

Is it the beginning of the end for Christmas cards?

Necessary cost, or expendable luxury? DICK LUMSDEN predicts the demise of one of a festive tradition

It's a sobering thought that, in a little over five weeks time, Christmas will be over for another year.

No doubt many of you are fully aware of this of course, and are already well ahead with the planning. Presents will have been accumulating in your spare room for weeks now, snacks and nibbles will be stockpiling in your freezer and you've probably even considered trading in your Tesco vouchers so you can buy the Christmas booze.

Others, like me, will only start to think seriously about Christmas round about December 20 - if then!

It's a strange time, Christmas, especially in times of economic gloom. You get sucked into spending more money than you intended on things you don't need and then spend weeks feeling guilty and not daring to count up what you spent.

Don't get me wrong. I might be a tad slow at getting into the Christmas spirit, but when the times comes, I enjoy the traditions and I enjoy the collective feeling of contentment that hangs in the air for the few days immediately before and after.

But as I get older I seem to be becoming more and more cynical. And, especially this year, as we celebrate our fifth successive festive season under an economic black cloud, I'm very averse to wasting money.

I'm sorry to say it, but in my humble opinion, potentially the biggest waste of money this time each year is Christmas cards. I mean, honestly, what purpose do they serve except to help Royal Mail claw back some much-needed revenue?

And even if you are a Christmas traditionalist you can't defend them as being of religious significance... they have only been around since 1843, when the very first Christmas cards were sent by Sir Henry Cole, a businessman with more money than sense, who had them specially printed for friends and business associates to prove how well he was doing!

If you want to wish someone a happy Christmas then do it face to face, or pick up the phone and tell them. For those people that you haven't seen for years, what is the point of sending them a cheesy piece of paper with a trite verse inside and an illegible scrawl of a



NELLY CHRISTMAS: Model Nell McAndrew promoting Christmas card recycling - but is the writing on the wall for the festive greeting?

Photo: PA

the only person in the country that passionately hates the wall-hanging Christmas card holder which is continually falling off the wall and scattering cards all over the floor.

Mind you, I don't think I'll have to worry about them for much longer. I think the days of the Christmas card are numbered.

Think of it like this. Last year, we sent each other more than 678 million Christmas cards - that's an average of 14 cards for each and every adult over the age of 18.

Now. How many 18-25-year-olds do you ever see sending Christmas cards? Virtually none, I bet. Boyfriend/girlfriend maybe... possibly Mum and Dad... and that's about it. They are certainly not licking and sticking their quota. Blanket status updates on Facebook wishing everyone Happy Christmas or texting everyone in their phone

likely to send a cheesy Christmas email with a singing gnome (don't get me started on those...) or the dreaded "round robin" list of what the darling children have been up to all year.

As usual the people who send most of the cards are us - the older generations - and as we all get older there will be fewer and fewer of us around each Christmas from now.

Within a few years, the non-card senders will outnumber the card senders, and a whole industry will be on the brink of extinction.

For some families, sending out 100 cards is not unusual. Say they cost an average of 50p each, and they are all sent second class; that is an astonishing £80 added to the cost of Christmas - and it is a complete waste of money.

Within the next few weeks Royal Mail will release details of

fail, there is someone you forget to send a card to and inevitably, on Christmas Eve, the card they sent you drops on your mat, forcing you to rush out and post one first class so they at least get your belated best wishes before they go back to work in January.

With the cost of the card, plus first class post likely to be at 46p next year that is almost a whole English pound to embarrass yourself and advertise the fact that you totally forgot. Why do it?

For Christmas cards, I believe the writing is on the wall - and it isn't in beautiful script with a dusting of snow and holly berries.

Dick Lumsden is Managing Director of Owl Marketing Solutions, one of the few companies specialising in marketing and advertising to the 50+ group. If you have any views on this article, or are