

Christmas, 1989

14 November 1989



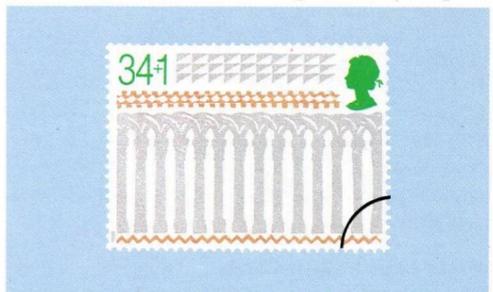
The five stamps to be issued on 14 November will be Britain's 24th issue of Christmas stamps (first issued in 1966) and commemorate the 800th anniversary of Ely Cathedral. Four of the five stamps carry a 1p surcharge for charity. The values are 15p (basic second class inland rate), 15p plus 1p, 20p plus 1p (basic first class inland and EEC rate), 34p plus 1p (Zone B airmail) and 37p plus 1p (Zone C airmail). The designs show some of the most important architectural features of the Cathedral.



The Cathedral Church of the Holy and Undivided Trinity of Ely is a well-known landmark of the Fen Country, and is sometimes referred to as the "Ship of the Fens". A religious community - probably of both monks and nuns - was founded at Ely in AD 673; the first Abbess was Etheldreda, Queen of Northumbria. The Saxon church was sacked by the Danes in 869 and only the base of a cross inscribed to Ovin

building a new church but the main part of the cathedral was not completed until 1189, almost a century of the death of Abbot Simeon. In 1106 the white marble coffin of Queen Etheldreda was positioned east of the High Altar. Three years later Abbot Hervé le Breton was confirmed by the Pope as Bishop of the new diocese of Ely, carved out of the diocese of Lincoln.

The Octagon, the great glory of the Cathedral, was built in 1322 to replace the collapsed



(Steward to Etheldreda) remains. In 970 Ely was re-founded as a Benedictine monastery for men, with Britnoth as the first Abbot. After the Norman Conquest, Abbot Simeon set about

central tower. Some 400 tons of wood and lead make up the Lantern Tower - each corner post was hewn from a single oak and are held by timbers resting on huge pillars of stone quarried at Barnack, near Stamford.

Henry VIII dissolved the monastery in 1539 and two years later established the "King's New College at Ely" with a Dean, canons, petitioners, scholars and "aged men decayed in the King's wars or service". The religious life of the Cathedral was interrupted only by Oliver Cromwell who closed the choir office; the doors remained locked for 17 years. The cloisters and Chapter House were destroyed at this time but fortunately not the Cathedral itself. The late

17th and 18th centuries were, in general, years of decline for the Cathedral; a great period of restoration began in 1839 with the arrival of Dean Peacock. In the 1870s, Prime Minister Gladstone described Ely as a "pattern for the Cathedrals of England". The most recent restoration work was carried out in 1973-4; HM The Queen attended Divine Service in the Cathedral on 25 November 1973.



Technical Details

The stamps have been designed by David Gentleman and printed by Harrison & Sons Limited in photogravure using specially-produced metallic inks. Printing was in sheets of 100 on phosphor-coated paper (20p-37p) and on standard fluorescent paper with a single phosphor band (15p stamps). Perforation 15 x 14, gum PVA Dextrin.

Presentation Pack

The presentation pack (No. 203) will cost £1.50; it was designed by Carroll, Dempsey & Thirkell with text by Tim Shackleton; printing by Litho-Tech colour printers. The text gives a history of Ely Cathedral and features some of its stained glass windows.

Royal Mail Stamp Cards

Royal Mail Stamp Cards featuring enlargements of each of the five stamps will be available from 30 October, price 18p each. They are numbered 122A-E.

First Day Cover

The Royal Mail first day cover will be available from the British Philatelic Bureau, philatelic counters, the National Postal Museum and main post offices from 30 October, price 18p. Three pictorial postmarks will be used for the first day cover service — one each for the British Philatelic Bureau, Ely and Bethlehem, Llandeilo, Dyfed. All show features of Ely Cathedral.

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 the requested postmark. Application forms, available from the Bureau and main post offices, should be returned not later than 14 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 envelope under an outer cover endorsed "Special First Day of Issue handstamp" to:

British Philatelic Bureau 20 Brandon Street
EDINBURGH EH3 5TT

Ely Special Postmark Duty
Cambridge LDO
Clifton Road
CAMBRIDGE CB1 1AA

Bethlehem Special Postmark Duty
Swansea LDO
Wind Street
SWANSEA SA1 1AA

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for those collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, non-pictorial "First Day of Issue" handstamps. A pictorial "First Day of Issue" handstamp, showing the arms of the City of London will be used at the City of London LDO, King Edward Street, LONDON EC1A 1AA.

Souvenir Cover

A souvenir cover, of similar design to the first day cover, will be available from all philatelic counters from 15 November, price 18p. This can be used to obtain relevant postmarks after the first day of issue and will be on sale for one year.

Earlier Related Issues

The treasures of British cathedrals have featured in two earlier sets of Christmas stamps: the 1971 set depicted stained glass windows in Canterbury Cathedral and roof bosses in York Minster and Worcester Cathedral were shown on the 3½p and 10p stamps of the 1974 issue. A representation of the "Boy Bishop" of Hereford was shown on the 34p stamp of the 1986 set.

Five cathedrals were depicted on a set in May 1969; St Paul's Cathedral has featured on stamps issued in 1965 and 1980 and Westminster Abbey on two stamps issued in 1966 and the "London 1980" 50p stamp.

