

Knowsley Archives Presents:



Christmas in the Archives:

The Sentiment of a Christmas Message



Exhibition Catalogue



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About the Exhibition

The exhibition, '*Christmas in the Archives: The Sentiment of a Christmas Message*', featured cards, letters and postcards from multiple different collections located within Knowsley Archives Services.

These items highlight Christmas messages sent from around the world to and from residents right here in Knowsley, spanning from the 1910s to the 1990s. A few were from family in active duty sending seasons greeting to their loved ones, others from friends to friends wishing their family joy and happiness for the New Year and a charming Christmas greeting from Huyton Parish Church.

Many of the cards featured, held a traditional Christmas design either made by hand or manufactured. However, a good selection of them features unique designs such as a garden in full summer bloom and a view of Prescot in 1743.

The exhibition ran from Monday 3rd November 2025 to Tuesday 5th January 2026. It was located at Knowsley Archives Service at The ARK (Archive Resource for Knowsley) in The Kirkby Centre.



The Sending of Christmas Cards

Though it may seem like a timeless tradition, here in the United Kingdom we have been sending Christmas cards to our loved ones only since the mid-19th Century.

Whilst Queen Victoria may have sent the first Christmas card, the first commercial card that was available for the public to purchase and send was released in 1843. The first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, Sir Henry Cole, commissioned the first commercial Christmas card and they were designed by the painter, John Callcott Horsley. Originally, there was only 1000 cards commissioned and each one was hand-coloured after being printed lithographically.

Ever since then, Christmas cards have been a part of the Christmas spirit, helping to send a message of goodwill to family members across the country and the world, to even your neighbour just across the street.

Although as we enter the digital age, the sentiment of sending cards, especially at Christmas, is slowly beginning to decline with younger generations sending well-wishes to each other through social media or even through text messaging.

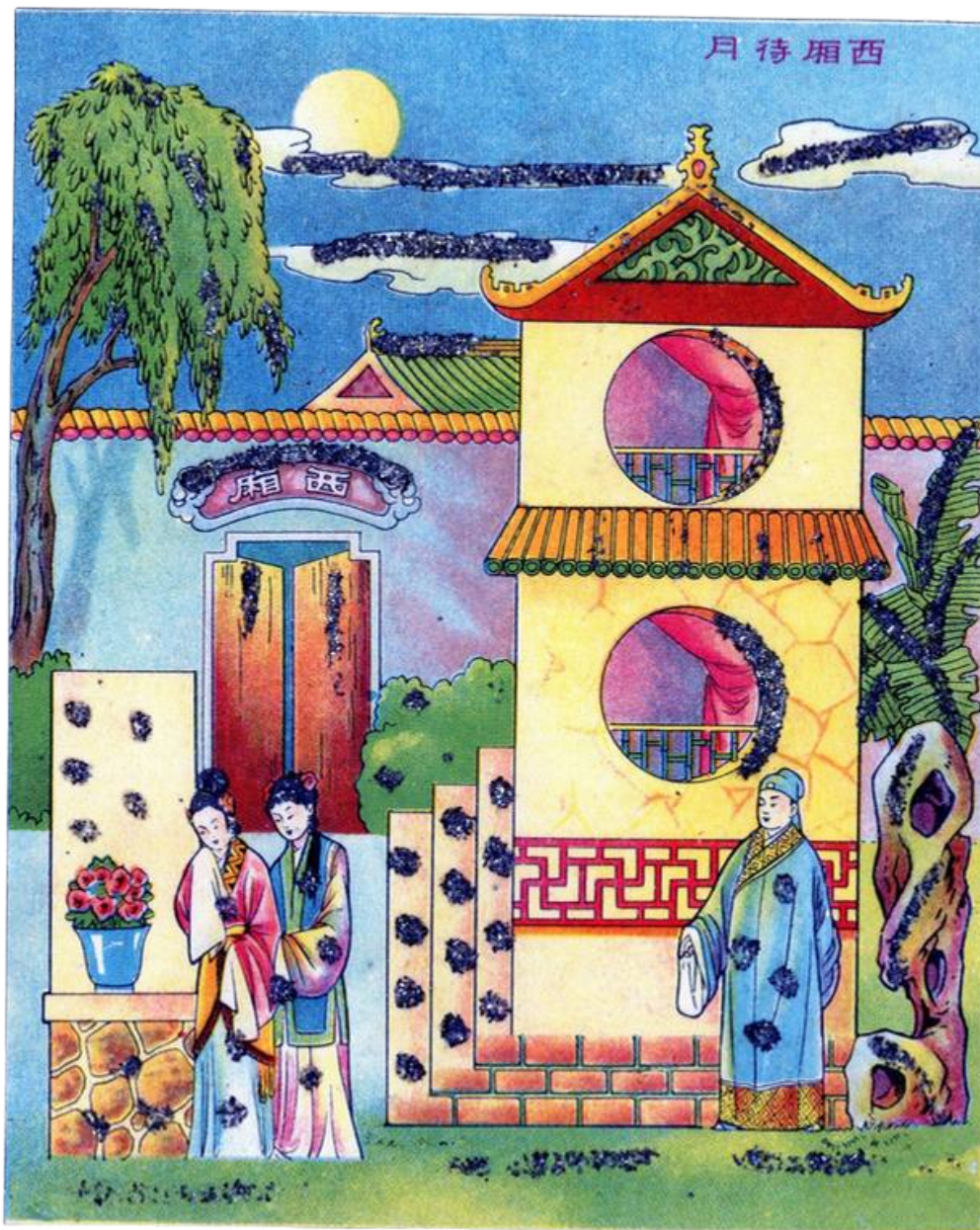


Space A



Photograph of Space A

Space A



Pop-up Christmas Card with a Chinese scene design

This card, though whilst does not feature a traditional Western Christmas scene, it has been carefully crafted to create a pop-up feature, with bright colours and just the right amount of glitter added to make this a thoughtful and memorable card.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2 – Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card & Glitter

Date: 1950s - 1987



Space A



Front of the card

A Winter Scene of a Stagecoach with Horses

This professionally created card features a simple yet charming design on the cover which has been embossed in gold on a cream background. When opened the inside is gold and the front design remains visible through the card.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/07 – Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

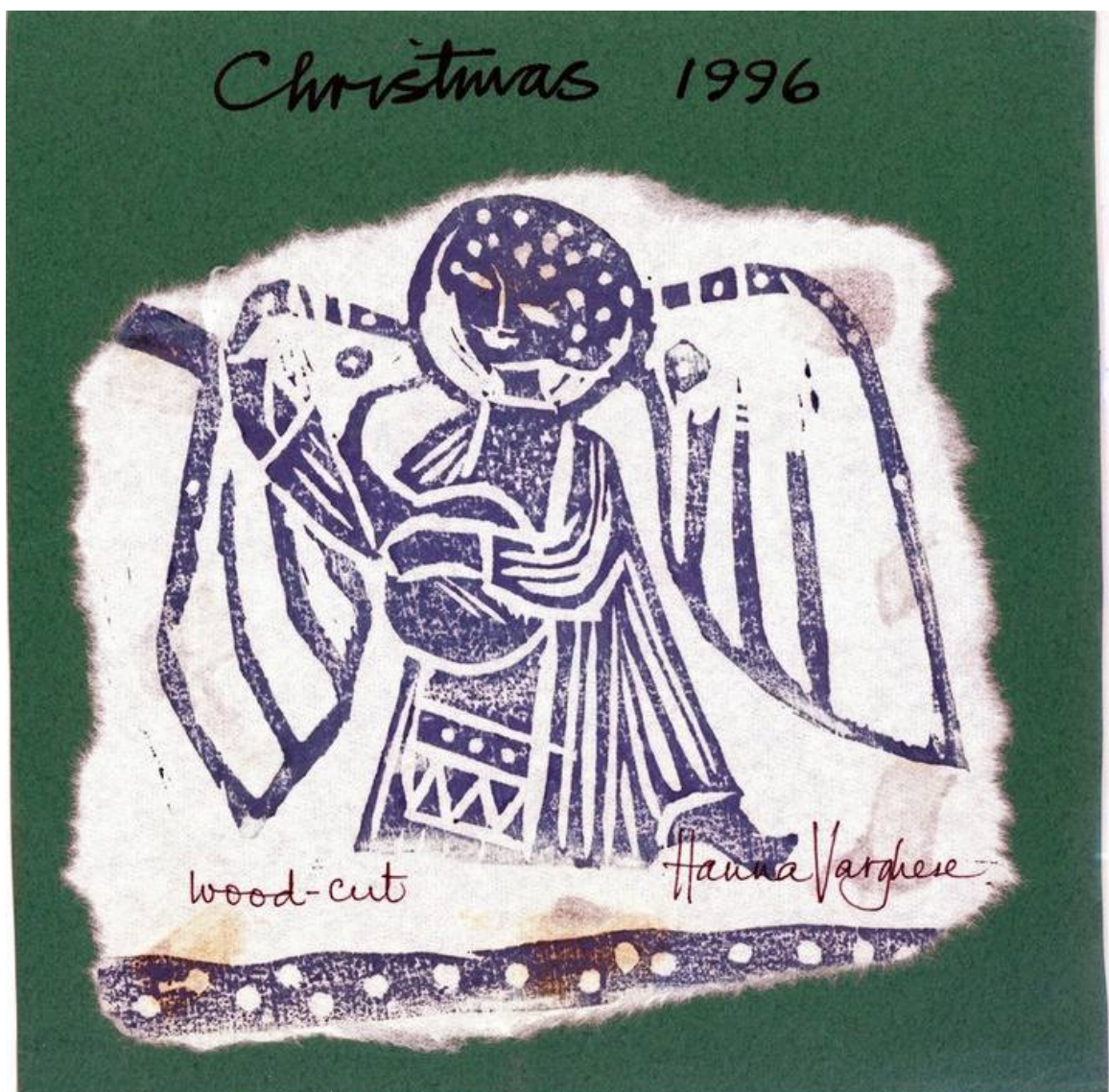
Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987



A view of the inside with the embossed design

Space A



An intricate design with a Christmas Angel

This hand-made card was made from an original woodcut design that featured an angel, which has then been printed on to textured paper and then mounted on sugar paper. This card is Copyright asserted by the artist, Hanna Varghese, who has also signed the card.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/3/1 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Textured paper & Sugar Paper

Date: 1996 - 1998



Space B



Photograph of Space B

Cabinet One

The family featured in the card, believed to be members of the Cole Family, appear to have already finished their food and have turned to face the viewer with their glasses raised and ready to toast to a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, as though the viewer is sitting at the head of the table with the family. Rather like any family gathering, featured at the table is a hearty meal and plenty to drink.

Either side of framed family setting, there are two different scenes also framed, that are depict two different acts of charity. As though to remind the viewer that whilst Christmas is a time for spending with the family, it is also a time to help those less fortunate and share the Christmas spirit of goodwill and togetherness.

Like any family gathering and Christmas 'get together', there is always room for chaos. A man can be seen keeping his attention on the rambunctious children in the background, though closer towards the viewer, a cheeky child has grabbed a glass and is having a large gulp of wine.



The first Christmas card, 1843, created by artist John Callcott Horsley (1817 - 1903) featuring three generations of the Cole Family who have enjoyed a hearty meal and are now toasting their drinks.

Cabinet Two



An eye-catching design featuring poinsettias with a red ribbon weaving in and out of the card.

This marvellous card captures the essence of Christmas with rich colours of red and green, blooming poinsettias, complete with both an illustration of a red ribbon and a real ribbon in a bow on the front. On the back of the card are signatures from twelve students.

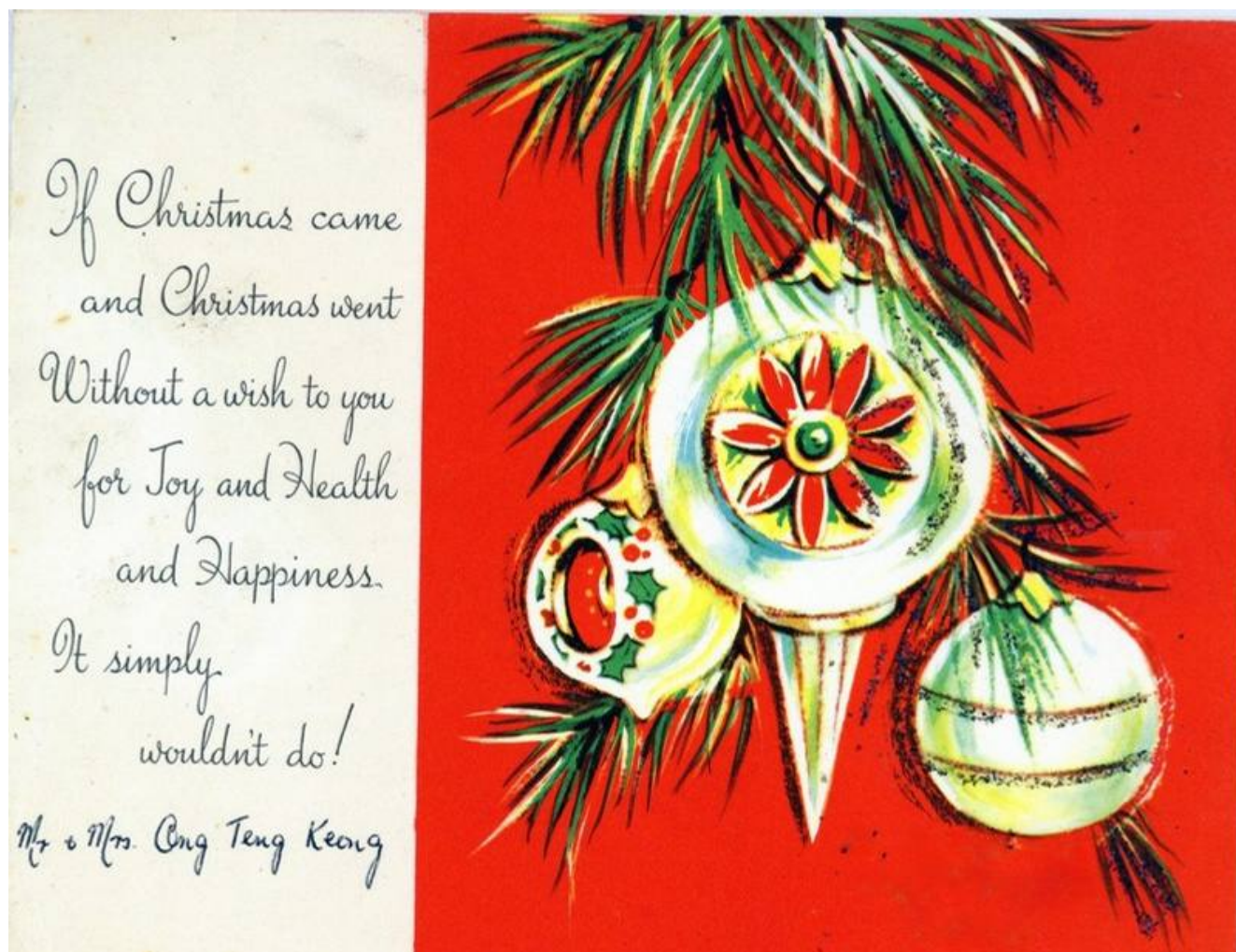
Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/5 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card & Ribbon

Date: 1950s - 1987



Cabinet Two



A Traditional Christmas scene of baubles hanging on a fir tree branch

Another design that captures the essence of Christmas with the use of colours and imagery, however this design is more subtle but still having a lasting impact.

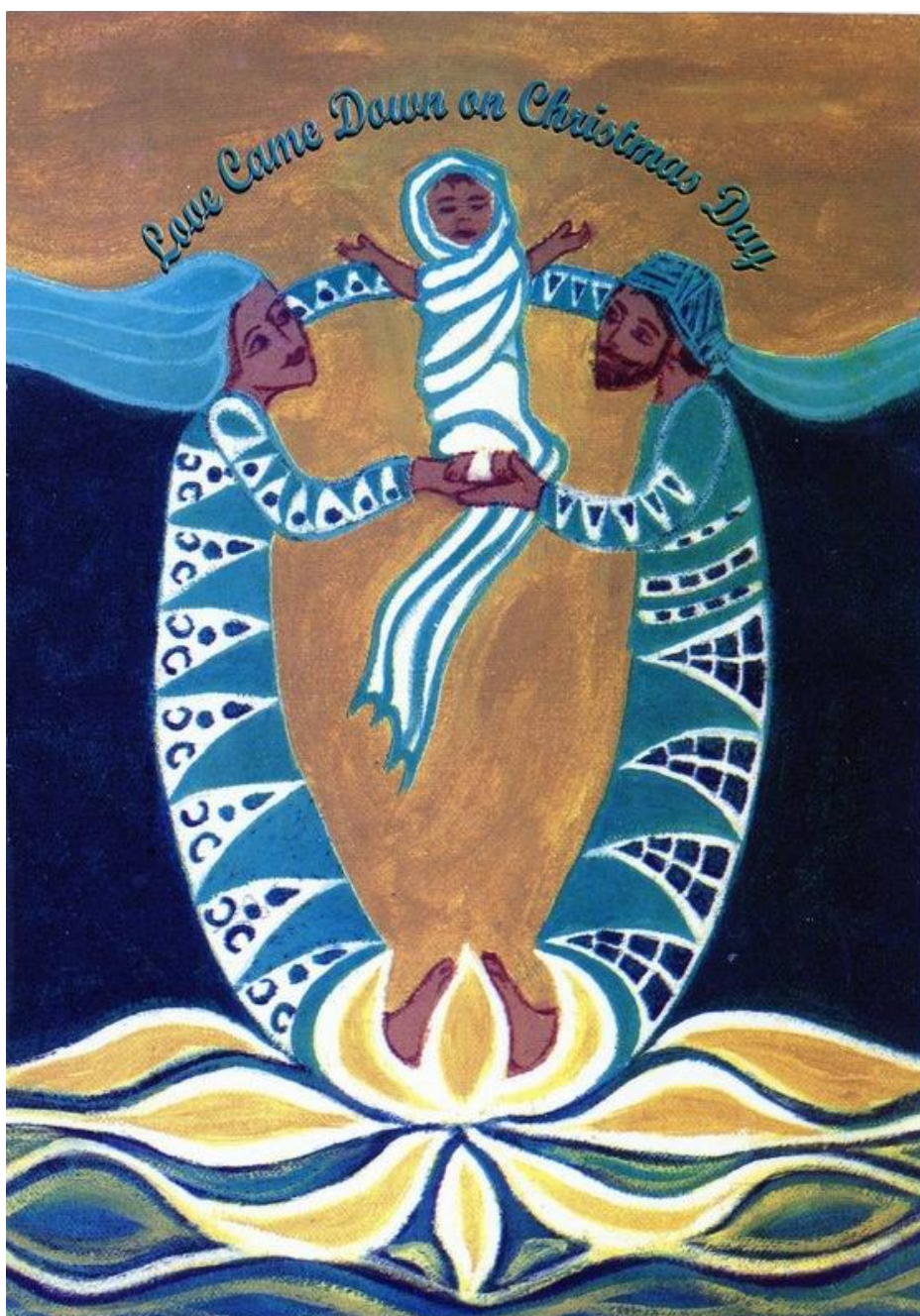
Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/9 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987



Cabinet Two



A Modern Nativity scene

A design stepping away from a traditional Christmas design and focusing on a religious element, with the heading above the illustration. 'Love came down on Christmas Day'. Inside the card, there is a stamped signature for the artist, Hanna-Cheriyen Varghese, and it has published by the Council of Churches of Malaysia.

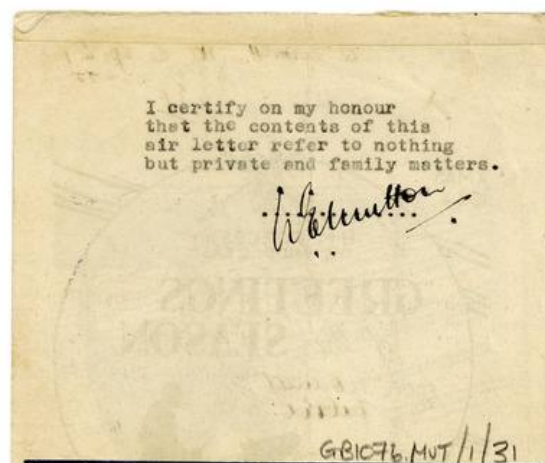
Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/2/3/3 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987



Cabinet Two



When folded, one side is an address to the recipient and the other is a declaration from the sender



A Wartime Christmas Message

A Christmas air letter addressed to Miss Eileen Wilson from Sgt. Norman Mutton with a 'greetings of the season' for Xmas 1944 message inside, from H.M Forces in the Middle East. The simple design of the letter folded within, the outside contains an address to the recipient and a declaration stating, 'I certify on my honour that the contents of this air letter refer to nothing but private and family matters'.

Collection: GB1076.MUT/1/31 - World War II Letters Collection

Material: Light card

Date: 1944



Cabinet Three



A Traditional Malaysian Scene

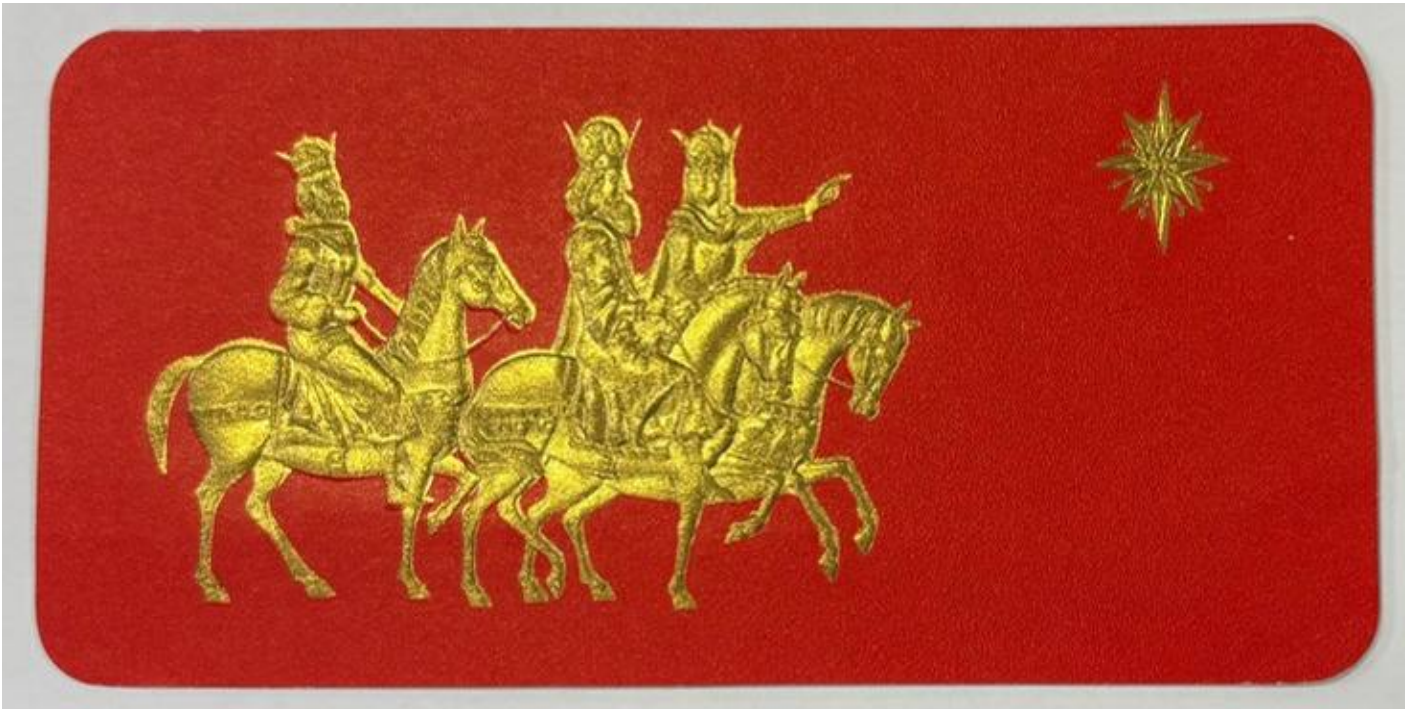
Unlike previous Christmas cards, which have featured seasonal drawings or images, this features an elaborate illustration of a traditional Malaysian scene with the message of a Merry Christmas.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/8 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987

Cabinet Three



Three Wise Men

Another religious based card, rich in the colour red with gold embossed design featuring the Three Wise Men pointing and heading towards the Star of Bethlehem. The prewritten message inside reads: "May the peace and joy of Christmas remain in your heart all year through". There is also a long written personal message from Soo Lau Curow in Thailand to Margaret .

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/10 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987

Cabinet Three



Front design of the card

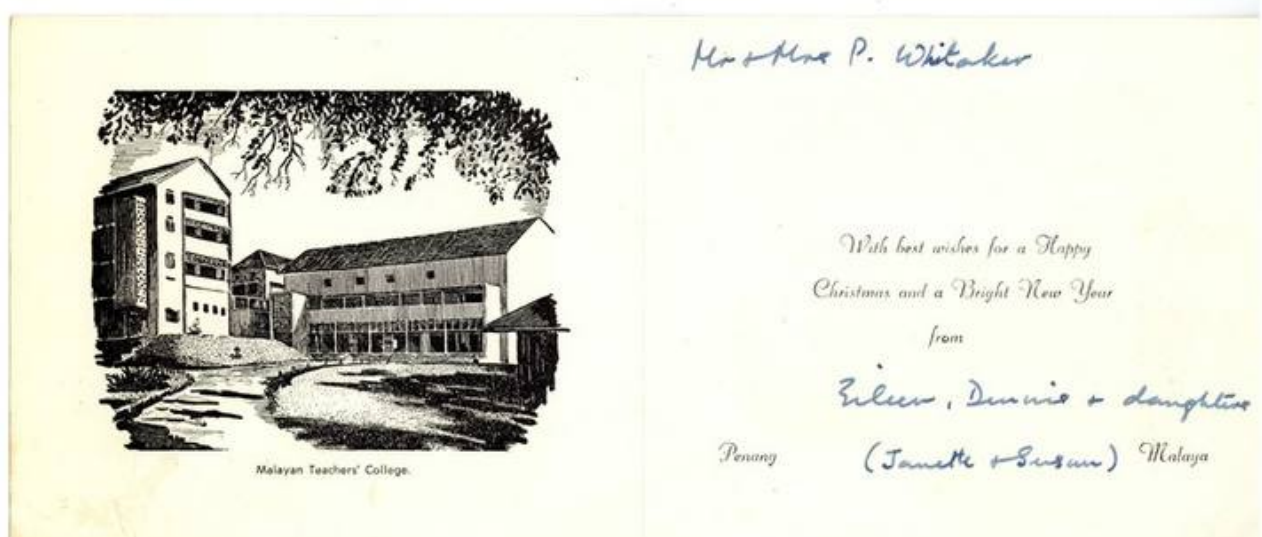
A greeting from the Collage

A Christmas greetings card bearing the crest of the Malayan Teachers' College, Penang, Malaya on the front and a detailed engraving of the College inside.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987



The inside of the card and the engraving of the college

Cabinet Three



A charming Christmas Lantern Card

A homemade Christmas card featuring a photograph of Christmas lanterns hanging on the branches of a fir tree. There is no prewritten message but there is a long-handwritten letter on the back to Miss Hodge.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2/15 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987

Cabinet Four



Front of the postcard

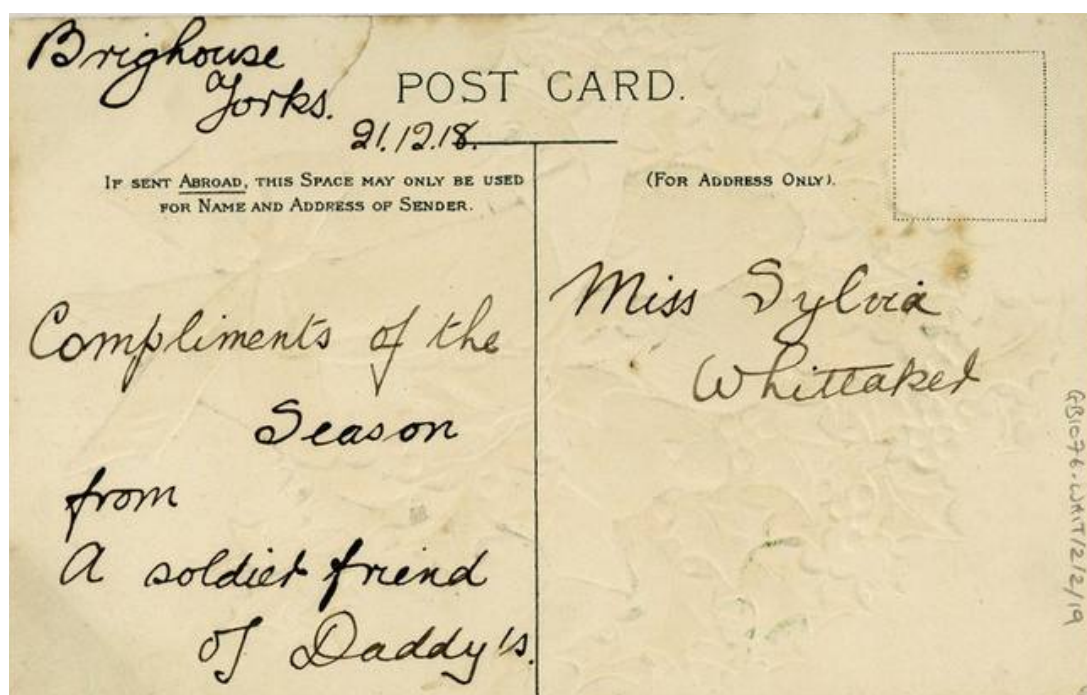
The Three Robins

Postcard for Sylvia (Sally) from "a soldier friend" of her father with compliments of the season. The colourful illustration on the front features three robins nestled in a parcel filled with holly leaves and berries

Collection: GB1076.WHIT/2/2/19 – Sally Whittaker's Collection

Material: Postcard

Date: 1918



The message written on the back

Cabinet Four

A Royal Flying Corps branded Christmas

A card for Sylvia [Sally] from her father whilst he was on active service, the front of the card has the RFC logo, whilst inside includes a black and white image of RFC planes and the message to Sylvia written in pencil.

Collection: GB1076.WHIT/2/2/9 - Sally Whittaker's Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1917



Front of the card



Inside of the card

Cabinet Four



Front of the card

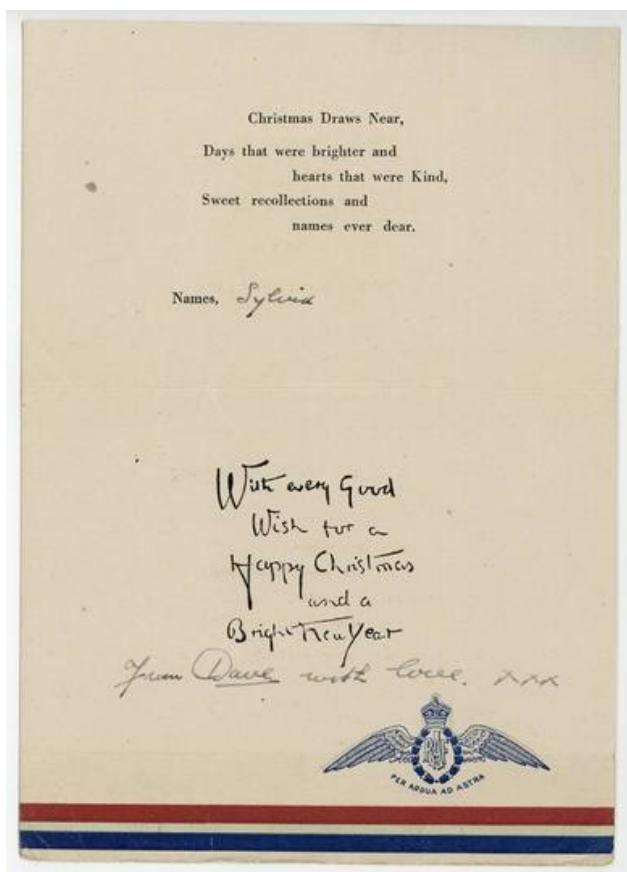
Greetings from India

A card for Sylvia [Sally] from her father whilst he was on active service in India. There is a pre-written message, 'Christmas Draws Near, Days that were brighter and hearts that were Kind, Sweet recollections and names ever dear'. There are handwritten messages in both ink and pencil inside.

Collection: GB1076.WHIT/2/2/55 - Sally Whittaker's Collection

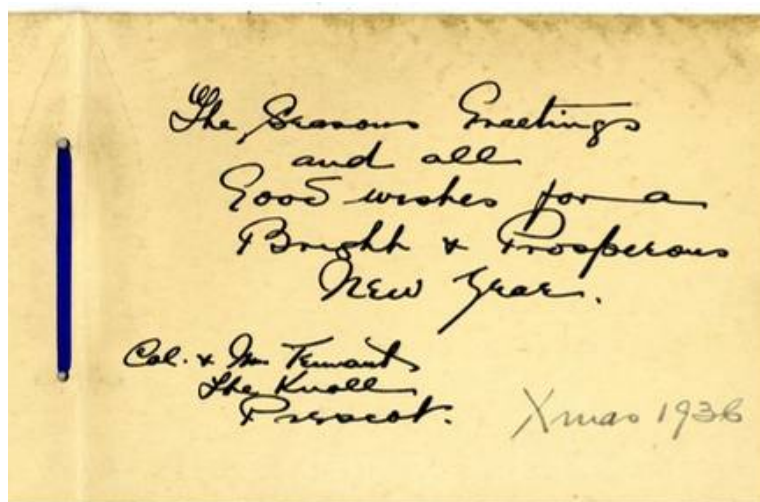
Material: Card

Date: 1940 - 1944



Inside of the card

Cabinet Four



Inside of the card

Prospect of Prescott

This greeting card has been bound with a royal blue ribbon, and whilst the seasonal message is written on the inside, the front shows a striking engraving of the South Prospect of Prescott in 1743.

Collection: GB1076.PTHC/3/2/15 – Prescott Records From Tickle, Hall & Cross

Material: Card and Ribbon

Date: 1936



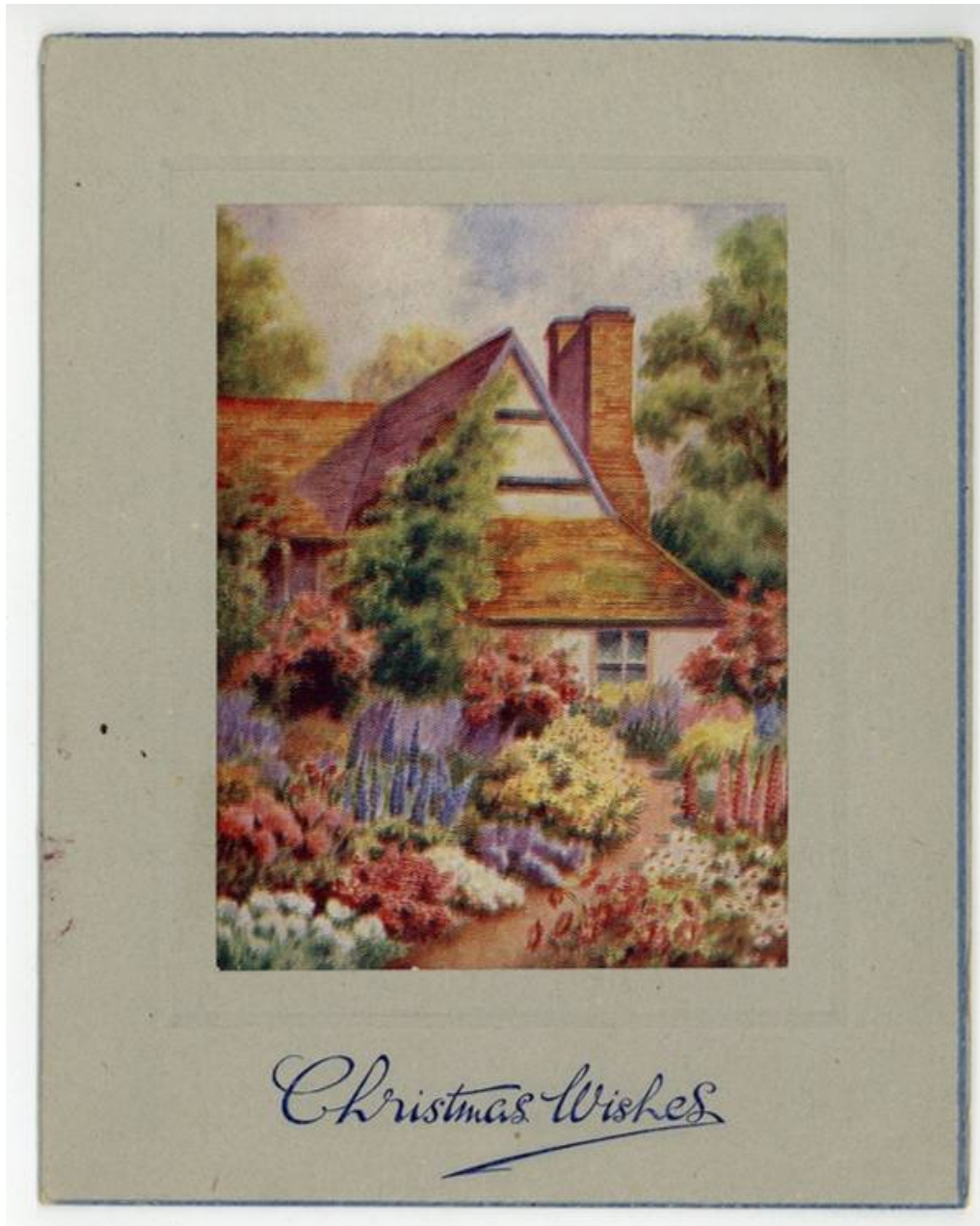
Front of the card

Space C



Photograph of Space C

Cabinet Five



Christmas Wishes

An unusual design for a Christmas card but featured on the front is an illustration of a cosy cottage nestled in a garden in full summer bloom. This was sent to Sylvia from her father.

Collection: GB1076.WHIT/2/2/34 – Sally Whittaker's Collection

Material: Card

Date: No date

Cabinet Five



The true gifts of Christmas: Peace, Joy and Love

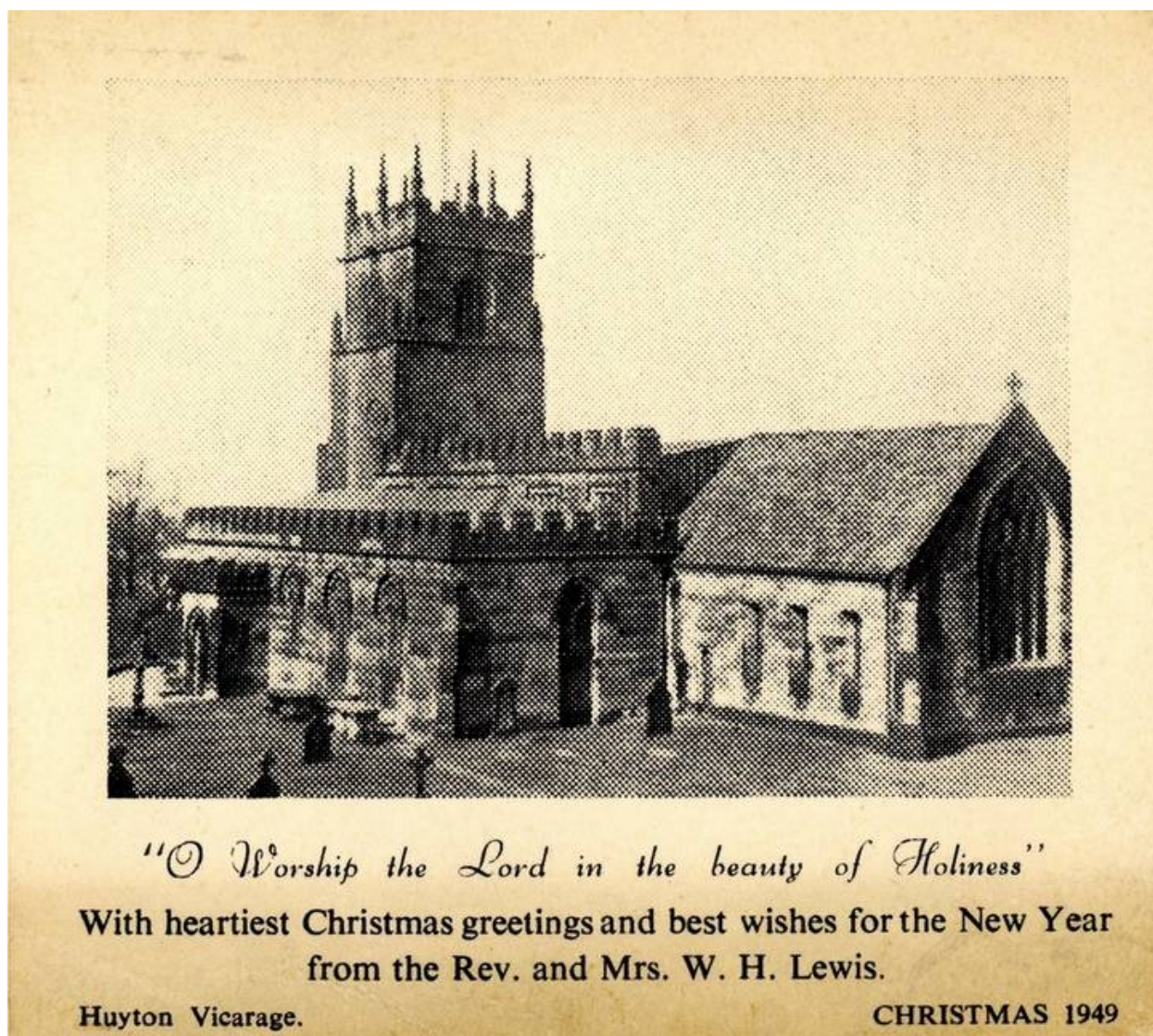
A simple yet charming design of an angel rendered in gold pen from Hanna and George to Margaret, with an inscription that reads, '*The true gifts of Christmas: Peace, Joy and Love*'. Copyright is asserted by the artist, Hanna Varghese, who has signed the piece. Inserted in the card is a colour photograph of three people sitting on a bench together.

Collection: GB1076.MMTC/2/1/3/4 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1998

Cabinet Five



Huyton Parish Church

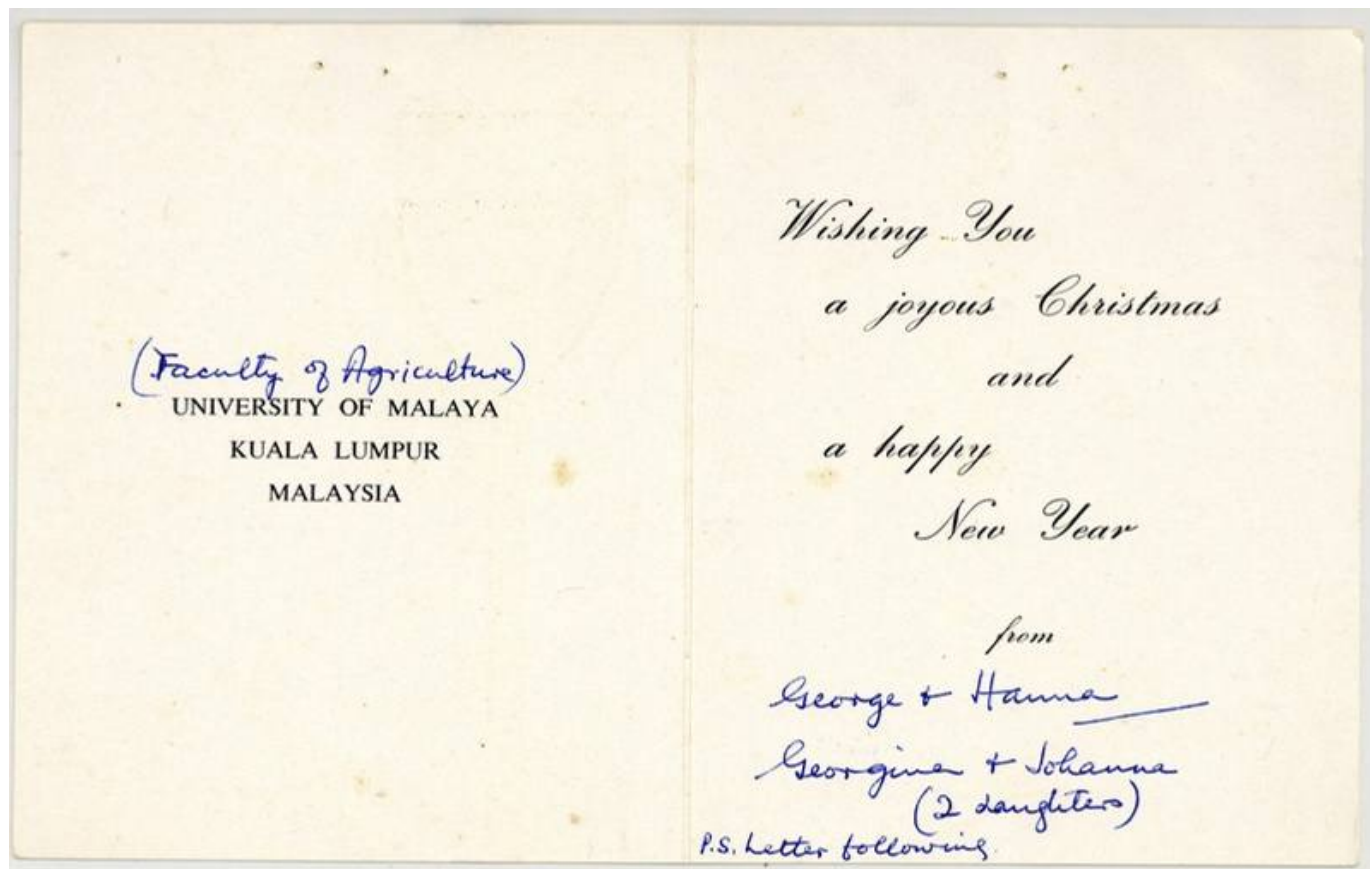
A small, printed card offering a Christmas greetings from the Rev. and Mrs W.H. Lewis of Huyton Vicarage. These cards would have been passed out to members of the congregation. There is a printed image of Huyton Parish Church featured.

Collection: GB1076.WHIT/2/2/56 - Sally Whittaker's Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1949

Cabinet Five



Inside of the card

A Christmas Message from the University of Malaya

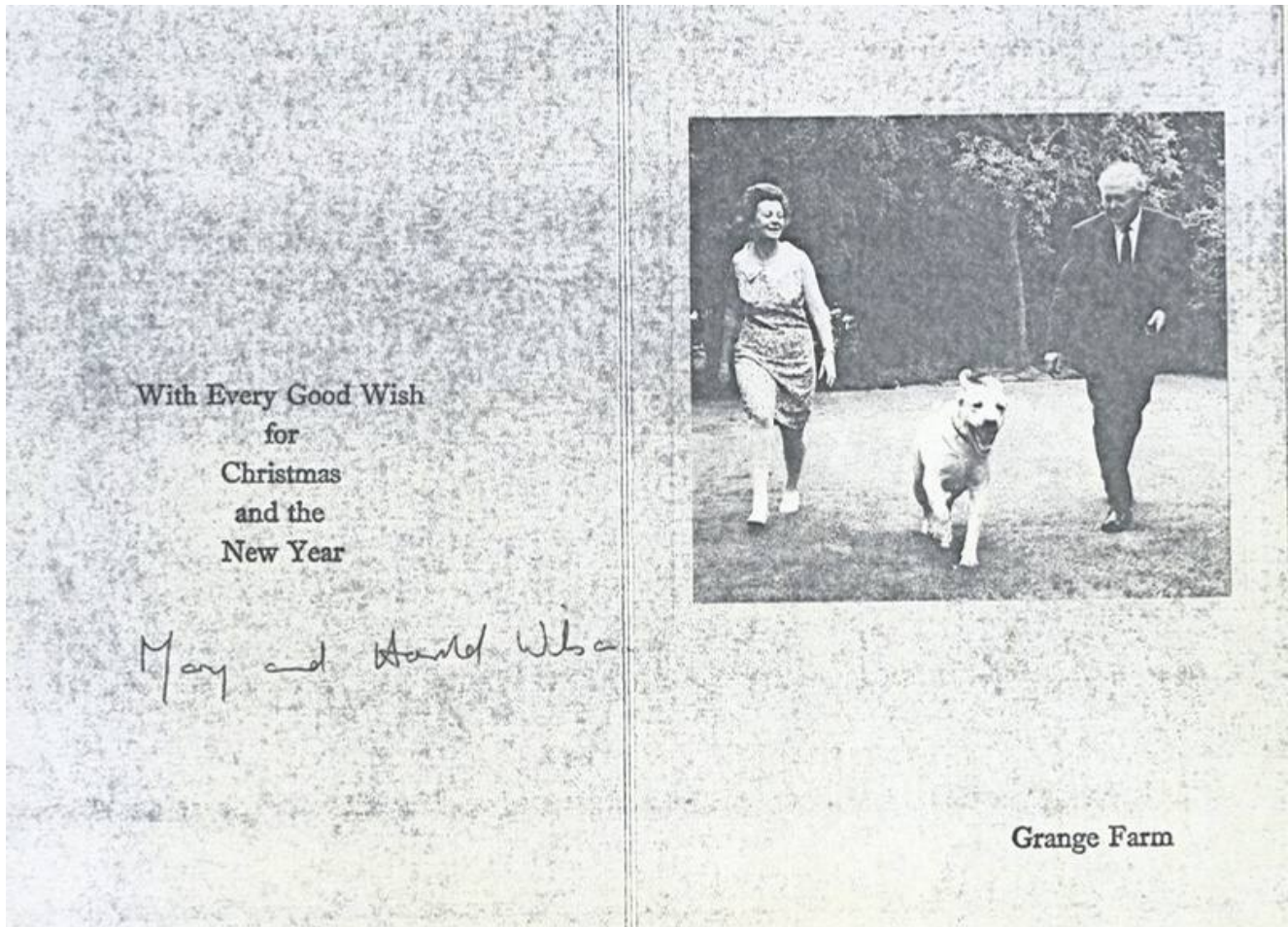
The front of this card bears the crest of the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Inside there is a brief message from George and Hanna and their two daughters, with a promise that a letter will be following.

Collection: GB1076.MTTC/2/1/2 - Malayan Teacher Training College Collection

Material: Card

Date: 1950s - 1987

Cabinet Six



A Former Prime Minister

A photostat of a Christmas card from Harold Wilson with his wife Mary, complete with a photograph of them with a Labrador at 'Grange Farm'.

Collection: GB1076.KELL/5/16 – Councillor Peter Kelly Collection

Material: Paper (Photostat)

Date: 1971

Cabinet Six



Ring out the old, Ring in the new...

A collection of unsent Happy Christmas messages to be sent from the Executive Committee of St Bartholomews Ward Labour Party, featuring a design with bells and holly with a limited use of any other colour except for red.

Collection: Z10 – Huyton Labour Party – St Bartholomew’s Ward

Material: Card

Date: No Date

Cabinet Six



Humphrey the Cat

Though not part of our collection, it would be a shame not to include another furry friend who was also a part of political Christmas Cards. Humphrey the cat was featured on the Cabinet office Christmas card twice in the 1990s

Collection: Not part of the collection

Material: Paper

Date: 1990s

Credits

Exhibition Space - Knowsley Archives Service at The ARK (Archive Resource for Knowsley) The Kirkby Centre – First Floor, Norwich Way, Kirkby, L32 8XY

Curated by - The team at Knowsley Archives Services

Knowsley Archives Service, based in The ARK: Archive Resource for Knowsley, is home to a wide range of resources that describe the heritage of the people and communities that make up the Borough of Knowsley.

Our Mission Statement is:

- To collect, preserve and organise archive materials relating to the people and places of Knowsley, creating a collective memory for the borough that is accessible for research and consultation, either physically or online through digital content and finding aids
- To encourage learning through engagement, offering support to individuals and groups as they explore the collections, enabling our communities to develop a sense of pride and place
- To promote Knowsley's rich heritage, sharing an understanding of the history of the communities that make up the borough of Knowsley

Knowsley Archives Service was awarded Accredited Archive Status by The National Archives in November 2017 and was retained in 2024