The first Christmas cards

Though wood engravers produced prints with religious themes in the European Middle Ages, the first commercial Christmas and New Year's card was designed in London, England in 1843.

John Callcott Horsley (1817 – 1903), a British narrative painter and a Royal Academician, designed the first Christmas and New Year's card at the suggestion and request of his friend Sir Henry Cole, who was the first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Horsley designed the first Christmas card in 1840, but it went on sale only in 1843, when one thousand cards were offered for 1s each.

The card was not received without controversy, for it showed a family raising their glasses to toast Christmas. Puritans immediately denounced it. The idea was a hit with others. Christmas card became very popular, and other artists quickly followed Horsley's concept. A particularly popular card was designed by English artist William Egley in 1849.

The first Christmas cards were printed in 1843 in lithography by Jobbins of Warwick Court, Holborn, London, and hand-coloured by an artist named Mason. They were lithographed on stiff cardboard, with the greeting, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You." It also states that is was "Published at Summerly's Home Treasury Office, 12 Old Bond Street, London.