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The first known Christmas card was designed invented and sold in England as a way to encourage the common man to use the post office which was just then coming into being. The card itself had a central colorful picture of a family enjoying a sumptuous Christmas dinner, while it had two side panels of people caring for the poor. (as a matter of interest the card was criticized because of a child drinking wine.) But it did carry some religious symbols in the Holly as a symbol of chastity and Ivy as a symbol of Christ's footsteps. (The feeding and clothing of the poor were encouraging acts of charity and to be generous on St Stephen's day (December 26 also known as Boxing day) as that was the day when the workers were traditionally given their Christmas Box. The greeting was a simple "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you"

The important thing was that this was the first. Within a few years from tin Christmas Cards were being sent and delivered for a penny. The Penny Post was possible because with the advent of railways more mail could be carried farther and faster than had been the case with the horse drawn carriages up to then. In fact the Post office offered a half price postal delivery service if the card was sent on its own or in an unsealed envelope.

This was actively encouraged and by 1870 the printing of cards was popular and the postage was set at a halfpenny so more and more of the folk in the British Isles were sending them.

In the US the idea of Christmas cards had come a lot earlier but they were very expensive so were not much used. It was only in 1875 that mass printing and subsequent reduced pricing made the sending of Christmas cards in the US a practical and popular thing to do.

The Cards themselves are sent as a greeting and usually offer wishes and felicitations for the joy of Christmas and the up-coming year. So if you look at Sir Henry Coles Christmas card, mentioned above, you will see that the tradition is little changed.

Favorite cards often have images of the Nativity scene, snow, green trees a fat bearded man in a red suit and so on. More recently, with the rise of secularism many steer away from a religious message entirely. There are as many variations to the messages as one could imagine. Religious or secular the theme is Enjoy the Season and Hope next year is a good one for you.

Trending as very popular now are personalized Christmas Cards where all sorts of messages can be put alongside photos of family members. These of course need to be professionally done but with the wonders of technology and digital cameras it is as easy as 123. All one needs to do is gather the photographs you want to include, along with the personalized message you wish to send and order the cards from tinyprints.com who specialize in short production runs.

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