

Christmas, 1988

15 November 1988



The five stamps to be issued on 15 November will be Britain's 23rd issue of Christmas stamps and are entitled "Compliments of the Season". The theme is the sending of Christmas cards which began some 145 years ago. Henry Cole is credited with sending the first cards. The story of their origin is told by the late Arthur Blair in his delightful book *Christmas Cards for the Collector* (1986). Cole was a very busy man and in December 1843 found that he had insufficient time to write his usual letters of Christmas greetings to his friends and business associates.



"It was then", writes Mr Blair, "that one of his greatest inspirations took shape; an idea that was to become the biggest secular event in the Christmas calendar and in time create a huge industry that has brought wealth to many business concerns and employment to countless people: the creation of the world's first commercially produced Christmas card."



Cole contacted the artist John Callcott Horsley (1817-1903) who produced an attractive design showing three generations of a family, the adults drinking (in red wine) a toast to absent friends with the children eating plum pudding. The card was lithographed by Jobbins of Holborn and sold at one shilling at Felix Summer-



ly's Home Treasury Office in Bond Street.

Henry Cole (1808-82) is well-known to postal historians as an enthusiastic postal reformer, entrant in the Treasury Competition, Secretary of the Mercantile Committee and close friend of Mulready. For a while he was employed by the Post Office as assistant to Rowland Hill.

The five stamps show Christmas cards set on a mantelpiece, the cards featuring scenes from the Nativity. This ingeniously solves the problem of having a religious (Nativity) and a secular



(Christmas card) theme in the one design. The values and designs are: **14p** (second class inland) The journey to Bethlehem; **19p** (first class inland) The Shepherds; **27p** (acrogrammes & airmail postcards) The Magi; **32p** (Zone B airmail) The Stable and **35p** (Zone C airmail) The Annunciation.

Technical Details

The stamps have been designed by Lynn Trickett of Trickett & Webb Limited, illustrated by Andrew Davidson and with photography by Lucinda Lambton. Printing was by Harrison & Sons Ltd using the photogravure process in sheets of 100 on phosphor-coated paper (19p-

35p) and on standard fluorescent paper with a single phosphor band (14p). Perforation 15 x 14, gum PVA Dextrin.

Presentation Pack

The presentation pack (No. 194) will cost £1.50; it was designed by Trickett & Webb Limited with text by Neil Mattingley and photography by Robert Dowling. It features Christmas cards from the collection of Courtier Fine Art Limited and includes a potted history of the Christmas card. The pack was produced by Clement & Foster Limited.

PHQ Cards

PHQ cards (Nos. 114A-E) featuring each of the five stamps will be available from 1 November, price 16p each.



First Day Cover

The first day cover envelope, featuring Christmas cards on a mantelpiece, will be available about two weeks before the stamps go on sale, price 17p. Two pictorial postmarks will be used for the first day cover service, one at the British Philatelic Bureau in Edinburgh and one at Bethlehem, Llandeilo, Dyfed. The Bureau handstamp features a Christmas card being posted in a snow-covered pillar box; that of Bethlehem shows a card being delivered at a house letter box, the front door being decorated for the festive season. The Bethlehem cancel is inscribed "First Day of Issue" in English and in Welsh.

A first day cover service will be provided by the Bureau with the official Royal Mail cover addressed to the destination required with the five stamps cancelled with either postmark. Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned not later than 15 November.

Customers requiring only the special pictorial postmarks may obtain them under the reposting facility by sending on the first day of issue a stamped addressed envelope under an

outer cover endorsed "Special First Day of Issue handstamp" to:

British Philatelic Bureau 20 Brandon Street
EDINBURGH EH3 5TT

Bethlehem Special Postmark Duty
Letter District Office
15 Wind Street
SWANSEA SA1 1AA

1988 Collectors Pack

The 1988 edition of the Collectors Pack will be issued on 15 November, coinciding with the issue of the Christmas stamps, price £9.50. The pack contains all 1988 special stamps, but not the Edward Lear miniature sheet, mounted on a quality display board. In addition to the stamps, there is a colourful and informative brochure, giving details of the stamp subjects. The pack will be available from the Bureau, philatelic counters and main post offices.

Royal Mail Yearbook

Volume 5 of the Royal Mail Special Stamps Yearbook will go on sale on 15 November. The handsomely produced book contains background information about the development and production of all the special issues of 1988.

The book is hardbound with a matching slipcase and includes sets of all 1988 special stamps including the Edward Lear miniature sheet. It will be available from the British Philatelic Bureau, philatelic counters and most main post offices. The Yearbook will cost £16.95.

National Postal Museum News

Details were given in the July *Bulletin* of the Spring 1988 issue of *Cross Post*, the journal of the Association of Friends of the NPM. The price quoted was £1.25. We should point out that this is the price to members of the Association, the journal is available to non-members for £2. Orders to: National Postal Museum, King Edward Street, LONDON EC1A 1LP. Details of the Friends can be obtained from the same address.

Also in July we published details of cards on sale at the Museum's sales counter; intending purchasers should please note that the Mobile PO card (SEPR 50) is now sold out.

