

The Bristol Scouts Smilers Sheet – The True Story



During 2006 the *Bristol North West Scout District* was re-organised and the constituent scout groups combined in part with *Bristol West District* to form the *Cabot Scout District* and with *Bristol East District* to form the *Brunel Scout District*. To mark the demise of the *Bristol North West District*, and provide souvenirs for the 850+ strong members, the *Bristol North West District* scouting group commissioned the printing of 1100 Business Customised Stamp sheets celebrating its 32 year long history.

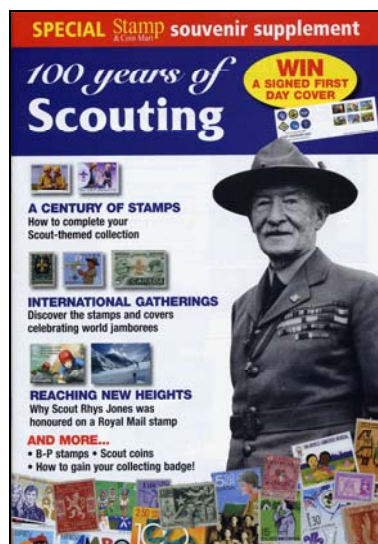
By June 2006 the Smilers sheet was made available to District members at £8.60 a sheet (maximum 3 sheets per household). In addition c. 50 First Day Covers (hand-stamped Bristol and dated 6th June 2006) and souvenir Presentations Cards (10 different) were produced, each card featuring a different stamp and label from the Business sheet. District members were presented with a souvenir card of their Scouting community within the Bristol North West District.



Few Smilers sheets found their way directly on to the philatelic market and the first that the Smilers collecting community knew about this sheet was when one appeared on eBay in October 2006. It was the subject of fierce bidding and was eventually sold for around £500. A few Presentation Cards also appeared on eBay at about the same time and these were also snapped up at around £25 each. The lack of supply created a flood of enquiries to the organizers of the North West Scout District who by the end of 2006 were also preparing to wrap up the financial affairs of the District.

To ensure an adequate supply of sheets to meet local demand the District declined to sell to the philatelic market and by the end of 2006, some 140-150 or so sheets remained unsold. These, together with the remaining presentation cards, were sold at the end of 2006 to the individuals who had underwritten the cost of producing the sheet. At the same time the District released an information sheet outlining plans for a limited edition *scouting centenary* overprint of 100 sheets during 2007 to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Scouting movement.

The sheet continued to be highly sought after attracting high prices on on-line auction sites such as eBay. The sheet was also featured prominently in a special Scouting Centenary supplement to the Stamp and Coin Mart magazine.



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In 2006 the owners of the remaining stock of Bristol sheets sought permission from Royal Mail to overprint the remaining stock of sheets with suitable lettering to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Scouting movement which was celebrated in 2007. This they duly received and c. 100 sheets were overprinted with gold-leaf lettering on the sheet and on each label adjoining each of the 10 stamps. The sheets were offered as a numbered limited edition to purchasers of the original sheet on the undertaking that they would not be sold for profit for at least 5-years after the purchase date. A limited edition of 100 numbered First Day Covers featuring the overprinted label and stamp was also produced hand-stamped Bristol and dated 1st August 2007.



Bristol Scout Smilers - First Day Cover



Bristol Smilers (Overprint) - First Day Cover

The sheets occasionally appear on eBay and when they do they are keenly fought over by Smilers enthusiasts. The overprinted variety is going to be the more difficult to come by than the original sheet and will no doubt command high premiums. So keep Smiling and happy hunting!



Detail of gold-foil overprint to label on Centenary sheet