

Long known as the 'robin redbreast' our familiar robin gave its name to the first postmen who wore red-jackets and became known as 'robins'.

Some suggest this is the reason why robins appear on Christmas cards, but there is a link with Christmas which pre-dates Victorian postmen.

Robins and Christmas

Legend has it that the robin's redbreast gives it a direct link to Christianity. One fable suggests that when the baby Jesus was in his manger in the stable, the fire which had been lit to keep him warm started to blaze up very strongly. A brown robin, noticing that Mary had been distracted by the inn-keeper's wife, placed himself between the fire and the face of baby Jesus. The robin fluffed out its feathers to protect the baby, but in so-doing its breast was scorched by the fire. This redness was then passed onto future generations of robins.

Read our guide to some of the best [weird and wonderful Christmas traditions from around the world](#).

Other robin associations

Another story suggests that a robin pulled a thorn from the crown of Christ whilst he was on the cross and that it was Christ's blood that created the bird's red breast.

The robin is one of three British birds which have red in their plumage and have an association with resurrection, the other two are the swallow and goldfinch. The robin is commemorated on Glasgow's coat of arms as 'the bird that never flew'.

It is said that St Surf of Kinross was befriended by a robin and when he prayed the robin would come and sit on his head or shoulder. Some of his disciples became jealous of the attention given to the robin and killed the bird but one of his followers, Kentigern, who became St Mungo founder of Glasgow Cathedral in the sixth century, prayed over the bird and restored it to life.

We all know that as soon as we take a spade out of the potting shed we are likely to see a robin perched on the handle. The robin will be looking for earthworms and grubs where we dig but this habit has also lent the robin to a whole range of slightly sinister, funereal connections.

In 'Babes in the Wood' we have two children who died from the cold:

No burial this pretty pair

From any man receives

*Till robin redbreast piously
Covers them with leaves.*

This type of association is probably the reason why a visit from a robin to a sick person might be said to foretell death. There are certainly many stories of relationships between robins and sick people, Wordsworth referred a great many times to the robin in his poetry and on one occasion, when his sister Dorothy was ill, he noted a robin which sang to her and fanned her face "in a manner most touching".

Our affection for the robin was cemented in 1960 when it was voted our national bird. Christmas robins will forever be commemorated on Christmas cards and I hope will always be a common sight in our gardens.