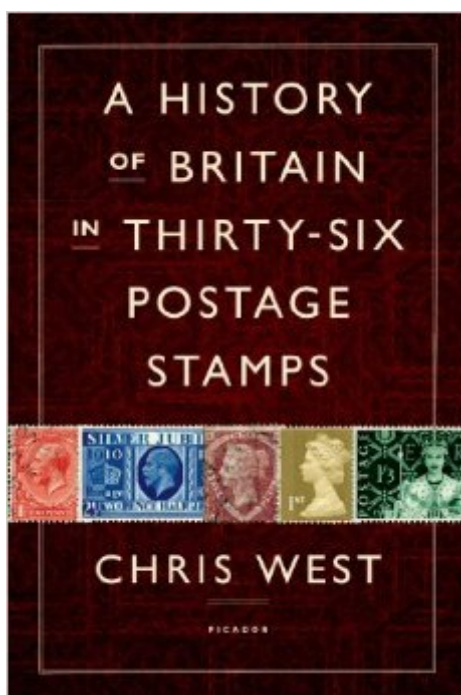


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A History Of Britain In Thirty-six Postage Stamps



Synopsis

Stamps tell a story—and Chris West's book is the unique, fascinating tale of Great Britain told through its stamps. Hailed by The Times of London as "a splendid reminder of the philatelic glories of the past," *A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps* tells the rich, layered, and breathtaking history of England through thirty-six of its fascinating, often beautiful, and sometimes eccentric postage stamps. West shows that stamps have always mirrored the events, attitudes, and styles of their time. Through them, one can glimpse the whole epic tale of an empire unfolding. From the famous Penny Black, printed soon after Queen Victoria's coronation, to the Victory! stamp of 1946, anticipating the struggle of postwar reconstruction—*A History of Britain in 36 Postage Stamps* is a hugely entertaining and idiosyncratic romp, told in Chris West's lively prose. On their own, stamps can be curiosities, even artistic marvels; in this book, stamps become a window into the larger sweep of history.

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Customer Reviews

Chris West incorporates not only history but culture and politics into a snappy survey of three dozen British stamps. These offer a sociable and social tour around the United Kingdom, since 1840. With (once-?) typical English efficiency, the Penny Post came about nearly the same moment a new queen ascended the throne. Rowland Hill, a liberal reformer eager to spread literacy and offer a cheap method of sending letters which did not rely on the fluctuating fees demanded from the recipient from the postmaster, pitched his proposal. Overhead then as now proved low compared to distance; the expense lay in overheads. These would be reduced by a standard fee, a

non-negotiable surcharge. Hill's three reasons convinced the Royal Post Office. It might lose money at first due to the loss of postmasters' income, but the cost would soon convince many more to use a fixed-rate service. In turn, businesses would save. Finally, families separated by industrialization and urbanization could stay in touch. They did. The first issue, the Penny Black with the young Victoria in profile, sold 68 million in its year of production. Its successor, the Penny Red, over the next forty years sold 20 billion; starting in 1881, the Lilac sold 33 billion. In London by 1857, twelve daily deliveries allowed rapid exchanges of letters or postcards, and that city counted for a third of British correspondence. Most chapters, however, depart from a stamp itself to summon up its era or a dramatic event. For instance, the Irish famine pairs with a depiction of a Penny Red postmarked there.

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