

The first Christmas stamps

Mail used to be sent free; the delivery was paid for by the recipient. But in 1837, an English schoolmaster named Rowland Hill noticed that the post office lost out too much by recipients refusing delivery. He proposed prepaid stamps in a pamphlet called *The Post Office Reform*.

On 1 May 1840, the first stamps went on sale in Britain. (The Christmas card was invented 3 years later.) They were the One-Penny Black and Twopence Blue stamps, featuring Queen Victoria. In 1870, the British Post Office introduced a half penny stamp for sending cards.

No provision was made for separating the stamps one from another. To do so required a knife or a pair of scissors. In 1847, an Irish engineer named Henry Archer submitted a plan to the British Post Office for perforating stamp sheets. By 1854 Archer's machine was sufficiently perfected to produce the first perforated stamps. The United States began using a perforating machine in 1857.



The first Christmas stamp

Canada issued a stamp with the Mercator map "Christmas 1898" inscribed. Post offices in England and the Netherlands also issued stamps with Christmas-related themes. In the US, postcard artist **Ellen H. Clapsaddle** designed Christmas themes for stamps. However, none were special Christmas issues. The first postage stamp for Christmas was issued in 1937 in Austria: the Rose and Signs of the Zodiac stamp.

The first official US Christmas stamp was launched in 1962. This year, the US Post Office will print more than 4 billion Christmas postage stamps. They can even be bought at some ATMs (Automatic Teller Machines) using a bank card: 18 stamps are printed out on a sheet the size of a \$1 bill.



Christmas seals

The Christmas stamp on your Christmas card may be accompanied by a Christmas seal, an idea conceived by a Danish postal clerk and first issued by