

## Have Xmas cards had their day?

How many Christmas cards did you get? Just two came our way, which is two more than usual. Neither arrived by mail.

Their delivery “by person” was fortuitous, because I was wondering what to write about the festive season, an obligation I feel each year.

Debating anything momentous would have risked another of my brother’s helpful feedback comments, like “a bit dry balls, Jimbo”.

Christmas cards are poignant. There was a time when they had a major role in a household’s external relations. Mum knew exactly how things stood with our wider family and community connections from the array of cards she despatched and what came back.

For weeks before the big day, cards dominated the mantelpiece and hung from lines of string above it.

There would be dozens of those innocuous bits of cardboard, each with a colourful exterior design wrapping an inner message in scrawled ink code signifying social approval or subtle judgement.

There was a saying applied to those who transgressed some norm: “Well, they’re off the Christmas card list.”

The list fluctuated according to how Mum felt about those who were on it. They were off it with the slash of her fountain pen if the slightest slight was detected, the worst being not sending us a Christmas card at all. Only death excused that.

One of our two cards this year was hand-delivered by an old friend who’d moved from the neighbourhood and lost touch because of Covid’s destructive impact on visiting.

The other arrived with a cousin who came for dinner, his shy proffering of an envelope with our names on it accompanied by a explanation about being “old-fashioned”.

They were touching gestures that went straight on to the mantelpiece, where there’s no risk of them being forgotten because both frequently flutter to the floor at the slightest breeze through an open door. They’re too few to warrant a string.

If all this suggests the days of mass mail-outs are gone, be assured they haven't. I saw proof earlier this month while passing a street postbox being emptied. Through the open door I saw something extraordinary.

The box was a third filled with dozens of identical white envelopes, all bearing the same stamp. Had to be Xmas cards. So, there's at least one home in our neighbourhood where tradition lives on.

What's replaced the custom everywhere else? I can only guess it has something to do with the digital age and social websites like Facebook, but that doesn't explain the generation of baby-boomers and an even older strata who have refused to be computerised.

Are those people still doing cards? If I was the enterprising journalist I once prided myself in being, I'd ask some shops. But again, online shopping may be the modern source of Xmas cards, so any inquiry would be complicated.

And does it matter? I don't think so, personally. The whole Xmas card thing was a curious phenomenon that had its day. If I want to know how the rest of the Tucker clan is doing I need only await cousin Mary's annual email.

Mary keeps up with all the family goss and takes pleasure in assembling it into a single short story that is fact-heavy but light on punctuation, grammar and visual accessibility.

That's a fancy way of saying it comes in one paragraph, a mass of type that's off-putting for a grammar-nazi like me. I shudder at the sight of it, but plough through out of a sense of duty. At least Mary has bothered.

Lin and my families are patchy with communication, which is probably not unusual. A few rellies other than Mary keep in sporadic touch, including my sole-surviving aunt, now in her 90s but adept at email. Others might as well be dead for all we hear from them.

My hope is the newest generation will perform better. Our grandchildren have been organised into a safe-ish online presence that does such engaging things as send us emojis.

Once this year, a grandson "accidentally" messaged me his latest essay for school. It was so good I made the mistake of editing and returning it with a screed of advice.

I haven't heard back. I suspect I may be off his list. It feels as judgemental as it must have seemed to Tucker friends and relatives when Mum ex-communicated them.