

Christmas Royal Mail's annual festive issue



Technical details

Printer De La Rue

Process Gravure

Stamp size 32 x 30mm

Sheets 50

Perforation 14.5 x 14 die cut

Phosphor One band 2nd, two bands others

Gum Self-adhesive, no matrix

Gutter pairs Vertical

Miniature sheet size 115 x 105mm

Miniature sheet perforation 14.5 x 14

ROYAL MAIL has issued Christmas stamps annually since 1966. This year's Christmas stamps – the 39th issue – go on sale at Post Office branches, Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets on 2 November. As for the past three years, they are printed on self-adhesive paper, the stamps having die-cut perforations, and can be removed from sheets by rouletting which surrounds the 'perforations'. There will also be a miniature sheet containing the same stamps but in conventional gummed format. They were designed by well-known childrens' artist Raymond Briggs. They feature Father Christmas, with reindeer, on rooftops, delivering presents: 2nd class, Father Christmas on snow-covered roof; 1st class, Father Christmas watching sunrise; 40p (European basic rate), Father Christmas in windy weather; 57p, Father Christmas, with umbrella, in the rain; 68p, Father Christmas with electric torch; and £1.12, Father Christmas sheltering from snow and ice.

Cylinders and colours

All values D1 magenta ● D1 yellow ● D1 cyan (blue) ● D1 black ● D1 phosphor

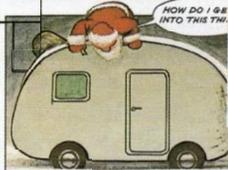
MINIATURE SHEET For the first time Christmas stamps will also be issued in a miniature sheet containing one of each stamp. Please note that the stamps are arranged in the sheet in the order of the story they depict, rather than in value order. The sheets were printed 16 (4 x 4) at a time, the printers' sheet then being guillotined into individual sheets. No cylinder numbers were shown in the margins of the printers' sheets.

FIRST DAY FACILITIES Unstamped Royal Mail FDC envelopes will be available from main post offices and philatelic outlets about a week before 2 November, price 25p. Orders for FDCs with the stamps or miniature sheet cancelled by a pictorial first day postmark of Tallents House Edinburgh or Bethlehem must reach Tallents House by the date of issue. Price £4.25 UK or £3.62 overseas. Please state if stamps or miniature sheet required.

It is very early on Christmas Eve...



CHRISTMAS



Mrs J Robinson
200 Manorbie Road
Ilkeston
Derbyshire
DE7 4AB



Royal Mail Tallents House 21 South Gyle Crescent Edinburgh EH12 9PB



Collectors may send stamped covers on the day of issue to: Royal Mail Tallents House, 21 South Gyle Crescent, Edinburgh EH12 9PB, or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Penarth Road, Cardiff CF11 8TA (Bethlehem postmark), marking the outer envelope 'FD0429' or 'FD0430'. Covers can be posted or handed in at main Post Office branches for the Bethlehem postmark. Details of sponsored handstamps will be announced in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – available on subscription from Tallents House. For a sample copy write to: The Editor, *British Postmark Bulletin*, Royal Mail, 148 Old Street, London EC1V 9HQ.

A Christmas pack (left, price £3.80) and stamp cards (30p each) will be available at main Post Office branches and philatelic outlets. The pack was written by Nicolette Jones and designed by Typearea. There will be seven cards – one for each stamp and the miniature sheet.

The Christmas airletter: the design, by Raymond Briggs, is spread over the front, back and central portions of the airletter.



CHRISTMAS AIRLETTERS Two airletters (aerogrammes) will be available from 2 November. As in 2002 and 2003, there will be national and bilingual (Welsh/English) versions. The bilingual version will be available only from Post Office branches in Wales, Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets. Price 52p each. The design, spread over the front, central and back portions of the airletter, features Father Christmas trudging through the snow with a large sack of presents. The airletter, like the stamps, was designed by Raymond Briggs, and printed by Mail Solutions Limited. It bears the usual 'stamp' comprising the Machin head of The Queen and 'Great Britain Postage Paid' indicator. The airletter does not qualify for 'First Day of Issue' postmarking. Christmas airletters were first issued in 1965, one year before the first Christmas stamps appeared.

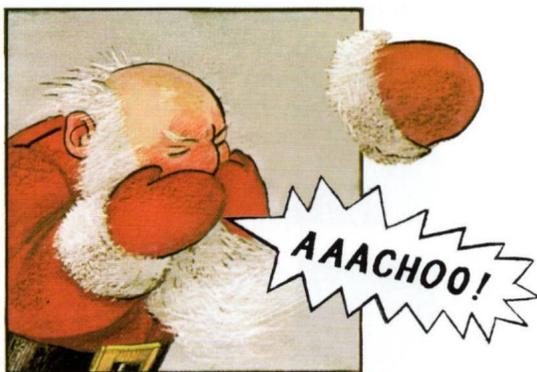
STAMP BOOKS Two Christmas self-adhesive stamp books (folded sheetlets) will be available from 2 November – 12 × 1st class stamps (£3.36) and 24 × 2nd class stamps (£5.04). The books have been printed by De La Rue.

SMILERS SHEETS FOR CHRISTMAS There will be one Smilers sheet for Christmas, containing 10 1st class and 10 2nd class Christmas stamps, price £5.40. The sheet will be printed in litho by De La Rue and have self-adhesive stamps. The stamps in sheets and books are printed in gravure. Smilers sheets are available from Royal Mail Tallents House and Post Office philatelic outlets. A Smilers sheets album is available from Tallents House, price £16.50 (order code PA665).

CHRISTMAS CARDS Packs containing 18 cards – three of each of the six Christmas stamp designs, will be available from Tallents House, price £5.95.

YEARBOOK AND YEARPACK The 2004 Yearbook and Yearpack, containing all the year's special stamps, will go on sale on 2 November when the Christmas stamps are issued. The standard version of the Yearbook costs £34.95, the de-luxe, leather-bound version £75. The Yearpack will cost £29.95 •

Raymond Briggs The designer of the Christmas stamps, now 70, is a celebrated pioneer of strip illustration in books for children and adults and a master of pathos and humour. His books include *Fungus the Bogeyman* (1977), *The Man* (1992), *The Bear* (1994), *Ug: Boy Genius of the Stone Age* (2001) and *The Puddleman* (2004). *When the Wind Blows* (1983) was a landmark picturebook on the subject of a nuclear holocaust, and *Ethel & Ernest* (1998), his cartoon-strip biography of his parents, is used in schools to teach 20th-century history. *Father Christmas* (1973) and *The Snowman* (1978) – the basis of the animation that is now a national institution – have confirmed Raymond Briggs as the contemporary illustrator most closely associated with Christmas. His *Father Christmas*, who first appeared in 1973, has changed attitudes to the seasonal character. This was the first working-class Father Christmas, quite unlike the regal Santas enthroned in glittering palaces, or the factory owners with a staff of elves as often portrayed in the past. He is based on Briggs' own father, Ernest, a milkman, who like Santa had a delivery round in all weathers. Ernest makes a guest appearance in Briggs' original picturebook, with his initials and date of birth on the number plate of his milk float. Briggs' Father Christmas lives like a 1930s working man in a terraced house with an outside lavatory and hens to lay eggs for his breakfast, and grumbles using his trademark mild expletive. In Briggs' second Santa book, *Father Christmas on Holiday* (1975), he realizes his fantasy of visiting hot places. Together the books persuaded the world that Father Christmas is a humble man with a hard job to do ●



The Christmas presentation pack features Raymond Briggs' Father Christmas. Two of his illustrations from the pack are shown above and on page 3.



Santa on stamps Raymond Briggs' Father Christmas was first featured, with the Snowman, on a 1993 Greetings stamp. They also appeared on last year's Isle of Man Christmas stamps. Father Christmas has been shown on British Christmas stamps in 1981, 1987 and 1997, on the cover of 1992 (2nd class) and 1997 Christmas stamp books, and on the Christmas airmailers (aerogrammes) of 1968, 1977, 1987, 1992, 1993, and 1997.

Each year thousands of children write to Father Christmas, and all mail addressed to Toy Land or other fantasy places is replied to by a Royal Mail Santa service introduced in 1963 (see December 2003 *Bulletin* for details) ●

Dorothy Martin wrote about Father Christmas and stamps depicting him from around the world in the December 1998 *Bulletin*.