

50 Years of Australian Christmas Stamps: The 2007 Christmas Issue

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In 2007, the Australia Post celebrated 50 years of Christmas stamps by issuing five stamps representing previous Christmas Issues of 1957, 1977, 1984, 1990, and 1996. They were selected as representative of the style and culture of the era from which they came. This article will present the 2007 Christmas Issue and then provide examples of philatelic items from each of the years represented in this 50-year celebration.

The 2007 Issue. The official Australia Post FDC is shown in figure 1. This same FDC to which have been added the five original stamps celebrated by the 2007 Issue is shown in figure 2. The date of issue was November 1, 2007, and the FDCs were postmarked Smithton (Christmas Hills) Tasmania.

Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 3



The 50c 1957 stamp was designed by Note Printing artist Donald Cameron. It depicts the Star of Bethlehem and a child kneeling in prayer from the 1776 painting "The Infant Samuel" by English artist Sir Joshua Reynolds. This stamp is shown on a maximum card in figure 3. The face value of the original stamp was 3.5c.

The 45c 1977 stamp was designed by Roger Roberts and depicts a surfing Santa. This was the first appearance of Santa on an Australian Christmas stamp. The stamp is shown on a maximum card in figure 4. The face value of the original stamp was 15c.

Figure 4

The \$1.10 1984 stamp was designed by Ken Cato, with photography by Michael Laurie. The detail was from a stained glass window in St Bartholomew's Church of England in Norwood, South Australia. This stamp is shown on a maximum card in figure 5. The face value of the original stamp was 85c.

Figure 5

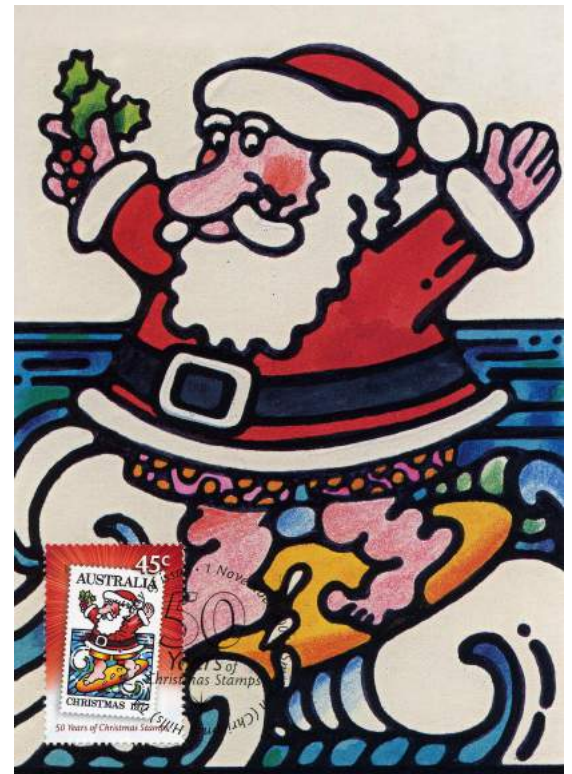
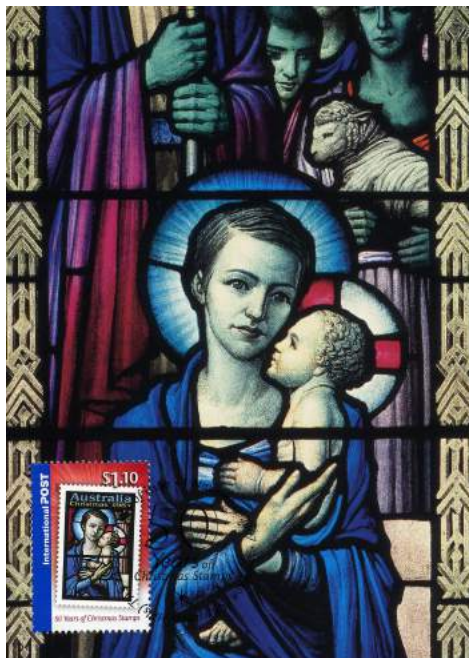


Figure 6



The 45c 1990 stamp was designed by Marg Towt and shows the Baby Jesus with a koala and kangaroo in the Australian bush. The Christmas Star is in the sky. This stamp is shown on a maximum card in figure 6. The face value of the original stamp was 43c.

The 45c 1996 stamp was designed by Sophie Byass and illustrated by Vivienne Goodman. It depicts the universal Christmas icon of Madonna and Child. This stamp is shown on a maximum card in figure 7. The face value of the original stamp was 40c.

Figure 7

Other FDCs for the 2007 Issue are shown in figures 8 through 10 (next page). Each of these was produced by Sherro with the art in the latter two by Nirlay Kundu. Unlike the United States, in Australia today, there are relatively few independent cachetmakers. This was not always the case as will be seen shortly.

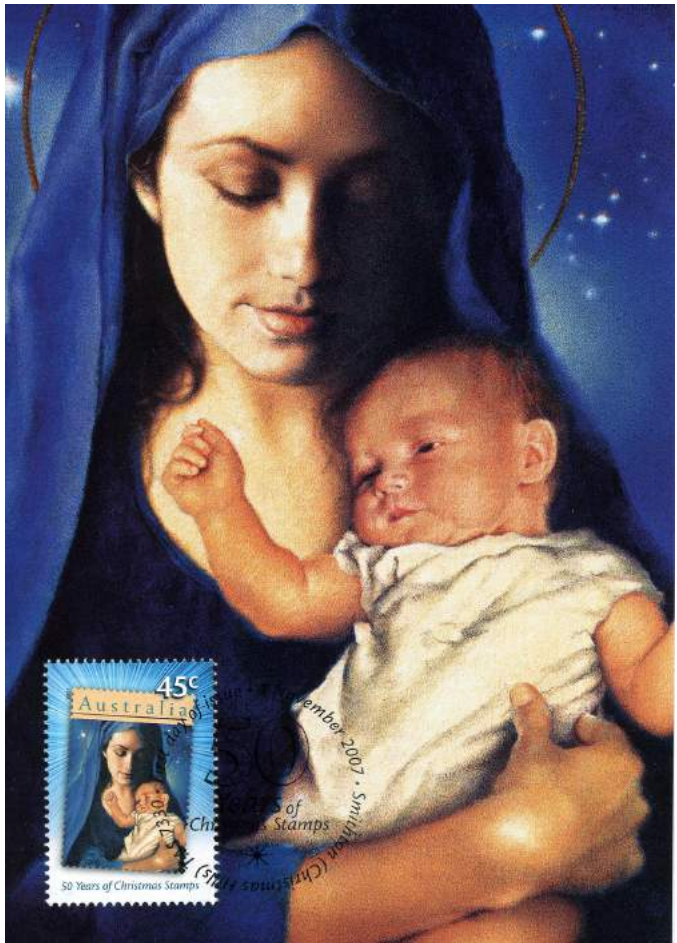




Figure 8

Figure 9



Figure 10

Included in the 2007 Issue was a minisheet, shown on an FDC in figure 11 (right) cancelled on November 1, 2007 in Brisbane Queensland, Australia.



Figure 11

Figure 12

An aerogramme was also included in the 2007 issue (shown right in figure 12, unused).



The 1957 Issue. This consisted of two stamps of the same design: the 3.5c red (included in the 2007 Issue) and a 4c purple. The first day of issue was November 6, 1957. At this time, the Australia Post was not actively engaged in producing philatelic items bearing stamps. Thus, most items with these stamps were from private cover dealers.

The Wesley Cover Service, Adelaide, South Australia was a prominent cover dealer. Wesley FDCs are shown postmarked from Largs North, South Australia (figure 13, below), and Ayr, Queensland (figures 14 and 15 below).



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

Royal FDCs are shown postmarked from Concord Repatriation Hospital, New South Wales, Australia (figure 16), and GPO Sydney, New South Wales, Australia (figures 17 and 18). Note the changes in the colors used in the cachet.



Figure 16

Figure 17



Figure 18





Royal also produced the FDC shown in figure 19 that is postmarked Clinton Hill East, Victoria. The bell appears very similar to our Liberty Bell.

Figure 19

An FDC by Guthrie is shown in figure 20 and postmarked GPO Perth, West Australia.



Figure 20

In 1965 someone took the initiative to create a commemorative cover for the first nine Australian Christmas Issues. This cover, shown in figure 21, was an FDC for the 1965 5c stamp showing the Holy Family. Postmarked Clarence St. Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, this cover featured each of the previous Christmas Issues including that from 1957. Note the generic Australia Post FDC cachet on this cover that appeared on many other FDCs.



Figure 21



Figure 22

The 1977 Issue. This consisted of two stamps: the Surfing Santa (included in the 2007 Issue) and a 45c Madonna and Child stamp. By 1977, the Australia Post had begun producing official FDCs with Christmas-themed cachets. The FDC for this year sported a child's block cachet that spelled out Christmas, 77 (figure 22) and was postmarked October 31, 1977, GPO

Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. A Christmas aerogramme was also issued on the same date although the theme of the cachet and 25c imprint was that of a dove of peace and unrelated to the Christmas stamps (figure 23).



Figure 23

The 1984 Issue. By 1984, the Australia Post had begun issuing its Christmas stamps on two separate dates although the theme was carried through to both dates. Postal rates were quite complex. The first stamp, issued on September 17, 1984, was part of the stained-glass window theme and featured an angel (shown on the official Australia Post FDC, figure 24). The 40c stamp was for surface mail to New Zealand and Asia. A maximum card depicting St. Francis Church Melbourne, Victoria, the church with the window from which the stamp design had been taken, is shown in figure 25. A Wesley FDC for this stamp is shown in figure 26.



Figure 24



Figure 25



Figure 26

The remaining four stamps were issued on October 31, 1984 as shown in figure 27 on the Australia Post Official FDC.

A Wesley FDC for these stamps is shown in figure 28, postmarked GPO Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Each stamp is highlighted on maximum cards shown in figures 29 through 32 that depict the church with the stained-glass window from which the stamp was designed.



Figure 27



Figure 28

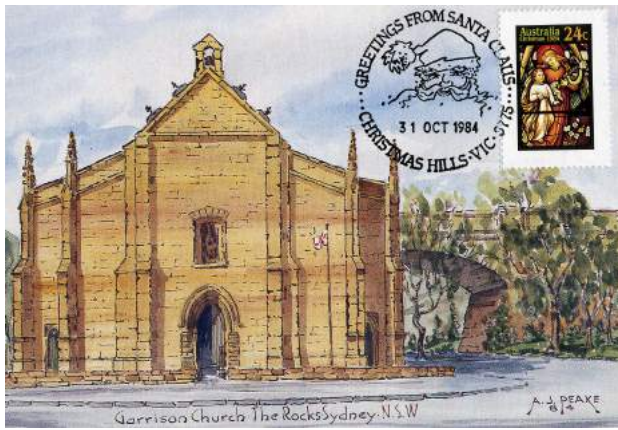


Figure 29



Figure 30

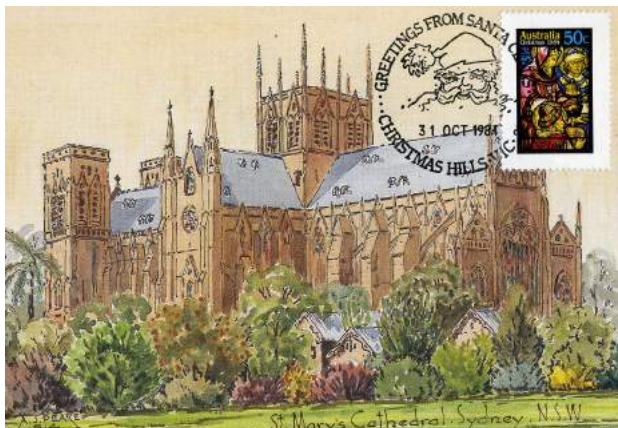


Figure 31

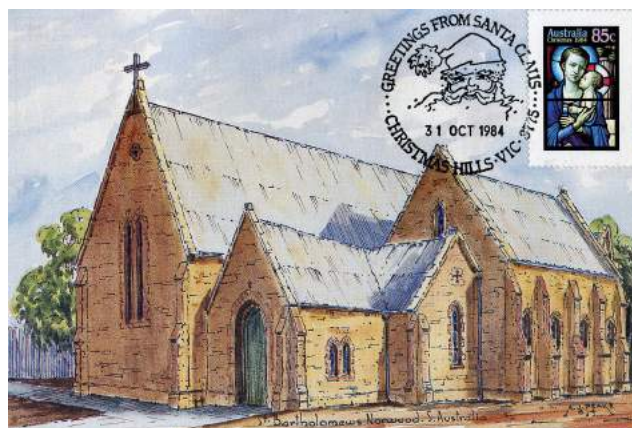


Figure 32

The 24c stamp was for the reduced greeting card rate. The 30c stamp was for the standard letter rate. The 50c stamp was multipurpose: airmail rate for non-standard domestic mail; the concessional greeting card rate to the UK; the second step for surface mail letters to New Zealand and Asia; and the surface mail rate for non-standard articles. The 85c stamp was for certain airmail and domestic certified mail fee. It is shown in figure 32 and was the one chosen for inclusion in the 2007 Issue. The 24c stamp was used on a Wesley cover for the Christmas Stamp Fair held November 3, 1984 in Adelaide, South Australia (figure 33).



Figure 33

A Christmas aerogramme was also issued on October 31, 1984

(figure 34). It too utilized a stained-glass theme.



Figure 34

The 1990 Issue. This was the first year that the Australia Post introduced self adhesive stamps, and this was extended to commemoratives in 1993. The theme of the 1990 Christmas issue from October 31, 1990, was the Bush Nativity. Each of the three stamps featured a Christmas subject set in the Australian Bush. The Australia Post FDC cachet featured an ostrich with ribbon and a pictorial cancel of a koala bear with a Santa hat (figure 35).



Figure 35



Figure 36



Figure 37



Figure 38

The 38c stamp had two kookaburra with gifts, highlighted on a maximum card with a kookaburra pictorial cancel (figure 36). The 43c stamp which was included in the 2007 issue is highlighted on a maximum card shown in figure 37. The 80c stamp featured an opossum in a tree with tinsel (figure 38).

Figure 39

An aerogramme of similar theme franked with (65c) parrot with pawpaw was also issued October 31, 1990 (figure 39).

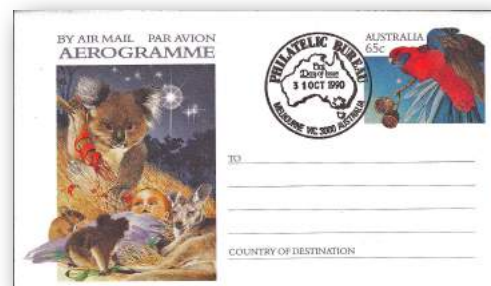


Figure 40



The 1996 Issue. The nativity was beautifully depicted on a set of three stamps issued November 1, 1996. The official FDC featured one of the three kings on camel on a blue cover with small stars and the large Christmas Star (figure 40). Its pictorial cancel from Christmas Hill, Tasmania also featured stars.

The Madonna and Child stamp selected for the 2007 Issue is shown in the maximum card in figure 41. A Magus bearing a gift was featured on the 45c stamp (figure 42). A shepherd boy and lamb was featured on the \$1.00 stamp (figure 43).



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43

The aerogramme issued on the same date featured two Magi on camels and was franked using the same image as the 40c stamp (figure 44).

In November 1991, David Maiden was named Manager of the Australia Post Philatelic Group and oversaw the opening of the National Philatelic Centre in Melbourne. In 1992, he began a tradition of sending out complimentary Christmas cards to select customers. These cards featured Christmas greetings on one side, and the Christmas Issue on the other. The complimentary card from the National Philatelic Centre for the 1996 issue is shown in figure 45.

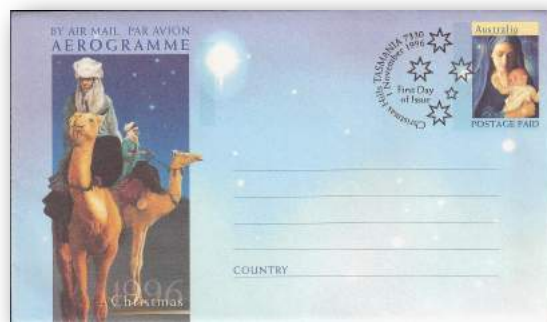


Figure 44

A Conundrum. The stated purpose behind the selection of the five stamps for the 50-year anniversary of Christmas stamps was to reflect the artistic style, social mood and cultural values of the time they represented. In such a situation, the collector is tempted to ask himself "Which five would I have selected?" It is interesting that two of the five were selected from the 1990s while the 1960s went unrepresented. A review of the 1960s reveals three notable stamps, all of which can be seen in figure 21. The 1963 stamp was the Star of Bethlehem which although common on Christmas stamps, is rarely the sole design. The 1964 stamp was the first multicolored Christmas stamp issued by the Australia Post and showed a child looking at a manger scene. The 1965 stamp was the first to have gold color in its design and featured the Holy Family. Any of these three stamps would have been an excellent choice from a philatelic standpoint. However, if one had been chosen, then one of the stamps from the 1990s would have had to be deleted. The 1990 Australian bush series must be included for it most reflects



Figure 45

Australia to the world. The 1996 nativity series is perhaps one of the most beautiful Christmas Issues with this theme worldwide.

Having gone through this thought process, one is left with but one conclusion. The five stamps chosen, although not representative of each decade included in the 50 years, are probably a very good selection and accomplish the stated purpose. Then too, by excluding my single most favorite Australian Christmas stamp, the 1963 Star of Bethlehem, the selection committee has given me an opportunity to write a separate article on this very special stamp.