions, plus Derby PS commemoration, 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Union Flag, 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sopwith Camel aircraft, etc are typical of the many versions that have already appeared. The sheets have attracted a strong following and appear to be prevailing over BCS sheets, especially now Royal Mail is capable of personalising the margins with unique imagery and text, rather than just personalising the labels.

Understandably, no sheets have been available from Tallents House stock lists and will not be listed in the *Bulletin* because they are created by the same service that lets you have a picture of Great Aunt Sally or Rover the dog on them and nobody would expect those to be listed! Look out for these sheets in online auctions and stamp dealer listings if interested. They are an attractive way of obtaining recent sheets listed in the catalogue below, such as the private Fifth Anniversary of Smilers commemoration, which utilised the 'A Bear called Paddington' sheet.

\* Care should be exercised when using these as a source because perforation types, border colours used, se-tenant combinations, etc. are sometimes different to the issued sheets due to mock-ups being utilised prior to proof approval and printing of stamp stocks.

## CATALOGUE LISTING

<u>No.</u>	<u>Stamp Issue</u>	<u>Stamp(s)</u>	<u>Format</u>	<u>Issued</u>	<u>W/drawn</u>	<u>Gum / Printer /</u>	
						<u>Process</u>	
<b>2000</b>							
P1	The Stamp Show 2000 <sup>1</sup>	Mixed x10 different Smiles	10P	22.05.00	26.06.00	WA	Q G
P2	Christmas [ <i>Post Office</i> © imprint]	1 <sup>st</sup> Christmas cracker	10L	03.10.00	29.12.00	WA	Q G
P3		19p Robin in post-box	20L	03.10.00	29.12.00	WA	Q G
<b>2001</b>							
P4	Occasions (Mock-Hallmark stamps)	New Baby	20L	01.05.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P5		New Home	20L	01.05.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P6		Love and Romance	20L	01.05.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P7		10 Cheers and 10 Thanks	20L	01.05.01	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	Q L
P7a		Reprint. Light grey, not silver	20L	?	.12.04	WA	W? L
P8	Smiles [Royal Mail cruciform in margin]	Mixed x10 different Smiles	10P	03.07.01	Early .02	WA	Q L
P9		Laughing Policeman	10P	03.07.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P10		Mona Lisa	10P	03.07.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P11		Clown	10P	03.07.01	Late .01?	WA	Q L
P12		Dennis the Menace	10P	03.07.01	.10.02?	WA	Q L
P13		Teddy Bear	10P	03.07.01	.10.02?	WA	Q L
P14	Christmas [ <i>Consignia</i> © imprint]	1 <sup>st</sup> Christmas cracker	10L	09.10.01	11.01.02	WA	Q G
P15		19p Robin in post-box	20L	09.10.01	11.01.02	WA	Q G
<b>2002</b>							
P16	Occasions	New Baby: Consignia imprint	20L	23.04.02	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	WA	Q L
P17		Moving Home: Consignia imp.	20L	23.04.02	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	WA	Q L
P18		Love: Consignia imprint	20L	23.04.02	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	Q L
P18a		RMG plc © 2002 imprint	20L	Late .02	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	W? L
P18b		RMG reprint diff. screen	20L	.04 or .05	31.03.06 <sup>2</sup>	WA	W? L
P19		Hello: Consignia imprint	20L	23.04.02	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	Q L
P19a		RMG plc © 2002 imprint	20L	Late .02	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	W? L
P19b		RMG reprint diff. shade	20L	?	31.03.06	WA	W? L
P20		Best Wishes: Consignia imp.	20L	23.04.02	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	Q L
P20a		RMG plc © 2003 imprint	20L	.03	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	WA	W? L
P21	World Cup Football Championships	St George's Flag and football	20L	21.05.02	20.05.03?	WA	Q L
P22	"Knock, Knock!"	Dennis the Menace	20L	01.10.02	Late .05	WA	Q L
P23		Teddy Bear	20L	01.10.02	31.03.06 <sup>2</sup>	WA	Q L
P24	Christmas	1 <sup>st</sup> Christmas cracker	20L	01.10.02	.12.04 <sup>3</sup>	WA	Q L
<b>2003</b>							
P25	Flower Paintings	Flowers x10 (two sets)	20L	21.01.03	Sold out <sup>5</sup>	WA	Q L
P25a		Reprint. Diff. screen/shades	20L	.04 or .05	31.03.06	WA	W? L
P26	Occasions (Multiple Choice tick boxes)	Mixed Tick Box stamps	20L	04.02.03	.12.04	WA	Q L
P27	Crosswords	Cartoons x10 (two sets)	20L	29.07.03	Late .05	WA	Q L
P28	Christmas	1 <sup>st</sup> Winter Robins	20L	30.09.03	.12.04	SA	D L
P29		1 <sup>st</sup> Spiral Ice sculpture	20L	04.11.03	.12.04 <sup>4</sup>	SA	D L
P30		2 <sup>nd</sup> Star Ice sculpture	20L	04.11.03	.12.04 <sup>4</sup>	SA	D L
<b>2004</b>							
P31	Occasions (Entertaining Envelopes)	12 Aeroplane and 8 Postman	20L	03.02.04	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	WA	D L
P32		8 Kissing, 8 Duck and 4 Baby	20L	03.02.04	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	WA	D L
P33	Royal Horticultural Society Bicentenary	Dahlia	20L	25.05.04	24.05.05?	WA	W L
P34	'Rule Britannia!'	Union Flag	20L	27.07.04	31.03.06	WA	W L
P35	Christmas	1 <sup>st</sup> Christmas Delivery	20L	02.11.04	01.11.05	SA	D L
P36		2 <sup>nd</sup> Christmas Delivery	20L	02.11.04	01.11.05	SA	D L
<b>2005</b>							
P37	Farm Animals	Farm Animals x10 (two sets)	20L	11.01.05	10.01.06	WA	W L
P38	Magic!	Heads or Tails Magic	20L	15.03.05	14.03.06	WA	W L
P39	White Ensign	White Ensign	20L	21.06.05	20.06.06	WA	C L
P40	'Classic ITV' 1955-2005	Emmerdale	20L	15.09.05	14.09.06	WA	C L
P41	'For Life's Special Moments'	Red, White & Blue definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P42		With Love definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P43		Flying High definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P44		Ready Teddy definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P45		Sunshine definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P46		In the Post definitive	20L	04.10.05	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P47	Christmas	1 <sup>st</sup> Christmas Robins	20L	01.11.05	.12.05?	SA	C L
P48		2 <sup>nd</sup> Christmas Robins	20L	01.11.05	.12.05?	SA	C L
<b>2006</b>							
P49	A Bear Called Paddington	Paddington Bear	20L	10.01.06	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L
P50	'Fun Fruit and Veg'	Fruit and Veg x10 (two sets)	20L	07.03.06	<b>On Sale</b> <sup>6</sup>	SA	C L

## Notes

Every stamp is 1<sup>st</sup> class, except for Christmas where a 2<sup>nd</sup> class value is also produced, although not in 2002.

- 1 Sheets were sold within a red folder at the show. Subsequently available for follow-up orders from Philatelic Bureau for a further two months after the show closed. The sheet check code & font is likely to be different on re-ordered sheets emanating directly from Edinburgh, but copies have not been seen.
- 2 The official PO withdrawal date, as given in the *Bulletin*, but stock was exhausted at least a month prior to this.
- 3 These sheets remained available for 'seasonal' personalisation between October and December until the end of 2004. In the intervening periods blank sheets were returned to the supplier. The PO did not publicise availability in the following two years and when Mike phoned the helpline in November 2004 he was told there was 'no demand for these'.
- 4 The first class sheet was available continuously over this period, but the second class sheet was 'seasonal', being withdrawn at the end of December 2003 and then re-appearing (briefly) in September 2004.
- 5 It is reasonable to assume that as the sheets annotated 'Sold out' were all reprinted, that stocks of the original printing would have been used to exhaustion prior to introduction of the reprint.
- 6 Sheets were still available for submitting personalised orders at the time of writing this article, with most now appearing to have a 12 month sales availability period, except for the pictorial definitives, which are presumably intended to be available longer-term and the seasonal Christmas issues.

## Abbreviations

Format 10P or 10L = 10 stamps in a Portrait or Landscape A4 sheet, 20L = 20 stamps in a Landscape A4 sheet.  
Gum WA = Water Activated, SA = Self-Adhesive.  
Printers C = Cartor, D = De La Rue, Q = Questa, W = Walsall.  
Process G = [photo]Gravure, L = [offset] Lithography.  
RMG Royal Mail Group plc.

(1795 words)