English Club
It's interesting to know...

The First Christmas Card*

Today, we send millions of Christmas cards every year. But in fact the Christmas card is a relatively modern invention.
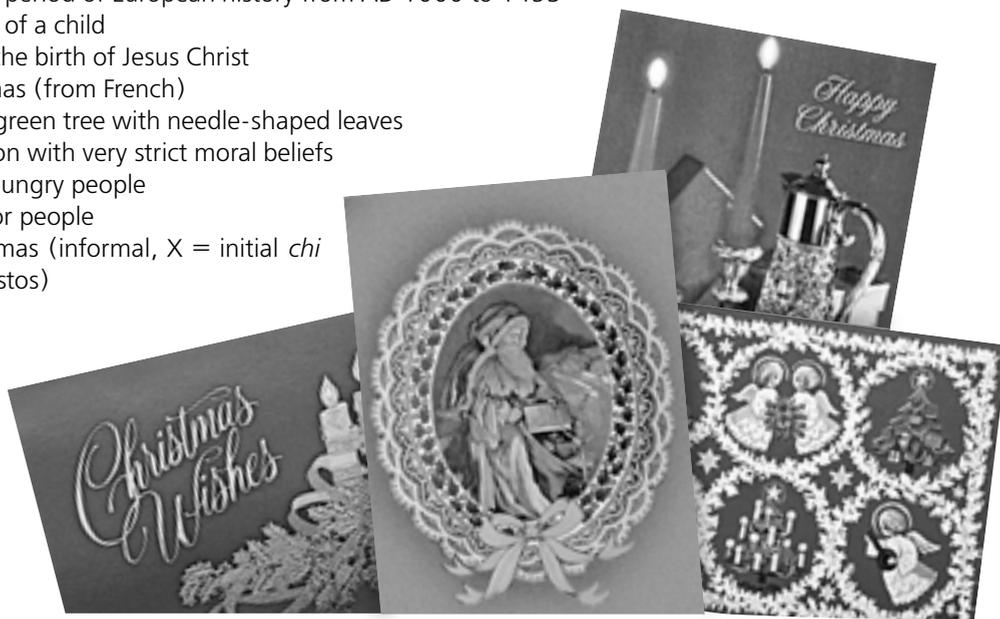
In the Middle Ages, European wood engravers produced prints with religious themes. But the first real Christmas card, as we understand the term today, was designed in London, England in 1840. It went on sale in 1843. The designer was John Callcott Horsley, a well known British painter and member of the Royal Academy. He designed the card at the suggestion of his friend Sir Henry Cole, who was the first director of the Victoria & Albert Museum. Horsley produced 1,000 cards and offered them for sale at 1s (one shilling) each. They were printed on stiff card and coloured by hand, with the greeting: "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You". The card shows three pictures: in the centre, a family party; to one side the hungry receiving food; to the other side the poor being clothed. Puritans immediately denounced the card, since it showed people drinking in the family party. But with most people the idea was a great success and the Christmas card quickly became very popular.

Christmas cards were not the first greetings cards. Since 1796, with improvements in printing, merchants had been sending cards to their customers offering "best wishes" for the new year. In many countries, Christmas cards gradually became even more popular than New Year's cards.

As Christmas is the birthday of Jesus Christ, cards often show scenes of His nativity. Others show images associated with Christmas such as wintry scenes of snow-laden pines, Father Christmas (Santa Claus), stars, candles or holly. The traditional greeting written on a Christmas card is "Merry Christmas", but many other greetings are also used, such as "Happy Xmas" or "Happy Noel".

Word Checker
- denounce: declare publicly to be wrong or evil
- greetings card (BrE) greeting card (AmE)
- His: his (a capital H is often used for God or Jesus)
- holly: a plant with prickly green leaves and red berries laden: heavily loaded or weighed down
- Middle Ages: period of European history from AD 1000 to 1453
- nativity: birth of a child
- the Nativity: the birth of Jesus Christ
- Noel: Christmas (from French)
- pine: an evergreen tree with needle-shaped leaves
- puritan: person with very strict moral beliefs
- the hungry: hungry people
- the poor: poor people
- Xmas: Christmas (informal, X = initial *chi* in Greek Khristos)

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40,000,000 Christmas Puddings! That's a lot of Pudding!

25 December is Christmas Day, the birthday of Jesus Christ. In Britain, people celebrate this day with a great Christmas dinner. The main course of the meal is usually turkey. And the traditional dessert is Christmas pudding. This year more than 40,000,000 people will finish their Christmas dinner with Christmas pudding!

Christmas pudding is a rich, boiled pudding made with flour, suet and dried fruit. There are several customs associated with Christmas pudding. By tradition, a silver coin is hidden inside the pudding when it is made. A few holly leaves are placed on top. And before the pudding is cut open and served, brandy is poured over it and set alight. Then it is eaten with thick, runny cream.

Although Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, two of these customs remind us of His death. The holly leaves are a reminder of Christ's *Crown of Thorns.* And it is said that the flames from the brandy represent the *Passion.*

And the silver coin hidden in the pudding? The person that finds it is guaranteed to receive great health, wealth and happiness!

Word Checker

brandy: a strong alcoholic spirit made from wine
crown: the round head dress that a king or queen wears
dessert: sweet course at the end of a meal
flour: powder from grain, used to make bread, cakes, etc
holly: shrub with prickly green leaves and red berries
the Passion: the suffering and death of Jesus Christ
pudding: a steamed dish made with suet and flour
suet: fat from the kidneys of cows, sheep, etc
thorn: sharp, spiky plant
turkey: a large bird, like a big chicken

Note: "pudding" can be countable or uncountable. When it's countable, we think of the individual pudding(s). When it's uncountable, we think of the food in general. Did you notice its countable / uncountable use in the title to this article?

– 40,000,000 Christmas Puddings! [countable]
– That's a lot of Pudding! [uncountable]