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Christmas Cards

Christmas makes the greetings card manufacturers very merry indeed. In the late 1990s the British purchased some 2'500 million cards annually. Of these nearly 25% were for birthdays - and almost 60% were for Christmas.

The Christmas card has its origin in the 18th and 19th century. Tradesmen in the 18th century sent New Year cards to their customers, and during this period oral Christmas greetings were reinforced by letters. What is generally taken to be the first commercially produced Christmas card dates from 1843 and was the idea of Sir Henry Cole. He approached a well-known artist of the day whose design was printed lithographically in black and white before each copy was hand-coloured. The central portion of the card showed a family enjoying food and drink, but the

fact that the children also seemed to be drinking wine did not go down well with the temperance brigade. The two side panels illustrated examples of charitable acts, the giving of food and clothing. There was no reference to the Nativity.

The invention of an envelope-making machine and cheaper printing techniques meant that Christmas cards became much less expensive - and much more popular - so much so that a letter to *The Times* in 1877 complained of the delay to legitimate correspondence by cartloads of Christmas cards, and 1880 saw the first plea to post Christmas cards and parcels early.

A similar development took place in America where Louis Prang, a Bavarian-born lithographer, led the way. By the early 1880s he was producing over 5'000'000 Christmas cards every year.

Stale Biscuits

A rare biscuit tin with its 80 years old content was auctioned off for over 20'000 Euros in London. Experts had estimated it would be sold for around 4'200 Euros. It was part of an auction of dolls, teddybears and other toys.

The tin is in the shape of a sports car, with electric headlights, and was meant as a toy. It was a present to a boy called Ted. The biscuits in the shape of numbers, letters and exotic animals are still in there.

from Basler Zeitung

Good old times

Do you get quite nostalgic when you remember the Christmases of your childhood? You are not alone, as the following quote shows: "Within the last half century this annual time of festivity has lost much of its original mirth and hospitality." - as *The Times* reported in 1790!

Luxury chocolate sales boom at Christmas

Swiss chocolate makers were reporting brisk trade in the run-up to last Christmas, with many customers opting for top-end of the range products.

Dark chocolate and special holiday recipe chocolates were particularly popular. However, not all countries that enjoy Swiss chocolate show the same tastes and trends.

"Sales are going well. Champagne truffles are very popular, as well as our Christmas packages, which we decorate ourselves," Madeleine Rubio-Teuscher, of the Zurich-based traditional chocolate makers Teuscher, said in the week before Christmas.

Teuscher is typical of Swiss chocolate companies in that it also has an international clientele. It sends packages around the world and attracts many

tourists to its shops across Zurich.

Larger Swiss chocolate companies, such as Lindt & Sprüngli and Chocolat Frey, as well as retailers Globus, Migros and Coop, also said they were doing well.

Christmas is the most important time for the premium chocolate maker Lindt & Sprüngli.

Dark chocolate was an overall trend last year. Also doing well were traditional hollow figures of Father Christmas, snowmen and the recent addition - the reindeer.

The United States in particular had different tastes. Lindor balls were popular during the Yuletide, but not in the flavours known in Europe - mint, strawberry and even peanut butter were all favourites across the Atlantic.

Chocolat Frey, which belongs to Migros and is a leader in the

Swiss chocolate market, also reported that premium brands were selling well, especially chocolates already packaged as Christmas gifts.

Dark chocolate with a high cocoa content has long been flagged-up by industry watchers, who have pointed to its more healthy image and the fact that chocolate can be differentiated by using different beans.

Over 90'000 tonnes of chocolate products (including imports but excluding cocoa and chocolate powder) were consumed in Switzerland last year. Switzerland has an average per capita consumption of 11.9kg, ranking it first among the consumer countries, but this figure also includes the purchases of tourists and those who drive over the border just to buy Swiss chocolate.

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