

Royal Mail news Christmas stamps • 1996 Yearbook • 1996 Yearpack • Definitives/ stamp book update • New postshop • NPM news • Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

Christmas Five stamps in the annual Christmas series go on sale at post offices and philatelic outlets on 28 October.

The 1996 set depicts the Biblical Nativity story from the Annunciation to the Epiphany, from watercolour paintings by Laura Stoddart. The designs feature: Star in the East (2nd class), Annunciation to Mary (1st class), Son of the Highest (31p), Journey to Bethlehem (43p), and Shepherds under the oak (63p). Trees are seen in the background of each painting, each tree having a symbolic meaning in art.

The 2nd class stamp shows the Three Kings journeying past palm trees. For the Romans the palm was a symbol of victory; the early Christians adopted the palm branch as a symbol of a martyr's triumph over death. The 1st class design shows the angel Gabriel presenting a lily to Mary, with an olive tree in the background. The lily is a symbol of innocence and the Annunciation. Artists from Leonardo to Rosetti have depicted the Annunciation with this flower. The olive has many associations, particularly with peace.

The 31p denomination depicts the journey to Bethlehem with Joseph and Mary passing cypress trees which are associated with death by many people, but also the durable evergreen is linked to immortality and life after death. The 43p stamp features an orange and an apple tree. Artists of past times have used both fruits as the 'fruit of salvation'. The apple in Christ's hand represents salvation. The orange is a symbol of purity and generosity.

The 63p value depicts the shepherds with an oak tree. Long before the Christian era, the oak was revered as a tree that could ward off evil. Oak is believed by some to have been the wood from which the cross was made, and it became a symbol of Christ with its qualities of strength and virtue.

The 2nd and 1st class non-value indicator stamps prepay postage at the basic 2nd and 1st class inland rates, ie 20p and 26p. The 26p rate also applies to basic rate letters to European Union countries. Both can be used as 20p/26p part postage to all countries. The 31p, 43p, and 63p rates are for letters to European, non-EU, countries; and airmail letters to 10 and 20g respectively.

CHRISTMAS STAMP ANNIVERSARY Christmas stamps were first issued 30 years ago; the first set featuring childrens' paintings was issued on 1 December 1966. The Nativity story has featured on several earlier issues: 1967 (religious paintings), 1969, 1970 (medieval art), 1971 and 1992 (stained glass windows), 1974 (church roof bosses), 1976 (medieval embroidery), 1979, 1981 22p and 25p (children's paintings), 1982 12½p and 26p (carols), 1984,



1988 (Christmas cards), 1991 (illuminated manuscripts), and 1994 (children's nativity plays).

Including the 1996 issue, Royal Mail has issued 139 Christmas stamps. To this can be added phosphor versions of the 1966 issue, and underprints on 13p values (1984, 1986, 1987) and 12p value (1985) from books or packs. Four of the 1989 issue carried a charity surcharge. A feature article on British Christmas stamps, by James Mackay, was published here in December 1994. *Bulletin* readers voted the 1995 Christmas stamps, featuring robins, the most popular set of the year.

Technical details

Printers Harrison & Sons Ltd

Process Photogravure

Size 41 x 30mm

Sheets 100

Perforation 15 x 14

Phosphor 2nd class one band

● 1st class, 31p, 43p & 63p

two bands ● Blue fluor in phosphor

Paper OBA (Optical Brightening Agent) free

Gum PVA

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau and Post Office Counters philatelic outlets around a week before 28 October, price 25p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial 'first day of issue' postmark of the Bureau or Bethlehem, Dyfed, price £2.57 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £2.19 to overseas addresses (no VAT). Orders for covers must be received at the Bureau by 28 October 1996.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers on the day of issue, for these cancels, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, Edinburgh EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Penarth Road, Cardiff CF1 1AA (for Bethlehem postmark). The outer envelope should be endorsed 'FD9627' (Bureau), or 'FD9628' (Bethlehem).

First day posting boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive local (mostly non-pictorial) 'first day of issue' handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – the Royal Mail's magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe; £21.75 rest of world (airmail).

Collectors are reminded that it will be in order to affix just the 2nd class stamp to covers to receive all special cancels ('first day of issue', sponsored and philatelic counters), in use on 28 October. The minimum 1st class rule is suspended on this day as the set includes a 2nd class rate stamp. This concession applies only to the Christmas stamp; otherwise covers must bear at least 1st class postage.



CHRISTMAS STAMP BOOKS Books containing twenty 2nd class and ten 1st class Christmas stamps will be available from post offices, the Bureau, philatelic outlets, and many retailers from 28 October, price £4 and £2.60 respectively. The front covers reproduce the design of the relevant stamps. There will no books containing international rate stamps this year. Christmas stamp books were introduced in 1978, initially containing definitive stamps. Books with the Christmas special issues started in 1984.

CHRISTMAS AEROGRAMME The 1996 aerogramme, shown here last month, will be issued on 1 October. Price 45p, including 36p aerogramme postage. Designed by Peter Malone, it features angels and a procession of stable animals. Christmas aerogrammes have been issued since 1965.

CHRISTMAS STAMP PYRAMIDS The Christmas stamps will be available in optical glass pyramid-shaped paperweights – an ideal Christmas gift. Available from the Bureau, price £24.95 each. Please quote which value stamp(s) required – 2nd class, 1st class, 31p, 43p, or 63p.

COLLECTOR'S PLATE A fine bone china plate reproducing the design of the 1992 18p Christmas stamp, of a stained glass window in St James's Church, Pangbourne, will be available from the Bureau, price £19.95.

WITHDRAWAL OF CHRISTMAS STAMPS Any remaining stocks of the 1996 Christmas stamps, stamp books, and aerogramme will be withdrawn from sale at post offices on 24 December. All will remain on sale at the Bureau and philatelic outlets for one year from the date of issue, unless sold out.

The 1995 Christmas stamps (£1.75 set), stamp books (20 × 19p, 10 × 25p & 4 × 60p), presentation pack (£2.10), stamp cards (£1.25 set) will be withdrawn from sale at the Bureau and philatelic outlets on 29 October, also the 1995 Yearpack (£15.95) and Special Stamps Yearbook (£22.50 standard version, £75 leather bound) on 30 October. The 1995 Christmas aerogramme (45p) will be withdrawn on 2 October.

CHRISTMAS CARD Last year Royal Mail delivered a card bearing the signature of former Managing Director Peter Howarth to all households in the UK. The card reproduced the design of the 19p Christmas stamp. A similar card, featuring a specially commissioned design showing Christmas cards being delivered through a letterbox, will be sent to 25 million addresses this year. The card will contain useful information about Christmas mailing, including the last posting dates ●

Definitives/stamp book update No further supplies of the 36p definitive are being printed; it will remain on sale at post offices until supplies are exhausted.

New printings of the 2nd class NVI stamp in sheets of 200 have extended phosphor bands. Supplies will be available from the Bureau and philatelic outlets from 3 December.

A book of 10 × 1st class NVI stamps with an Asda coupon promotion will be available from Asda stores from 7 October. Availability from the Bureau and philatelic outlets will be announced later.

The 1996 Cartoons greetings book has been reprinted to meet continuing demand. The stamps now have two phosphor bands instead of a phosphor screen and text on the inside of the book cover has been amended, the calendar of 1996 greetings occasions being replaced with useful information about the range of greetings stamp books. Supplies of the reprint



Classic Sports Cars PMC

A new joint Royal Mail/Royal Mint Philatelic Medallion Cover bearing the five Classic Sports Cars and commemorative medallion will be available from the Bureau from 3 November, price £12.95. Early ordering is advised as such covers have previously sold out very quickly.