

Christmas, 1980

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Christmas comes but once a year – but that is almost too often for a Post Office trying to ring the changes on design possibilities for an annual issue of stamps.

Broadly speaking, religious and secular designs alternate year by year and in 1980 artists were given a “secular” brief. It took an experienced designer, in this case Jeffery Matthews, to produce five different but cohesive designs based on Christmas decorations. The delicacy of the designs combined with a restrained use of colours (five colours for each of the 10p, 12p and 13½p stamps and only four colours for the 15p and 17½p) combined to give the right, seasonable atmosphere to the issued designs. These were: **10p**, a decorated Christmas tree; **12½p**, candles, decorations and ivy in the form of an Advent wreath; **13½p**, mistletoe spray and apples with decorations; **15p**, paper chains with

decorative crown and bell; **17½p**, holly wreath and decorations.

Issued on 19 November 1980, printing was in photogravure by Harrisons in sheets of 100 (two panes of 50), perf. 15 x 14, on all-over phosphor paper except for the 10p which had a single, central 4mm phosphor bar to activate sorting as second class mail. Some of the all-



over phosphor stamps have a glossier surface than others and so the Post Office issued a statement explaining that superficial variations could occur because of the complex interaction of materials during the phosphor coating process. While, on Post Office instructions, the general counter staffs made no distinction, philatelic counters and the British Philatelic Bureau were prepared to supply these varieties to order.

There were many minor constant flaws and Gibbons *GB Specialised Stamp Catalogue* also lists and illustrates four more major flaws as follow: *10p*, broken branch above left-hand bird's head (stamp 3/3, no dot cylinder) and a broken bauble (stamp 9/8, dot cylinder); *12p*, break in outline of left-hand small candle (stamp 9/7, dot cylinder); *13½p*, severed string above upper right-hand apple. The 12p is known imperf between the stamp and lower margin and it also exists cancelled “Sussex Coast” on 13 November, 1980, six days before the official release.

Following withdrawal from the British Philatelic Bureau on 18 November, 1981, sales were reported as: **10p**, 277,875,000; **12p**, 142,673,000; **13½p**, 18,180,000; **15p**, 17,525,000; **17½p**, 16,225,000.