

Royal Mail issued 63 Olympic and Paralympic Gold Medal Winner 'instant' stamps between Thursday, 2 August and Monday, 10 September 2012. Each of these stamps depicted a photograph of a gold medal winning Olympian or a group of winners. Stamp collectors generally accepted this as a 'one-off' never-to-be-repeated issue. But enough is enough says Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS in this thought-provoking special report.

## Living People on Royal Mail stamps—Enough is enough!

By Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS

Royal Mail has congratulated itself on the success of its London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games 'instant' Gold Medal Winner stamps. It was an achievement and required meticulous planning to prepare, print, distribute and have on sale at 500-plus selected post offices by lunchtime the following day.

Royal Mail had inadvisably, in my opinion, announced that every Gold Medal winner would be included on a postage stamp. This led to the ridiculous situation that two Paralympic Gold Medal Winners – Sarah Storey and David Weir – were each featured four times on a 1st class stamp in less than two weeks!

It is reasonable to assume that most people, like me, I suspect, only remember the names of the best-known Olympians that featured on the stamps, and even less the names of the events in which they won gold. Stamp collectors generally accepted this mammoth Olympic and Paralympic stamp issue as a 'one-off'. But I say enough is enough!

### Pre-payment of a postal service

The directors at Royal Mail will be delighted with the amount of extra revenue generated from the sales of these stamps, most of which are never likely to see the inside of a post box or be used on commercial mail. Perhaps this is a good time to remind Royal Mail executives that postage stamps are actually intended as a receipt for the prepayment for a postal service.

Since Sir Rowland Hill introduced the Penny Black, the world's first postage stamp, on 6 May 1840, the stamps of Great Britain have been collected and treasured by collectors throughout the world. It is worth recalling that perforations were not introduced until 1854. Until then the counter clerks in the post offices used a pair of scissors to cut the stamps from the sheets.

Counter clerks had to use scissors again during August 2012 when customers requested a single Olympic Gold Medal Winner stamp out of the sheetlets of six 1st class values. Though some post offices, notable among them London's Trafalgar Square, refused to do so, despite Royal Mail having made clear that they would be available.

Unfortunately, since the late 1960s far too many new commemorative stamps have been issued, together with miniature sheets, prestige stamp booklets, and related products.



The first Royal Mail London Paralympic Games Gold Medal Winner stamp, showing women's cyclist Sarah Storey (one of four stamps issued in two weeks), cancelled by the special 'London 2012, Olympic Park' handstamp, 31 August 2012, the day of issue



The last Royal Mail London Paralympic Gold Medal Winner stamp sheetlet, issued on Monday, 10 September 2012, depicting men's athlete David Weir (one of four stamps issued in two weeks)

These stamps have been issued for one purpose only and that is to generate as much revenue as possible from stamp collectors.

The stamps of Great Britain only showed members of the Royal Family and all required royal approval. The GPO and then Royal Mail made clear that it was a requirement of Buckingham Palace that

ordinary living people should not be included on postage stamps.

### 1966 World Cup Finals

Major sporting occasions and successes on stamps are popular with collectors and in particular thematic collectors. I vividly remember the debate in the national and

philatelic press at the time as to whether or not the GPO should include living people on the three World Cup Football Championship stamps - 4d., 6d. and 1s. 3d. values - issued on 1 June 1966 (693/695).

England hosted the 1966 FIFA World Cup Finals and won the Jules Rimet Cup in a thrilling final at the old Empire Stadium Wembley, beating West Germany 4-2 in extra time. The 4d. value was re-issued with the words 'England Winners' to mark England's remarkable victory and issued on 18 August 1966 (700). The stamps were popular and sheets were traded on the floor of the London Stock Exchange.

Geoff (now Sir Geoff) Hurst of West Ham and England scored a famous hat-trick and deserved to be shown on the stamp, as did England Captain Bobby Moore (later Sir Bobby) Moore, also of West Ham and England.

Sir Bobby Moore, then deceased, together with other footballers were included in the European Football Championship set issued on 14 May 1996 (1925/9). Sir Bobby Moore was also depicted on the 26p value in the Millennium Series, The Entertainer's Tale, issued on 1 June 1999 (2093).

### Sir Francis Chichester 1967

Sir Francis Chichester's World Voyage was marked with a special 1s. 9d. value issued on 24 July 1967 (751). The GPO said that Sir Francis Chichester was not included on the stamp, but the figure shown on his yacht, *Gipsy Moth IV*, was clearly the great yachtsman.

Francis Chichester, then deceased, and *Gipsy Moth IV* were shown on the 47p value in the Extreme Endeavours (British Explorers) set of five stamps issued on 29 April 2003 (2364).



### Controversial

My news story that a living member of a well-known pop group was controversially included on a stamp in the Royal Mail Millennium Series received a lot of media attention. Drummer Roger Taylor of Queen was depicted alongside Freddie Mercury, lead singer, deceased, on the 19p value included in the Entertainers' Tale, issued on 1 June 1999 (2092).

Royal Mail had either deliberately or inadvertently broken the convention that living people other than members of the Royal Family did not appear on its stamps.

### A fallacy

My news-breaking story put out on the wires by the Press Association news agency attracted a significant amount of media coverage. From my own research it was abundantly clear that it was in fact Royal Mail and not Buckingham Palace that perpetuated the convention that only members of the Royal Family could be shown on a postage stamp.

Once I had shown this policy to be a fallacy,



The 1966 World Cup Football Championship stamps



Left: The 1996 European Football Championship stamps with Sir Bobby Moore



Left: The Freddie Mercury stamp also depicting living person, drummer Roger Taylor of Queen, caused a storm of controversy



Right: Sir Bobby Moore from the 1999 Millennium Series stamp



Royal Mail scrambled around and moved the goalposts. It was announced that in future living people could be included on Royal Mail stamps, provided they were not the main subject, or they were shown in a group and not individually identifiable.

### Strangford Stone 2000

A group of identifiable living people was included on the 2nd class stamp 'Raising the Stone' (Strangford Stone, Killyleagh) included in the Millennium Projects 'Stone and Soil' issued on 4 July 2000 (2152).



### 50th Anniversary of Coronation 2003

Identifiable living people were again included, this time on some of the 1st class stamps issued on 2 June 2003, to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Coronation on 2 June 1953 (2368/77)

### Rugby World Championship 2003

Later that year, on 19 December 2003, Royal Mail issued a special miniature sheet to celebrate England's victory in the Rugby World Cup Championship in Australia. It consisted of four stamps - two x 1st class

England flags and fans and England team standing in a circle before the match and two 68p values showing the Webb Ellis Trophy and Victorious England players after the match. (MS2416).

### The Ashes England Winners 2005

This special sporting miniature sheet was followed by a special 'The Ashes England Winners 2005' miniature sheet, issued on 6 October 2005 - two x 1st class England team with Ashes trophy; Kevin Peterson, Michael Vaughan (Captain) and Andrew Flintoff on the opening day of First Test, Lords and two x 68p values showing Michael Vaughan Third Test, Old Trafford; Second Test Edgbaston. (MS2573).

### The Beatles 2007

The Beatles were featured on a set of six and a miniature sheet 'The Beatles Album Covers' and issued on 9 January 2007 (2686/91, MS2692). At the time two of the four Beatles were deceased but two living people, Sir Paul McCartney and Ringo Starr, were included on the stamps.

There are more examples of Royal Mail stamps, that include living people but I am not trying to be complete. Rather, I am painting a graphic picture of how Royal Mail is only interested in producing as many new commemorative new issues as possible, year on year, no matter if the issues and related products were completely unnecessary to actual postal needs.

Many regular collectors of Great Britain stamps have already hung up their tweezers as far as new issues were concerned! Certain new commemorative stamp issues have enticed new occasional collectors to our hobby

Right: The Royal Mail stamps issued on 2 June 2003 to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Coronation showed several identifiable living people



Below: England Rugby World Champions in a group and with their back to the camera in 2003. Two years later, living English cricketers were shown on the 'Ashes England Winners 2005' miniature sheet!



Below: One of the floats in the Olympic Victory Parade passing the Stanley Gibbons shop in the Strand, on Monday 10 September 2012



The enlarged Royal Mail Gold Medal Winner stamps showing Laura Trott (Cycling: Track Women's Omnium) and Ellie Simmonds (Paralympic 200m swimmer) carried proudly during the Olympic Victory Parade.

but for how long? Realistically, the number of new members joining stamp societies, stamp clubs and specialist societies is nowhere near enough to replace the old stalwarts of yesteryear.

### The Olympic Games makers 2012

The Royal Mail 'Memories of London 2012' miniature sheet, issued on Thursday, 27 September 2012, the second day of Autumn Stampex, included a 1st class stamp showing a group of Olympic Games 'Games Makers', pictured with the iconic Olympic Stadium in the background. But why oh why has Royal Mail used a photograph of these wonderful



London 2012 Olympic Games 'Games Makers' shown looking away from the camera. It is clear that the Royal Mail policy regarding living people on stamps, if one actually exits, is shambolic!

dedicated volunteers, in their distinctive purple and red uniforms, with their backs to the camera? If Royal Mail is going to honour representatives of more than 70,000 Games Makers on a postage stamp then to use this picture is pathetic!

### London Underground 150th Anniversary 2013

The Royal Mail stamp programme for 2013 is to include a set of stamps in January to commemorate the 150th Anniversary of the London Underground, the world's oldest underground railway. The line between London Paddington station and Farringdon station opened on 10 January 1863.

Perhaps the London Underground stamps might show a carriage of identifiable passengers, perhaps train drivers, or passengers on a packed platform at Paddington Station about to board a London Underground train during the evening rush-hour. I haven't seen the designs. But Royal Mail: please no more living people on postage stamps – except on rare occasions—enough is enough!



*Post Script:* On Monday, 10 September 2012, hundreds of thousands of people lined the route of an emotion-filled Victory Parade in central London from Mansion House in the City to The Mall, to cheer Britain's Olympic and Paralympic athletes. Enlargements of the Royal Mail Gold Medal Winner stamps were carried alongside each float in alphabetical order of the events starting with Athletics and Mo Farah. I was standing on the crowded pavement opposite Stanley Gibbons' shop at 399 in the Strand as the 21 slow-moving floats carrying the athletes took nearly 25 minutes to pass by. Fortunately the rain held off. All Photographs taken by: Peter Jennings FRPSL, FRGS