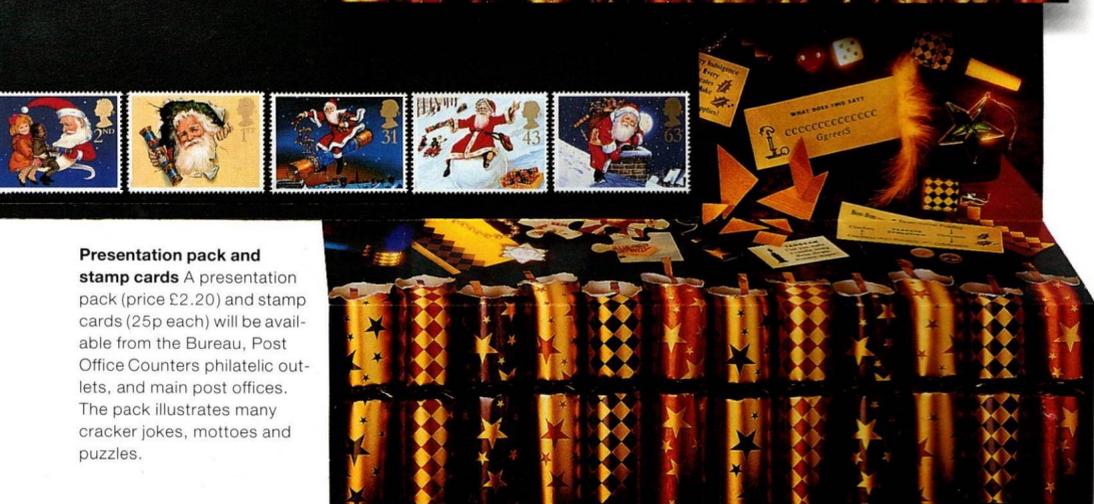
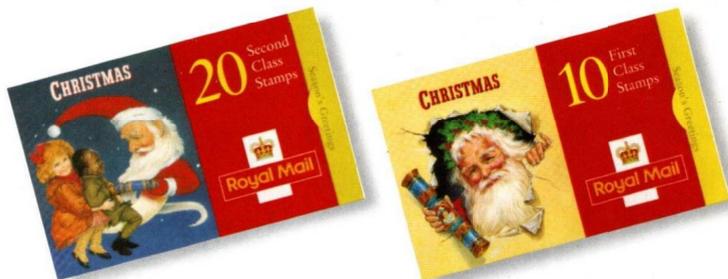




**Christmas stamp books**

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 27 October, price £4 and £2.60 respectively.

Christmas books, containing definitive stamps, were introduced in 1978; books with Christmas stamps started in 1984.



**Presentation pack and stamp cards**

A presentation pack (price £2.20) and stamp cards (25p each) will be available from the Bureau, Post Office Counters philatelic outlets, and main post offices. The pack illustrates many cracker jokes, mottoes and puzzles.

## Royal Mail news 1997 Christmas stamps • 1997 Year Book and Year Pack • Two new books • New Postal stationery

**1997 Christmas** Royal Mail's 32nd issue of Christmas stamps goes on sale at post offices and philatelic outlets on 27 October. The stamps feature Christmas crackers, 1997 marking the 150th anniversary of the introduction of crackers. The stamps depict: 2nd class Moon cracker, 1st class Ripping cracker, 31p Raining crackers, 43p Snowball cracker, and 63p Rooftop cracker. The values cover minimum inland 2nd and 1st class rates, basic weight letters to Europe (EU and non-EU countries), and the first and second weight steps for airmail letters elsewhere.

Crackers owe their origin to the French custom of wrapping sweets in a twist of waxed paper. In the 1840s a British confectioner Tom Smith, adopted the custom and included a small message and a charm with his sweets, set within a coloured card tube. In 1847 sparks from a smouldering log gave Smith the idea for the cracker that became a favourite of Victorian Christmases. His company, Tom Smiths Crackers Limited, is still a major manufacturer.



**CHRISTMAS STAMPS** Britain's first Christmas stamps, featuring children's paintings, were issued in 1966. To date, including the 1997 set, some 144 Christmas stamps have been issued. To this total 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.

The 1997 stamps are the first depiction of Christmas crackers which is perhaps surprising as they are so much a part of many people's Christmas. The stamps also feature Father Christmas (Santa Claus) who has only previously been on two Christmas stamps – the 11½p and 26p values of the 1981 and 1987 sets.

Father Christmas and crackers also feature on the 1997 Christmas aerogramme which goes on sale at post offices and philatelic outlets on 7 October, price 45p.

The 1995 Christmas stamps, depicting robins, were voted the most popular set of the year by *Bulletin* readers. Last year's set came fourth in the 1996 poll but the 2nd class stamp was the third favourite individual stamp. We look forward to seeing how this year's set fares with readers in the 1997 poll – to be announced here in December.

**THE DESIGNER** The stamps were designed by John Gorham who also designed the Christmas aerogramme. The illustration of Father Christmas on the 1st class stamp and on the front panel of the aerogramme is by Mark Thomas. Mr Gorham also designed the 1990 Christmas set, using illustrations by Andrew Davidson, and worked on the 1987 Studio Pottery,

### Technical details

**Printers** Harrison & Sons Ltd

**Process** Gravure

**Size** 41 × 30mm

**Sheets** 100

**Perforation** 15 × 14

**Phosphor** One band 2nd class, two bands others

**Gum** PVA





### Cylinders and colours

**2nd 1A** (gold) ● **1B** (greenish yellow) ● **1C** (bright magenta) ● **1D** (new blue) ● **1E** (grey black) ● **P58** (phosphor)

**1st 1A** (gold) ● **1B** (greenish yellow) ● **1C** (bright magenta) ● **1D** (new blue) ● **1E** (grey black) ● **P59** (phosphor)

**31p 1A** (gold) ● **1B** (greenish yellow) ● **1C** (bright magenta) ● **1D** (new blue) ● **1E** (bright blue) ● **1F** (grey black) ● **P59** (phosphor)

**43p 1A** (gold) ● **1B** (greenish yellow) ● **1C** (bright magenta) ● **1D** (new blue) ● **1E** (grey black) ● **P59** (phosphor)

**63p 1A** (gold) ● **1B** (greenish yellow) ● **1C** (bright magenta) ● **1D** (new blue) ● **1E** (grey black) ● **P59** (phosphor)

### Stamp book cylinders

**1st class** B1A ● B1B ● B3C ● B1D ● B1E ● B15 (phosphor)

**2nd class** B2A ● B1B ● B4C ● B1D ● B2E ● B14 (phosphor)

1990 RSPCA and Queen Mother, 1992 Wintertime, and 1995 Peace and Freedom (St Paul's and Liberation) issues. Born in 1937, he studied at Harrow College of Art before working as an apprentice in a silk-screen company, and for the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sunday Times*. Since 1968 he has run his own design studio and in the 1970s and 80s taught at the London Royal College of Art. He has received prestigious awards from the European Art Directors Club and the Design & Art Director's Association of Great Britain. His work includes packaging design, posters, book design, film graphics and direct mail as well as postage stamps.

**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 27 October, price 25p.

Orders for the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps, cancelled with a pictorial 'first day of issue' postmark of the Bureau or Bethlehem, price £2.57 (including VAT) to UK addresses, £2.19 overseas (no VAT), must be received at the Bureau by 27 October. Alternatively, collectors may send stamped covers, on the day of issue, to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, Edinburgh EH3 5TT, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Penarth Road, Cardiff CF1 1AA (Bethlehem postmark), marking the outer envelopes 'FD9719' (Bureau), or 'FD9720' (Bethlehem).

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors to post covers to receive local (mostly non-pictorial) 'first day of issue' handstamps. Sponsored special handstamps will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from the Bureau (£10 UK/Europe; £21.75 rest of world).

Collectors may submit covers bearing just the 2nd class Christmas stamp for all first day, philatelic and sponsored handstamps in use on 27 October, the 1st class rule for special handstamps being waived for the day.

**WITHDRAWAL OF CHRISTMAS STAMPS** Any remaining stocks of 1997 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 earlier.

The 1996 Christmas stamps (£1.83 set), stamp books (20 × 2nd class, 10 × 1st class), presentation pack (£2.20), stamp cards (£1.25 set) will be withdrawn from sale at the Bureau and philatelic outlets on 27 October 1997 ●