



# TOM PHILLIPS



## THE POSTCARD CENTURY

### 2000 Cards and Their Messages

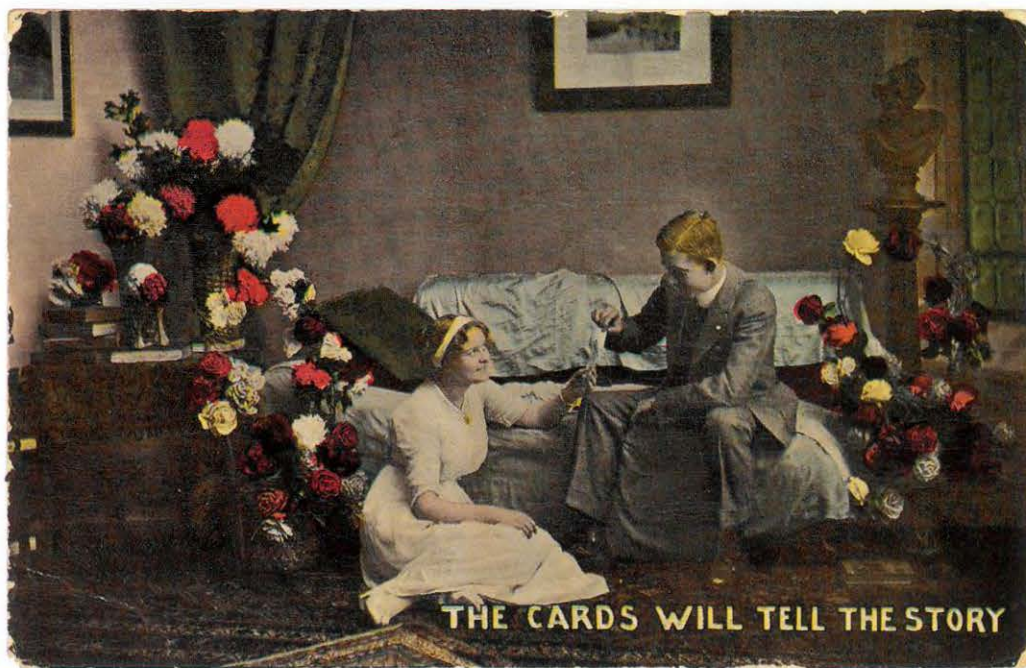
*The Postcard Century* shows and tells the story of the last hundred years in its own words and images. Two thousand picture postcards and their messages give a living account of the daily existence of people and a vivid glimpse of what mattered to them, pleased them, shocked or amused them via the cards they chose to send.

We bump into the high and the mighty, the low and the worthy and all degrees in between, and overhear them talking of the events, characters and places of the 20th century. From saucy seaside jokes, the tragedies of war and the hazards of travel to the caprices of life and work, all life is here.

Each year includes views of Piccadilly Circus and the New York city skyline. Though centred on the UK and the USA, cards come from every corner of the world, from Los Angeles to Beijing, from Antarctica to Alaska. Several themes emerge strongly, most notably those which evolved with the century, for example transport, the cinema, the role of women, fashion and holidays. Changes in the English language as used informally by Britons and Americans are powerfully registered.

The artist and writer Tom Phillips provides a commentary on the visual material, giving a perceptive and thoughtful context for the messages. Here is a unique glimpse into the hearts and minds of the people who lived through the most turbulent century in our history.

See two thousand pictures and listen to the words of two thousand people from 1900 to 1999.

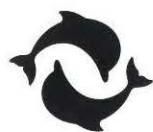




THE  
POSTCARD  
CENTURY  
2000 CARDS AND THEIR MESSAGES

TOM PHILLIPS

Bib. 600006234  
Item 100008590  
Barcode 000010009340  
Call no. NC1872  
P44  
2000  
Date 14 October 2022



Thames & Hudson



*Rima started opening, one after another, the drawers of an oak filing cabinet, 'You seem to surround yourself only with the past. Furniture, vases, first editions I can understand. But postcards! why postcards?'*

*'No you've misunderstood. It's newness that I collect', said Vellinger, 'objects that were when they were made or issued bang up to date, the latest novelty. Postcards always celebrate topicality, events and things of the moment, and that's why they whisk you back in time so perfectly. Nothing is more nostalgic than the modernity of the past.'*

HWK Collam  
(from *Come Autumn Hand*, Chapter XI)

To Hansjörg Mayer for over thirty years of support & encouragement & ever more valued friendship.

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher as a paperback is sold subject to the condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including these words being imposed on a subsequent purchaser.

First published in the United Kingdom in 2000 by  
Thames & Hudson Ltd, 181A High Holborn, London WC1V 7QX

First published in the United States of America in 2000 by  
Thames & Hudson Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York 10110

© 2000 text and photographs Tom Phillips and HaNaPa Productions.

All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 00-101171

ISBN 0-500-97590-6

Designed by Tom Phillips  
Production Supervision by Narisa Chakrabongse, Hansjörg Mayer,  
Paisarn Piamattawat and Suparat Sudcharoen

Printed and bound in Thailand by Amarin Printing and Publishing (Plc) Co., Ltd.





November 28th 1918. Glamrhyd in Venice to Miss Liza Davy in Newquay,  
*Hope you are having a good time at New Quay now. It's grand out here. You  
 will miss the Flying men now the war is over. No more walks.*

Fig. 1

## PREFACE

The Postcard Century is not a random title. Firstly this book celebrates a century throughout whose entire length the postcard has been in popular and current use. It may well happen the twentieth will be the last as well as the first century of which that might be said. It is hard to imagine that anyone will be sending (let alone collecting and delivering) so physical an object in 2099.

Secondly it tells a story (not of course the only story) of those hundred years both in pictures and in the words that, in so many different hands, accompany them.

It can be seen as a composite illustrated diary in which nearly two thousand people have made their entries. Each card and each message is both a captive and a witness of its time and, as with any true diarist has no benefit of hindsight.

Any other hunter gatherer of cards with different preferences and interests (not to speak of prejudices) and different luck in his or her quest would have assembled quite another sort of journal.

The cards I have searched for are those that have in their pictures or messages (and ideally in both) some special flavour of their time. High history vies with everyday pleasures and griefs and there are glimpses of all kinds of lives and situations.

The book is more an account of people than of events. It bumps into history as a ball on a pin-table hits or misses, by hazard. The march of the great moments of the century is sometimes heard far off and at others is documented by eye witnesses. There is no equivalence of occasion and person; great happenings are often recounted by humble bystanders and trivial occurrences related by the privileged.

This is a selection made from over ten thousand cards I have collected for the purpose: those ten thousand were selected from what must be going on for a million I have searched through.

The part played by chance in such an enterprise is both annoying and beneficial. As an example, a long sought-after postcard relating to the Gulf War arrived after I had finished the body of the work. Prefaces and Introductions are invariably written last and therefore it appears here as Fig. 50.





November 27th 1944. Mrs Herman Kemer in NY to Miss Elizabeth Curnan in Saratoga Springs, *Thanks for your card. Would be interested in 15 new cards from you, for the same number from me. Or - could you send me 1 used foreign card for 2 new cards (though not foreign). Either exchange would be acceptable. Thanks! Rose H Kemer.* Does this card indicate Mrs Kemer's advanced tastes or is it just a free hotel card used to inaugurate the real business? Card collecting from its boomtime at the start of the century was now very much a minority sport. It took art quite a long time to catch up with the classic purity of this view of the Hotel Phillips. The uniquely American alchemy by which a black & white photograph becomes this crystalline abstraction has no British counterpart.

Fig. 2

## INTRODUCTION

Like many artists I have always collected, or rather amassed, postcards. For quite a lot of my career I have used them as source material for painting. Those I did not use grew into piles and found their way into boxes and drawers, waiting a turn that would never come. About twenty years ago I looked at this accumulation and played with the idea of making a diary with a postcard representing every day of the century. A quick look through the first box or two convinced me of the folly of this since, as I should have guessed, most cards are sent in the holiday months which would have made November or February quite a struggle.

Ten years later the millennium started beckoning on the horizon. It seemed to ask the practitioner in every field 'What is your millennium project?' and straight the answer came: to revive my initial scheme (it seems to have been called at one time, in Churchillian fashion, *A Postcard History of the English Speaking Peoples in the Twentieth Century*) in some more practicable form. I looked again through the cards I had, and was surprised by how far they left me even from the starting line. They had been acquired with no regard to their messages, and many were unused.

Yet the project haunted me and sometime in 1996 I set about the task in earnest. Like so many enterprises lightly undertaken it turned into an obsession; what had been escapade turned into quest, leading me into a nether territory that I had scarcely imagined.

I have spent the last three years or so in one of the most eccentric worlds I have encountered. It would take a Dickens both to describe its locations and to characterise its denizens.

Most of the cards shown in these pages were bought at Postcard Fairs (an excellent cameo of such an event is given by a correspondent in 73r). These occur weekly in various municipal centres, sports facilities, church halls, stadia and racecourses. This alone gives one a rigorous course of study in civic architecture of the fifties and sixties, as well as an intimate acquaintance with their car parking arrangements and the characteristically ethnic nature of their refreshment.

At monthly intervals a substantial fair takes place in London in the brutalist interior of the Royal National Hotel and larger fairs are organised throughout the year, some lasting two or three days, in Leeds or Nottingham or York and among the neo-fascist stands of Twickenham Rugby Ground. Every pursuit has its Lower Depths and in the world of postcard collecting the bottommost circle is found every Saturday in the dank concrete bunker called Charing Cross Collector's Market (also inhabited by coin and stamp dealers as well as the pushers of that latest of collectibles the phone card). This is strictly for recidivists.

It would be inaccurate to say that all postcard fairs take place in bleak wasteland, far from real life and ordinary amenities: there are of course exceptions. The Bexhill event is held in the famous De La Warr Pavilion (see 76e), one of England's few Modernist architectural masterpieces, and London's chief annual mart (The Picture Postcard Show) has as its venue the well-proportioned, and centrally situated, Horticultural Hall.

Such fairs take the form of any other market with rows of stalls (referred to as tables) on either side of gangways inviting a snake-like progress through the lines. Each dealer's table is laden with long coffin-like boxes in which are filed, under various headings, his stock. Some dealers keep their better cards in unwieldy albums with multi-



October 10th 1973. Adrian Henri in Los Angeles to TP in London SE5, *an example of infinite regression - a man buying a postcard of a man buying a postcard of a man etc. etc. Thanks for the catalogue & the invites. I'm just here for a week. love Adrian. I'm not sure this really is a man, but the small child seems to have already found a card to his (or her) taste.*

Fig. 3



pocketed plastic leaves. Since new material of any quality is hard to come by (and tends to disappear before ever reaching the filing boxes) a regular visitor who lacks a plan of action might easily find himself ploughing through the identical cards he looked at a month before.

Although I tend to use 'he' and 'him' as a convention to avoid 'he or she' etc. there are women dealers and women collectors, though they are vastly outnumbered by men just as the young are outnumbered by the elderly. It is a hobby that, like all hobbies, desperately tries to attract the young. One suspects however that, as with bowls, it is eternally serviced and sustained by the over sixties who come to it after retirement.

The majority of those who attend postcard fairs are collectors of topographical cards, usually of their own locality. Others search out a particular subject. These can be broad categories like Advertising or fields so narrow as to make it unlikely that any new acquisition could be made. One collector might ask for postcards featuring corkscrews, another goats. Once his obsession has become known to the traders he only has to be seen approaching to be told whether they have a newly acquired card, put aside for him, featuring Teddy Bears or Wurlitzers or Snowmen. If not he is hailed with words along the lines of 'Nothing for you today, Ron'.

There is certainly no category so obscure that it has no collector nor any topic which, once hunted for, does not yield in the end a surprising quantity of related items. The man who collects goat cards for example has over seven thousand of them and, looking through his collection, one soon comes to believe that few cards are produced which do not include some appearance, however oblique, of a goat... one peers at a picture of a stolid alderman and yes, there on a badge on his regalia, in a small quartering, is a goat. But obsessions are obsessions and the specialist in question does indeed have a tuft of white beard. He tours the world with his wife who collects postcards relating to tea. Cards representing goats drinking tea pose a problem.

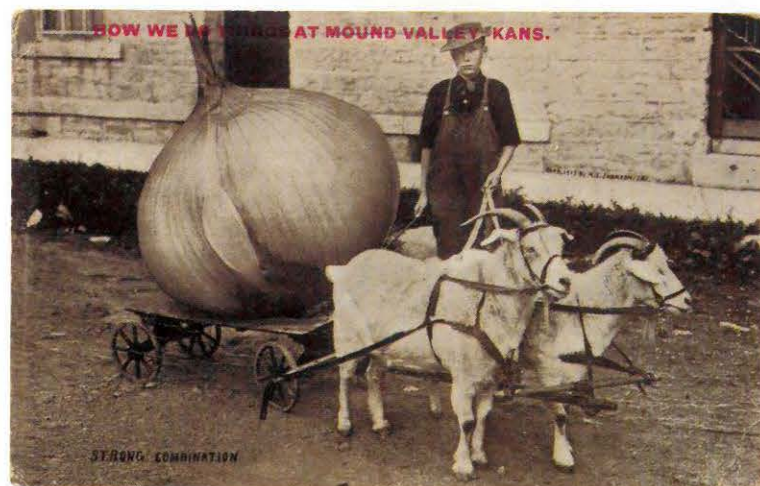
All human activities soon develop their own hierarchies and the runners, who comb street markets and charity shops for postcards and bring their finds to recognised dealers, represent the lower ranks. The marshals of the field are those who only have gleaming albums with acid free mounts and whose very demeanour freezes away the more humble punter (who is unlikely to find a postcard in their immaculately ordered stock under £20 or \$30). They produce glossy catalogues illustrated in colour in which each card is described with an expertise comparable to that of a dealer in antiquarian books. By and large these fine and rarefied wares were not for me since almost all their chosen items were pristine and unsullied by the degradation of postal use. Only once, from a sumptuous American catalogue worthy of a dealer in Fabergé eggs, did I buy such a card for this book (58a) which, being modern and used and having a 'small bruise at one corner', was priced at a modest \$30. Its rarity and relevance and charm won the day.

These are the final arbiters of value and the words Postcard Collecting do not belong in their literature, for they are Deltiologists. This term was invented in America to hoist a hobby from the junkshop dust into a vocation and a science. It is an innocent enough invention confected from the Greek and as legitimate in the end as philately, since the ancient Greeks had neither stamps nor postcards. But it has stayed resolutely on the US side of the Atlantic. I use it in this book to designate to what one might call heavy-duty experts and expertise: there are as yet no English enthusiasts who refer to their pastime as deltiology. The more obviously derived French term cartophilie (a bastard etymology) has failed even to cross the channel.



May 25th 1905. GL to Pearl Agnew in Durban, Natal (a punctilious girl who writes its date of receipt, 16th June), so glad to have your letter & cards. Playing here this week. Hope you are well & everything going straight. This is the type of card (even if not a Real Photo) that most of the throng at a Postcard Fair are seeking, i.e. their own locality in days gone by. Here, a stone's throw from where I write is the Grand Theatre, Peckham, a casualty no doubt of the cinema's growth. Two people are just entering for the matinée of the Grand Christmas Pantomime, presumably late in 1904. Much though I was pleased to find this card I would have been more excited to find one of the Odeon and the Labour Exchange that replaced it; or the huge Job Centre that replaced both (to celebrate British Film Year) in 1985.

Fig. 4



August 23rd 1915. Anon in Angola, Kansas (still a mighty small place on the map) to Luke Williams in Baltimore, Yesterday I went to Oklahoma. It was a delightful drive... Today is the first time it has rained since I am away from home. The fabled goat collector would have no trouble filing this, but there are probably onion collectors and farmhand collectors too. Kansas collectors however should beware. The card was published in Waupun, Wisconsin by the enterprising Stanley Johnston to be overprinted with the name in red of any place that would buy it. This kind of card, called in the trade an Exaggeration card, is peculiar to the USA.

Fig. 5





August 22nd 1950. Agnes in London to NJ Hart Esq., W.S.F. Congress c/o Town Hall, Folkestone, Dear Norman. Not knowing O'Leary's address I have written asking Keith to send it to you (O'Leary is not an F.U. member) Thompson was in yesterday He is coming to your Conference & will pay you the lot when he arrives. Best success to you. This card issued by the Federal Union used a cartoon from the St Louis Post Despatch proposing a United Europe. On the back a quotation from Victor Hugo says he represents 'a party which does not yet exist. This party will make the twentieth century. There will issue from it first the United States of Europe...'. 1950 was early days to be reviving Hugo's idea though, in the month this was posted, Churchill had called for a European Army. The Common Market was still four years away and Britain's entry in to the EEC was in 1973. Such a card could be any price from 5p to £5. I found it in a 20p box at the Annual PTA Fair.

Fig. 6



July 7th 1992. Dear Mum & Dad, write Pete & Tom from Besançon, Thanks for the phone call. It was nice to hear from you. Glad... you're enjoying the summer weather over in Britain. This morning it seems that the lorry drivers have won and maybe they'll start going back to work. Tom finishes today for the school holidays... Take care. Victor Hugo would have loved the epic possibilities of the film as first demonstrated long after his death by his neighbours the Lumière Brothers (who were to Cinema what the Wright Brothers were to Aviation). The card came from a box marked 'Moderns: all 5p' at the same annual Fair at the Horticultural Hall.

Fig. 7

Whatever name it cares to give itself it is an amiable world and full of characters some larger and some smaller than life. It has its buccaneers and mountebanks and rogues, its badgers, moles and Mr Toads. There is enough of a Mafia to make it intriguing and a degree of honesty, trust and fair dealing that recalls some earlier age of innocence. There is a sense of camaraderie that is infectious, perhaps born from its character as a travelling circus. No matter how distant the fair you attend a core of the usual suspects, both of dealers and collectors, will be there as if some caravansera of estate cars moves eternally through the night to pitch up with their piles of narrow boxes among the local traders of Penzance or Galashiels.

It would be quite wrong to imagine the punters to be a mere gathering of anoraks. Nerds there are of course, as may be found on the fringes of any pursuit, yet, amid the leaning searchers panhandling in the ranks, one spots the immaculately coiffured grey head of a famous operatic conductor, or the ascetically shaven skull of one of the world's leading modern art entrepreneurs.

Some traders are not by inclination part of this shifting circus but can only be found in their shops, or (visitors by appointment only) in some upstairs room in a dingy house in a road off a road that is itself difficult to find. Once again Dickens or Balzac would have to be invoked to provide the full flavour. However there are few kinds of shopping that bring forth more conversation and hospitality, for most who deal privately are themselves addicts supporting a habit via a little commerce. They invariably have their own specialised personal collections of unpurchasable treasures, as well as a fund of information always given freely.

Shops entirely dedicated to postcards are a rarity. Philately tends to be the subsidising merchandise that allows postcards to be indulged in. Here, as one can never do at fairs, one may sit down and go through a stock at leisure. One shop I have visited regularly has provided not only the characteristically congenial atmosphere but cups of tea and an ashtray and, over a period of two years or so I have been through that dealer's entire stock, from Advertising and Ayrshire to Zanzibar and Zoology, a whole wallful of mysteriously numbered boxes.

I have pursued these same trails through American fairs from a baking marquee in Orlando to a somewhat sinister hotel in New York, and have walked the long gauntlet of street markets in Paris, Milan and Berlin. Wherever my proper profession has taken me I have sought out the local representative of this far flung freemasonry, and been guided to the haunts of by now familiar transaction. Indeed I have made it a condition of giving a lecture or participating in a conference that there would be some possibility of following the postcard trail. I volunteered for instance to speak at my exhibition in San Marcos, Texas, knowing that I was armed with the address of a nearby dealer.

To my dismay he said he would be unavailable that evening. His stock was all packed up, he explained, for he was the guest dealer at the deltiological society in another part of town. Yet, immediately, he rang back to suggest that I be his guest at their soirée. This involved me and my own long suffering host in a backstreet adventure trying to find the local Veterans' and Ex Servicemen's Club (a venue that had an English enough ring to it) and, thereafter, a very odd three hours which included an immensely specialised lecture on vending machine returns at the World Columbian Exposition. The talk was illustrated with slides of cards virtually indistinguishable from one another (to the uninitiated). Yet I got to see the dealer's stock and found the Private Breger card I had been looking for (44s).



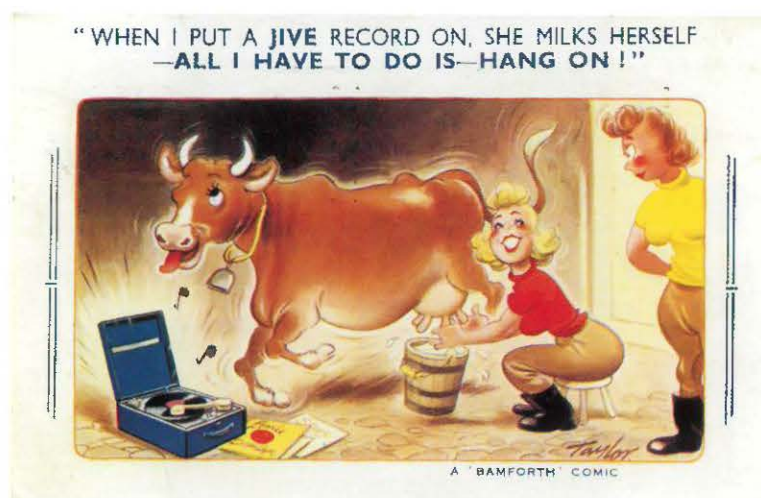
Such intriguing forays lead one into parts of towns that are authentically about their own business where one might still receive that welcome to a stranger that is denied to tourists. How else would I have got to see a whole street in St Louis whose trees were inhabited by dozens of pale home-made Halloween ghosts. The postcard is the alibi; the quest is all. Where else might one expect to find the earliest known card sent from Eastbourne (to Vienna, in 1895, see Fig 23) than in an austere private dealer's apartment in Milan? That I was there at all and had pounced on the card with glee (even though it was highly and correctly priced by a knowledgeable expert) meant that I had become, if only for a while, a postcard twitcher.

The other route to sought-after cards was via the auction house. By and large this is more precarious since, unless one actually attends the auction, one does not see the goods in question. What was an intriguingly murky reproduction in a catalogue can spring to disappointing and expensive life when it arrives on the mat. British auctions take place in inconvenient places like Bournemouth, Nottingham, Croydon and Cirencester. Auctioneers' catalogues, even those of the most diligent, do not feel it part of a card's description to indicate whether it has a message of any interest, unless it had been sent from the Titanic as the ship went down (a use which would for once increase rather than diminish its value). Nonetheless I have made one or two good guesses and got rich returns, as in the case of a large carton classified as 'Saucy postcards, postally used, mostly 60's & 70's', which turned out to contain a sequence running from 1951 to 1977 from (and occasionally to) Fred & Jean who year by undaunted year savour the dubious delights of various holiday camps (Fig. 8). Actually attending auctions and their viewings involves an acquaintance with a whole new set of all too likely locations (disused church, theatre bar etc.) but there, peering through the boxes and albums, or bidding in the room, are all the faces you have come to know.

Having, by getting my numbers confused, travelled all the way to Cirencester to buy the wrong card of the Titanic (later swapped for a better one, see 12a) I decided to stick to the postal end of bidding. Some postal auctions are so tiny that there are scarcely fifty lots. A regular treat is the arrival from America of Barr's Postcard News, a newspaper-style gathering of mini-auctions accompanied by coarse-screened black and white (mostly black) illustrations. Although the pages are enlivened with excellent articles from the likes of Lewis Baer and Roy Nuhn, the meat of the matter is the listings of the largely part-time dealers. The style of the paper retains a homespun American look so unreconstructedly old-fashioned that you could mistake it for a catalogue of agricultural machinery from the twenties.

Ring up people in remote parts of America after midnight English time and suddenly to be in part of a room with children, a distant ballgame on the TV and the noise of dinner plates being put away was a never failing delight. Telephoning from so far away gave me a sort of status in itself as I heard Elmer or Chuck say, 'Doris, it's a guy from London, England!' to his wife. It was by this means I got hold of a batch of cards sent home from Europe by Max Church in World War II. The sequence gives a unique perspective on that experience, followed by a moving peacetime coda, a card whose short message could be expanded into a novel (47r). They were offered to me (as a result of attempting to buy something of the same type) by one who styled himself, very much in the character of that periodical, Old Mr Postcard.

I am too unpractised a cybnaut to take full advantage of the internet's various buying stations and as yet have only successfully managed a single purchase (albeit from Australia). Perhaps I have been



June 22nd 1960. Fred & Jean in Weymouth to Mr E Crook in Sunbury on Thames. One of their cheerier bulletins from a Holiday Camp, *Dear Dad, Just to say we are having a much better time now. We have made friends with a couple of Londoners & they are real cards. Lots of love.* The image comes from the late fifties. The disc on the Dansette (?) portable record player is, judging from the sleeve shown, a skiffle number performed by Lonnie Donegan who played and sang with Chris Barber's band, to whose music I also jived in a Greenwich dance hall in 1956.

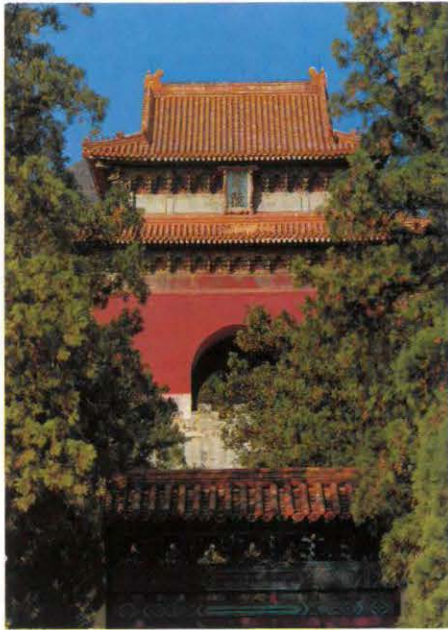
Fig. 8



July 1st 1945. Max Church on service in Weimar has appropriated some German propaganda cards (see 45a) and sends one to his father in Detroit. This is no 264 of the daily cards he has sent home. The War is over, but not his duties, *Hi Dad, I went on our trash truck to the dump today. I saw something I won't forget for some time. There were crowds of people there & when the truck stopped they would all rush aboard & grab the bread out of the garbage, then they go through the trash & pick out the cigarette butts & other things, Max.* The picture by favoured war artist Schnürpel shows an infantry grouping at Sebastopol.

Fig. 9





25th March 1984. Janet & John in Peking to Lady SH in Pulborough, *A good start to the holiday by being hi-jacked! In your papers perhaps? terrific excitement at our end of the world because of tricky political situation - Red China - Free China HK. Off we went to Taiwan, where we were surrounded by soldiers, police, ambulances, arc-lights, the lot. for 8 hours - not entirely pleasant but the chap who wanted to blow us up was arrested so all was well... we missed over a day of our Peking tour as we had to return to HK. Then all passengers sitting near the chap had to give statements (that included us) - what a palaver. Now we are enjoying the tour & hope to see the terracotta warriors of Xian. Do hope your barking nephew is giving you no trouble...* Did the Wright Brothers dream of a flight to Peking or imagine a hi-jack? A card from a box marked 'Foreign, used, 5p'.

Fig. 10



June 9th 1909. Mr & Mrs A in Dayton, Ohio to Harold P Sloeman in Chicago, *How would this do instead of a pony? Wilbur Wright was back in America by the time this was posted from the brothers' home town. In a month Bleriot would fly the Channel. It needed their triumph in France (see 08a) for the Wright Brothers to become news in their own country. J B Miller & Sons published this card sometime after that event but still described the Wright Flyer as an air ship. Sketchy though it was the Wrights' first plane was built with aesthetics very much in mind.*

Fig. 11

spoilt by all the added intrigue and interest that various human encounters have given me.

Luckily journals like Barr's make less of a distinction between old cards and those produced since World War II. The paucity of material from recent days made me more reliant on friends as time marched towards the present. The most recent years of all had of course hardly come on to the market except in lots found at Oxfam and various charities. Only a few categories have seeped through the dyke that protects the worshipful old from the flood of the modern. Royalty, Holiday Camps, Aviation and 'TV related', now feature in the selections of some quite staid dealers. The low value (5p - 20p) put on modern cards of most types, especially when used, still tends to make them unprofitable to deal in.

Two or three friends helped me enormously by letting me have all the cards they had ever received. Many others either supplied odd cards they had found lying around, or persuaded friends of theirs to surrender their accumulations. One or two scoured boot sales and market stalls for me wherever they were. The list of such enablers, supporters, scouts and foragers is long and they are incompletely listed and inadequately thanked as a legion d'honneur under Acknowledgements. For myself it became a no-holds-barred campaign of vigilance. When visiting the homes of friends, or their places of employment, no pinned up card in works canteen or bar was safe from my predatory gaze.

## THE MYTH OF THE GOLDEN AGE

There is a generally held belief in postcard circles that cards ceased to be of interest sometime around 1940 or even earlier. This of course is a slowly moving frontier and has crept begrudgingly towards the fifties even during the period of my search.

The mythical Golden Age has stayed where it is, finishing around 1920. A Silver Age of adjustable length now can be discerned trailing after it like a comet's tail.

American collectors are more elastic, perhaps because their sense of history is more compressed. US publishers kept to the original size for a longer period (into the seventies and beyond) than their British counterparts, who moved to the larger and now universal continental size (the 4" x 6" card that you now see in most racks). British postcard traders, however, are more reluctant to accommodate in their conveniently sized filing boxes any intruders, however interesting, even though some of such cards are by now half a century old.

This is what, in part, led to the difficulty of finding later material, a dilemma that put the canons of deltiology in question. In one sense, and not unwittingly, this book is an attack on the tenets of a faith, a polemic against the way the postcard is seen and understood by those who claim to have its welfare most at heart.

What I hope these pages prove is that the postcard is seamlessly interesting from the beginning of the century to its end. In all its history it has defined life rather than merely mirrored it, giving a more human picture of the world than any other medium. Postcards are crammed with random people, dressed as they really were at the time and behaving with that authentic inconsequentiality that makes everyday life so difficult to fake.

If one were seeking the vernacular aesthetic of a period the postcard is where you will find it. Here the world documents itself in terms of the way it wishes to be seen. Because people vote for it with their



small change its vision dare not risk losing the endorsement of the public in general. It is the least elitist form of artefact.

Somewhere along the line nostalgia conditions the market, though it is a dying generation whose memories now reach back to the so called Golden Age. Nostalgia, while seeming to be a virtue of postcards, is in fact their worst enemy. Postcards have always, as one of their main functions, celebrated the new. What we look at and think quaint, be it car or shop-front or skyscraper was at its appearance on a card the very latest thing. What you see in these pages is to a great extent a series of Latest Things, from Bleriot to the first moonwalker and from the original Paris Metro to Eurostar. The people on cards are wearing what is newly fashionable. In their homes, at leisure among modern furniture, they are using, or listening to or watching the latest device.

This much of postcard collecting is governed by the Nostalgic Fallacy so well described by Collam in the quotation that heads this introduction, 'Nothing is more nostalgic than the modernity of the past'. Collam's hero, the arch aesthete Vellinger, goes on to describe how, in looking at postcards, one 'must perform the continuous feat of seeing this urgent newness in the older pictures whilst imagining the future quaintness of present scenes. In this balancing act is the rich experience of a perpetual present and an eternal time gone by. Every card we look at can be in the same instant new and old'.

Though written in the forties this suggests a way of seeing that would give equal value to cards of all periods. It is an act of the imagination to see the views of modern Bromley (in Fig 13) as part of the remembrance of things past. It is also a way of keeping young in one's mind. Curiously enough the card, posted in 1988, already shows in the old-style parked taxi the first signs of maturity.

A visual conundrum is presented by retrospective cards, i.e. reprints in modern format of old images. They are almost entirely banished from this book. Paradoxically, by negating their original texture and characteristic feel, their publishers have by making them new, robbed them of their original modernity. From this dilemma came one of the agonising problems of assembling this book, for it is ridiculously easy to get a new image of Marilyn Monroe or Elvis Presley and extremely difficult to find one posted when they were still alive. Old photos of the Beatles are reprinted by the million yet the flavour of their up to dateness is only captured by a card like 63a with its message that would now be impossible to write except to someone on Mars, 'Have you heard their records?'.

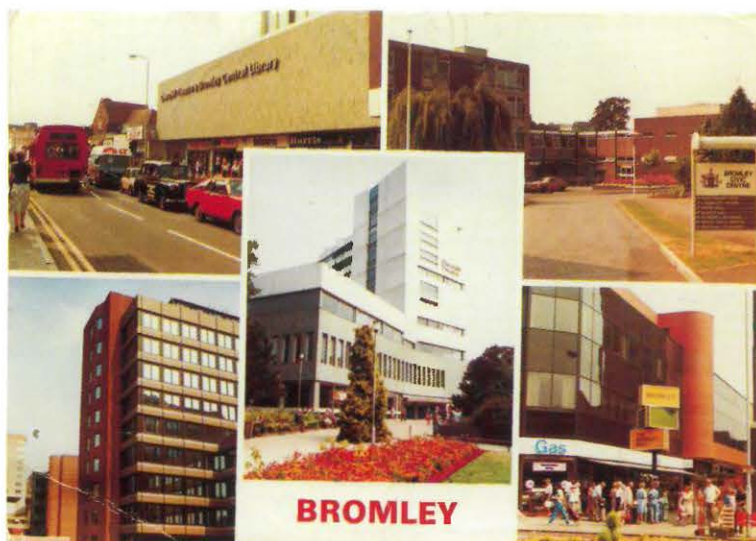
A similar problem hovers over current views which so often try to capture an unspoilt corner of a village or a landscape uninvaded by present day machinery. This is the quest of the picturesque, another enemy of the postcard. Worship of it (the error of the Heritage industry) encourages a failure of nerve, the assumption that we can no longer do things well. The picturesque assassinates the present with the past.

Printing techniques date very quickly. One by one they fall out of use and it is thereby relatively easy to identify a period. This fact can add layers of absurdity to Olde Worlde images in which people dress in past costume and walk about (in Williamsburg etc., see 83h). In no card does the postcard technique look so much at odds with the subject, announcing it as doubly fake. It cannot be long (and there are already intimations) before colour printing achieves the resolution of those black and white photographic cards which can be examined for further detail under a magnifying glass. This will establish a new realism to replace the succession of realisms that have already been



October 3rd 1904. Dear Mother writes L.E. to Mrs Morton, also in Eastbourne, Please will you send me my knife in the case as soon as you can. I am just going out for a walk. With best love. We must assume the knife and the walk are not related. The performance of photography was now less complicated and these paddlers, candidly snapped, seem oblivious of the camera. An eternity of seaside photos is born.

Fig. 12



March 23rd 1988. To David (a charity figure who tried in the eighties to get into the Guinness Book of Records for the largest collection of postcards) in Luton, Dear David. This is where I live (Bromley). It's a very nice place. Love again from the Old Granny. If the granny really is old then she has some flexibility of mind, for she sees Bromley's latest additions as part of its being a nice place. The entrance top right to the Civic Centre reminds me of the windswept path to many a postcard fair.

Fig. 13





Filey Edwardian Festival - 28th June to 6th July.

Photograph by Max Payne ©

July 10th 1997. Anita Gwynne in Sheffield enters the Evian competition affixing the necessary coupons and giving her answer to the quiz question, Water. She chooses a card sold in aid of a hospice, one of a series, and sends it to Plymouth. There is no fakery here but the pitfalls of the new revisiting the old are well illustrated since the attempt to look Edwardian is thwarted by the newer technology used. A real Edwardian of course, after the initial shock of the printing method, would soon point out anomalies of style in dress and deportment, as in the man in this group. One glance at the cut of his jacket, the hang of his trousers, the wearing of a sleeveless pullover with a blazer, the knot of the tie and its clashing colour would have him arrested as an alien time traveller. Ironically the card was printed by ETW Dennis in Scarborough who were printing postcards a hundred years before and whose heyday was in the era being here genially but unrigorously imitated.

Fig. 14



September 8th 1953. Les & Hilda in Chippenham to Kate Sinfield in Sleyning, Just a card until we get home to let you know that we arrived safely in Eric's car & quite a good journey down. Weather is mixed here it is fine this morning & we are going into Calne as we have not been there before. Last night we went to Bingo at the village hall & Barbara won a prize a set of baking tins our turn on Saturday we hope. John & I went to football at S on Wednesday & enjoyed the game. Eric went to see a friend of his at Melksham. Well all the best for now...

Fig. 15

accepted. Just as we can learn to see the newness of the objects and prospects in old cards we can stretch the mind to see as 'realistic' the antiquated printing of previous decades. Realism can then be appreciated for what it is, an aspect of fashion and style.

The postcard world owes a special debt to those in the early years of the century who collected modern cards and kept them in good condition for another generation to enjoy. The assertive modernity and the realism of their images as well as the advanced design of their graphics was precisely what seemed to make them most worth preserving. Thousands of messages on the backs of such cards ('another one for your collection' or 'here's the latest card for you album') testify to the early collecting craze. The best way of repaying this debt is to value the cards of today with the same zeal.

## BORING POSTCARDS

A book entitled Boring Postcards (Martin Parr/Phaidon Press) recently revisited (perhaps unknowingly) a territory explored in the seventies in an exhibition, Wish You Were Here. The catalogue of this show included Richard Morphet's magisterial essay on the postcard aesthetic to which I later replied with a further text called The Postcard Vision. Parr's book might just as well have been called Gripping Postcards in that it reproduced many of the seminal images that so influenced artists at the time and which contained many of the seeds of minimalism, installation and performance art. Pop art had similarly used many of the characteristics of postcards in the previous decade (Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake being obvious examples).

There are of course cards which seem to be competing in some obscure contest to attain absolute featurelessness as if there were an esoteric plot on the part of publishers to equal Samuel Beckett in sparseness and Andy Warhol in dumb absence of event. My own contender (Fig 15) for the Challenge Cup of Dullness has as its most lively point of interest the lettering of its caption. Over ninety percent of the rest of the image is taken up by either an almost undifferentiated grey sky or land unvisited by incident. The small band of action towards the bottom of the picture is itself dominated by long low buildings of impressive monotony. Yet there is a state of visual inertia that is nonetheless imposing. Each time I come across this card I find myself admiring more and more its truth to experience and pictorial daring.

The message on the back has something of the same character, a perfect cameo of life's lesser dealings in 1953. No uprising is mentioned nor national festivity, nor is anything of special interest alluded to; but again absorption in its nuances and minutiae brings a moment and its actors to life.

In that respect it is typical of many of the two thousand or so messages transcribed in this book. The mere action of copying them out yields more information than at first sight appears to be there. Ripples of disquiet beneath the surface, hints of the larger life of which they are mere shards, combine with telltale signs of character and mood.

## THE MESSAGES

The postcard was the phone call of the early part of the century, the mode of making arrangements, placing orders or just keeping in touch. With up to five deliveries a day local cards were amazingly fast



ways of communicating: it is not uncommon to find messages written at lunchtime to say the writer will be late home for tea.

Even when the phone existed as a reliable appliance it was mainly installed in offices, as more recently fax machines and computers have been. As late as the fifties it was largely a middle class phenomenon. International calls were quite a performance involving booking in advance and fairly punitive charges.

At the very dawn of the century the postcard was still a novelty and one senses that it was considered quite sophisticated. Its use spread very quickly, especially below stairs. Indeed, one of the most common functions of cards after 1902 was the exchange of news between members of a scattered family, each in service at different places. Almost as common are the greetings from old colleagues of domestics who had left their posts. Strong emotional bonds are found in the sisterhood of girls in service.

One reason for the growing popularity of the postcard was the small demand it placed on the writer in an age when schooling, for most people, was over at the age of fourteen. A letter seemed to require a rigmarole of formality and correct layout that daunted the untrained, but almost everyone could manage a few words on a card. It was also cheaper and carried the bonus of a pleasant or interesting picture.

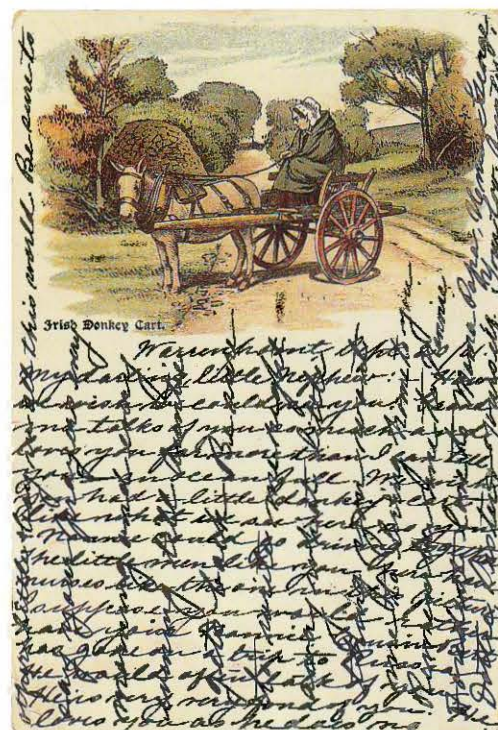
The postcard message while being informal developed its own prescription and tacit rules and, rather like haiku, contained necessary elements. The greeting, the weather, health of writer, enquiry as to health of correspondent, signing off; such was the standard pattern, either enough itself or forming a safe basis for permutation and variation. It can be seen to be the skeleton of almost all cards to this day whether they were posted on holiday or from friend to friend, relation to relation or neighbour to neighbour (cards are often sent from just a couple of streets away).

The example of Max Church, the American serviceman, has already been mentioned. His sequence of daily cards deals with these conventional topics, yet also recounts the growing up of a callow youth into a man who, in the space of a single and singular year, was exposed to the privations of a battered and impoverished Europe, the glimpsed horrors of Buchenwald, the culture of Paris and, it seems, the confrontation of his own sexuality.

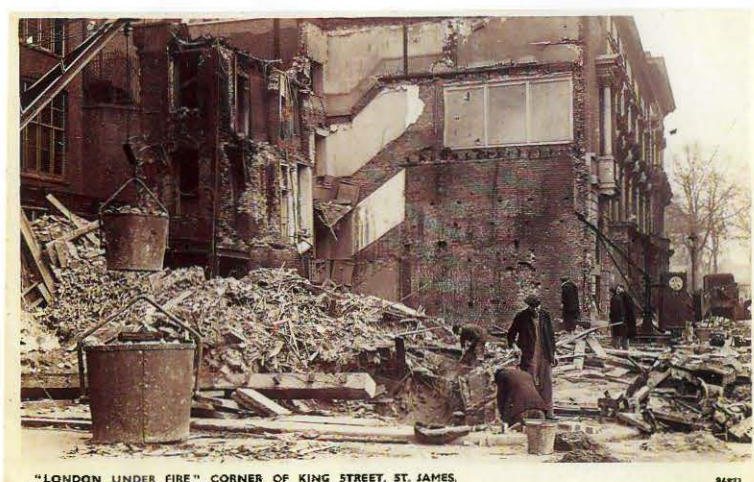
Another sequence from World War II had already been widely scattered throughout the postcard trade before I came across it. Card by card I acquired (by enquiry and legwork) a fair sampling of the regular postcards sent to Kath, an evacuee, from her father in London. He describes the blitz at first hand and, in the restrained fashion of the time, conveys the pain of separation (Fig 17).

Each would deserve a book to itself since I can only afford a glimpse of a glimpse. Other voices in these pages are heard more than once (especially those of Fred & Jean the inveterate campers) but largely the messages are isolated and their context of incident and relationship has to be inferred. A whole hinterland of tragedy can be discerned behind a few words, or the curtain can briefly rise on a scene of joy and celebration.

Before the telephone comprehensively took over the territory, courtship was a natural province of the postcard. What now is breathed down the phone, left on machines or e-mailed, had for half a century to be committed to the card, often sent to the lover's home where the prying eyes of parents or siblings or servants might see it. Couples of course developed their own private languages but the final mode of obtaining privacy was a code. Some of these were primitive,

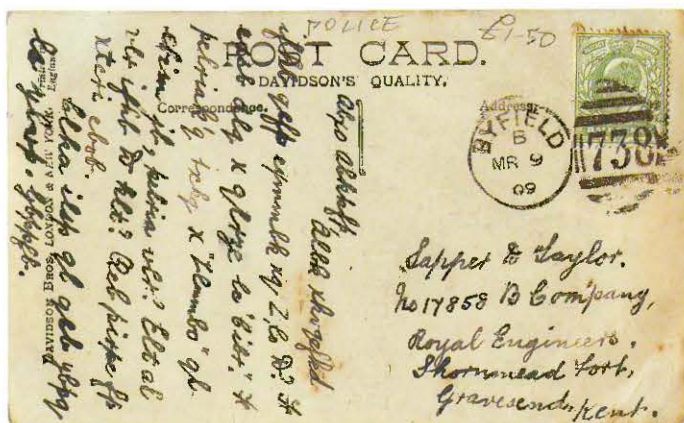


September 21st 1901. Master Willis Wilmot's Auntie is visiting Ireland and sends him a card to New Orleans. Her use of cross writing is typical of early American writers of cards and is not at all difficult to read if the script is well schooled (though little Willis may have a bit of trouble). The message is as inconsequential and rambling as any phone call might be from doting adult to small relative, Warrenpoint. My darling little Nephew:- How we wish we could see you. Grandma talks of you so much and loves you more than I can tell you - an ocean full. We wish you had a little donkey cart like what we see here as you and Nannie could go driving together. The little men like you here have nurses like this one in the picture. I suppose you would rather have your Nannie. Cousin Bert has gone on a trip to Russia. He would often talk of you. He loves you as he does no other boy in all the world. Be sure to say your prayers every morning and every evening till Auntie gets back. Be sure to write me right away what little thing you want me to bring home to you. Remember me to Nannie. Fondest love to Mama, Papa, Henry, George, Dollie, Sister and yourself your lov. Auntie. Willis's eyes may have glazed over somewhat at the bit about saying his prayers but he would have perked up at the idea of a present (noting the cautionary word 'little'). Fig. 16



September 25th 1944. Mr West writes from London to his evacuee daughter Kath in Harrogate, Dear Kath - Hope you are well - we have had nothing to worry about but still have an alert now and again. It rained all yesterday and is cold this morning. E [her older sister Elsie] had a lovely time at the dance. Lots of love, Dad xxxx. Typically, Mr West plays down the dangers of the War even though their own house, it would seem, had been bombed. Fig. 17





March 9th 1909. Jenny writes in code to Sapper D Taylor on a card depicting policemen helping a soldier to reach the top of a wall to give his sweetheart a kiss. Translating the simple cypher is here only slightly delayed by Jenny's incomplete mastery of it, Dear Dennis, Does anything like this happen at C or G? I have got a touch of flu. I shouldn't want a copper to help me should you? How do you like G now. The slush is awful here. Fond Loves to the best o boys.

Fig. 18



October 6th 1916. From Somewhere in France and on the back of a French village view whose name has been obliterated by the censor G writes to Lance Corporal Flint of the Artists' Rifles in Romford, Many thanks for your interesting letter and also for your ripping snap of the Zepp. Congrats for getting one up. Best of luck in your new stunt. Will certainly write to both mentioned in letter. Leslie appears to be rather unfortunate after all, being medically unfit for a Com. in any case for the Infy... Write again soon. Cheers. I am in the pink. Zeppelin raids began in 1915 and concentrated on the South East of England.

Fig. 19



September 10th 1915. Also from Somewhere in France to Miss Talboys in Oxford. My Dearest Rose. Many thanks for your snice letter dated the 5th inst. also the Sunday Pictorial. We are having a lot better weather just at present Rose dear. That is not correct about Cudds (?) being wounded. We get very dirty on this coal shifting. Hope you like the postcard all right There does not seem to be a very good selection here, but I try and pick the best ones out for you, my darling. Hope you are keeping well Rose Ta Ta with love xxx Fred xxx. The card is of the tinted French romantic type similar to 16n. Written in the usual indelible pencil.

Fig. 20

like backslang or mirror writing, but more elaborate cryptic devices were frequently published in magazines and were eagerly adopted (also wisely in the case of 03p). Once women took their place in business shorthand could fuel an office romance. Even when codes were not used (or the simple strategy of signalling endearments by the position and angle of the stamp) one sees time and again the old method of writing the message upside down in relation to the address. This was meant to avoid the gaze of all but the nosiest of postmen.

To retain the full flavour of messages they are, throughout the captions of this book, transcribed as they appear with all their disjointedness, eccentric spellings and wayward grammar. No expletives are deleted in later cards nor any political incorrectness adjusted in the communications of any period. What always seems remarkable in older messages is that they often carry on without any help from commas or full stops (my mother used to write virtually without punctuation which I thought eccentric until I started reading the backs of postcards). Some messages whose words are purely conventional are paraphrased. Many, however, are given in full, though routine greetings and signings off are largely omitted. Where the text is shortened the omissions are indicated by dots. In all other respects the texts are merely copied out, often after long staring at impenetrable handwriting. The pleasure of suddenly being able to read a word that at first sight looked like a string of m's followed by an unattached loop is almost as great as the moment of suddenly overhearing a real voice or being party to a revealed fragment of someone else's existence.

As with domestics, absence is a constant theme and no separations were more brutal than those occasioned by war. These are among the most touching notes, especially in those cases where the chirpy words of a World War I soldier are darkened for us by the knowledge of his imminent death. Sometimes the tension can be electrically felt as the weary serviceman wets once more the point of his indelible pencil and confines himself to the few phrases allowed by the censor. From *Somewhere in France*, he gives his formulaic reassurances from a rat-infested trench that, *all is A1*, and he is *in the pink*.

In an ideal (though infinitely more cumbersome) world all the written sides of cards would be reproduced since much of the flavour of a message lies in its script and layout, but some sense of that variety can be tasted in the earliest years when messages were restricted to the picture side of the card.

The range of messages apart from the obvious themes already mentioned only gradually reveals itself to give a panorama of human activities and emotions dealing with everything from a lost glove to the explosion of the atom bomb. What is just as absorbing is the steady change in usage and language as twentieth century shifts in English unfold. Even though later technologies affect the number of postcards sent (after their heyday as the world's most efficient and popular mode of communication) the messages, allowing for new freedoms in language, do not in essence differ all that much. Eerily, as the changes are rung on standard phrases, the novelists and poets of the time are evoked (by what after all is their source material) and we hear voices from Hardy, Wharton, Bennett, Wells, Runyon, Chandler, Beckett, Murdoch, Pinter and an Amis or two. All these and others are echoed as the more stilted early cards are gradually transformed into the letting-it-all-hang-out manner of younger cardsenders at the end of the century.

This is not the place for analysis of such matter, but one example tells the tale well enough. If one takes the current words for expressing enthusiasm about someone, somewhere or something they replace themselves at fairly regular intervals. Old terms vanish never to



reappear. Roughly in order of appearance they are *Capital, First Class, Topping, Ripping, Excellent, A1, Grand, Top Hole, Spiffing, Smashing, Marvellous, Super, Stupendous, Fabulous, Terrific, Fab, Ace, Sensational, Brilliant, Brill, Awesome, Wicked*; all of which can be reinforced by *awfully, absolutely, jolly, really, pretty, utterly, bloody, dead etc.* and permutations such as *pretty bloody terrific*. Similarly endearments undergo fashions over the years though my favourite will always be *Yours to a cinder xxx* (frequently found in the twenties). Cryptic expressions of affection or desire occur in acronyms whose meaning can only be guessed at but one assumes might occasionally be hotter than the most often used favourite S.W.A.L.K. (Sealed With A Loving Kiss).

In the spirit of structuralism one could reduce this volume merely to the list of the names of the senders and recipients. Put in chronological order these would tell a story in themselves, a random core sample of habits of naming over the last hundred years. As the century proceeds into living memory I have suppressed identities to offer privacy to those whose cards have drifted my way or have been offered to me to use. Nonetheless the christian names of individuals and couples seem to date the message with almost as much certainty as the postmark. Could there ever have been a couple circa 1900 who signed themselves *Nikki and Elvis* or might there be one in 1999 who could end with *loving greetings from Horace and Madge*? Fred & Jean seem completely at home in the middle of the century where we in fact find them. Some individual names are particularly relishable but of all the girls I would like to have met I must choose Philately Holtgreve, who appears in 1934.

## THE HISTORY OF THE POSTCARD

It is hard to imagine an earlier mention in literature of the postcard, than that by Francis Kilvert who in his diary for Tuesday October 4th 1870 writes, 'Today I sent my first post cards, to my mother, Thersie, Emmie and Perch. They are capital things, simple, useful and handy. A happy invention'. The Post Office Act of 1870 permitted the first Post Cards to go on sale on Oct 1st. Kilvert, a thirty year old country curate living in Wales, was very quick off the mark. Coincidentally it is only the day before that he makes one of the first references to the dawn of air mail. 'Oct 3rd. How odd, all the news and letters we get from Paris now coming by balloons and carrier pigeons'.

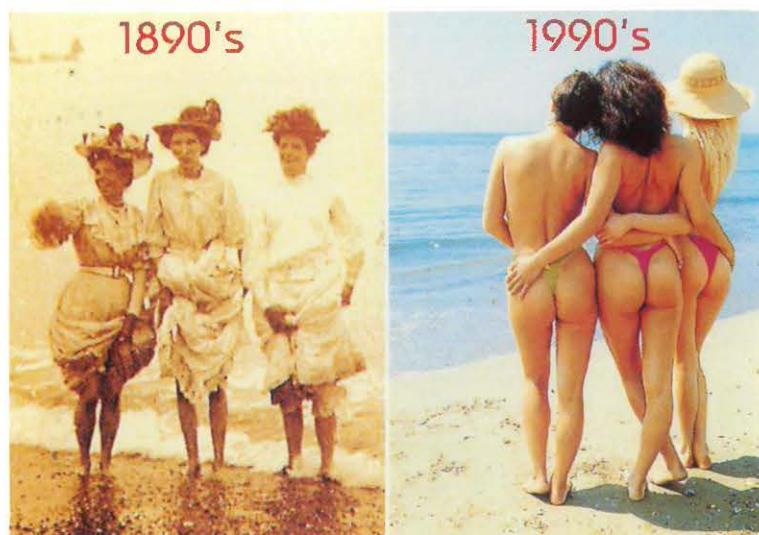
It was this beginning that was celebrated in 1970 (see 70p). However, these Post Cards, handsome though they were (and indeed more elegant than their Austrian counterparts issued a year earlier) lacked any pictorial matter. The USA followed suit in 1873 with their own official postal cards. This set the precedent of unwrapped mail and represented the first milestone in the evolution of the picture postcard. Virtually a quarter of a century of debate and dithering lay ahead in both England and America while European countries quietly established the pictorial card as a genre. Germany led the way with illustrated greeting cards depicting resorts and tourist sites. These almost invariably feature the words *Gruss aus* (Greetings from) and allow space for writing on the picture side. They were the models on which most early cards were based.

In 1893 The World's Columbian Exposition took place in Chicago and America's first official picture postcards were sold there (largely from vending machines). Luckily Chicago was rich in immigrant German printing expertise and the results were impressively produced by chromolithography, a high quality colour process.



Chips in Sofia is clearly at the end of his tether. He even puts the date when he is going to be back (December 26th) rather than the actual date, clear on the Bulgarian postmark as 13th December 1906. His message seems to rain down angrily on the theatre whose facade he has defaced with hanged figures and the slogan HOME SWEET HOME. *Dear Nell* he writes to Elsie Nobel in Charlton, SE London, *This is the last of my cards now, so will be the last from this hole, thank G. Will of course send you one or two en route but I may get home before them, that doesn't matter does it. Cannot tell you the day yet, patience my dear and it will come along in a letter. How did the (?) go off, all right rotten or nicely thank you? Will make the best of this card being the last would write inside the theatre only ??? not open yet. The town would not accept the Electric light instalation, serves them right if they can't stand a joke, what do you say? Come home! Oh, alright, give me a chance to pack my things up and say goodbye to my sweethearts and (?) does not matter which. Have just done 5 mins work and I am tired so I sit down to write this now I find it is dinner time so will just finish it as I go to the grub shop. Here I am calling it names. Grub don't know what it is these last 3 months am as thin as a match and cannot get fat no matter how much I try will try harder this next two week you bet. What ho, my time is drawing near now 13 days from now at the very outside. So good bye dear letter - tomorrow best love to all yours ever. Chips. P.S. This is a Chinese Puzzle.*

Fig. 21



May 2nd 1995. Janet & Tony to Mr & Mrs B in Horsham. *On our hols in Weymouth. Weather up to today been good but it has rained all to-day. Have been to Monkey World (for rescued chimps) and Abbotsbury Swannery.* In order to chime with the picture postcard's centenary the card takes some liberties with dates. The girls on the left look much more like early twentieth century bathers, and daring for their day (see Fig 12). Remarkably enough the publishers, Bamforth & Co., who entered the postcard business in 1902 could have produced both images from stock.

Fig. 22





February 12th 1895. To Fräulein Mizi von Gasleiger from her mother in Eastbourne wishing her *Grüsse und Küsse* from us all. One of the earliest picture postcards produced in England, printed by Catford & Sons, soon after the picture card was officially allowed. Fig. 23

A year later the picture postcard in Britain became legitimised. Unlike the Chicago Fair examples these, which started emerging towards the end of 1894, were dingy affairs. They were not helped by the strange squarish format insisted upon by the Post Office. The example here of such a Court Card (as they were referred to) is typical. It can hardly have lured many to the delights of Eastbourne though it shows views that are still current, especially the famous Carpet Gardens (see 55s). It also adopts the German formula 'Greetings from Eastbourne'. Significantly it was bought and sent by a continental visitor no doubt already used to finding view cards wherever she travelled. She must have been disappointed by the smudgy printing even as she consigned it to the post box on February 12th 1895. It reached its no doubt equally unimpressed recipient in Vienna on the 15th.

The excellent Picture Postcard Annual has for a number of years been collating earliest posting dates from all over Britain and this is one of only a handful of surviving cards sent in those first few months. With such lacklustre production it is little wonder that the picture postcard was not an instant success.

Popularity had to wait (as evidenced by the same tables) for the real coming of age of the British Postcard in 1899 when the Post Office finally capitulated to the standard format allowed by the Universal Postal Union. Raphael Tuck & Sons immediately issued a full colour set of London views. The first of these, and in a sense the first true British postcard, was a view of the Tower of London (fig 24) complete with Beefeater.

Thus the beginning of the century virtually coincides in Britain with the advent of the regular shaped postcard, and, as can be seen, the postcard cliché was born with the medium: one can still buy a current card at the Tower of London featuring a general view with inset Beefeater.

Only one restriction remained that separated the century's earliest cards from the standard versions used today. This was lifted in 1902 when senders of postcards in the UK were at last permitted to write on the same side as the address, thus liberating the whole front surface for pictorial use. America followed suit in 1907.

The rest of the postcard's history can easily be traced in this book. The format of Tuck's London views remained standard until well after the World War II. A second, larger but squarer type gained currency in Europe which the USA was slower to adopt. Towards the end of the century all regulations seemed to relax and outside cards appeared. Gargantuan cut-outs sprang up in the 1990's spelling nightmares for the neat storage systems of collectors. Fortunately these still have only a novelty status and the basic postcard size has held its own thanks in no small degree to its adoption by Freecard publishers. These marvellous receptacles of memory, bearers of image and carriers of news still seem what Kilvert called their ancestor in 1870, 'a happy invention'.

## DATING THE CARDS

In the upper reaches of the deltiological world where collectors put the highest value on cards virtually untouched by human hands, dating an item is problematic. With the photographic variety a great deal of expertise has grown up about types of sensitised paper and their identifying signs. Unused cards are often dated by collating them with examples that have lost their virginity in the post.



September 19th 1900. From Dot in London E.C. to Mrs A M Raphael, South Tottenham, My Dearest Et. I do hope you are getting on all right, how is little 'Coo' Love from your affec. sister Dot. Posted at breakfast time, Et could have been reading this over her lunch at 1.30pm, admiring the new range of colour postcards by Raphael Tuck & Sons. This, printed in Saxony, is the first standard size colour picture postcard issued in Britain. The view of the Tower of London is one that has changed very little. Fig. 24



For the purposes of this work the date given is that of a card's postal use. There are many clues available to support conjecture when postmarks are unclear. The best of these of course is a handwritten date in the message from more diligent correspondents. Sometimes a postmark slogan may place the date within an Exposition or around some key event like a Coronation. The content of the message may help with the mention of some specific occasion ('we saw Apollo 2 lift off') and even talk of deep snow in London might (usually) help decide whether a faintly indicated month is September or December.

Postmarks are wayward things that can emboss their way right through to the other side of the card or give its surface a diffident kiss of ink. They can usually be deciphered, though one has to remember which way round they put the month and the day in different countries. Alarming, in Thailand what seems a pleasant sixties view of a street or temple turns out to have been sent, according to the postmark, in the year 2519.

Stamps can be of great assistance though not so much in the years before inflation was invented when both design and the rate of postage might remain static for decades. Modern life has seen to that. The ever accelerating cost of postage gives a useful bracket of time. The odd sedate commemorative stamp was quite an event in earlier years but towards the latter half of the century the hitherto unexploited philatelist was singled out as fair game, and stamps on both sides of the Atlantic now succeed each other at intervals of sometimes less than a month. The smaller the country (and there are some states like San Marino that only seem to have a philatelic identity) the more frequent, larger, and more lurid the stamps.

On the assumption therefore that most people use a not too obsolete stamp this can give a good lead. In the very first years of the century, however, even a change of monarchy did not disturb the sender. In distant British colonies stamps depicting a young Queen Victoria were still in use five or six years after her death.

A real Sherlock Holmes would have consulted weather records to correlate 'terrific downpour between Ipswich and Colchester this lunchtime' with a fuzzy postmark to deliberate between the 13th and 18th April, but I confess that having weighed all reasonable evidence I made in many cases an educated guess. Over 95% of the cards are of an unequivocal date.

## THEMES AND SUBJECTS

Postcards provide the world's most complete visual inventory. Few things, people or places have not at some time or other ended up as the subject, or an unwitting or unintentional component, of a postcard.

In the fairs already described dealers have settled on a group of categories which enable them to impose some order on this plenitude. The litany of subjects is repeated in their trays and boxes all over Europe and America. Since there is a consensus I have usually referred to topics under these headings.

Almost all these categories are represented somewhere in the following pages. My own interests and predilections (not to speak of prejudices) play a part in my choice yet I have also tried to keep a special watch on certain themes as much as the chance nature of the availability of material has allowed. These are the role of women, the development of the aeroplane and the automobile, and the rise of cinema. Also an eye has been kept open for architecture and fashion.



ST in Germany to Mrs WF Turner in Honeywell Road, London SW11, *We had a glorious hot day yesterday - to-day is freezing cold & likely to rain & real English weather Helga is off at the last minute what a blow I shall never recover Elsa cannot explain very well in English something about his wife cannot come - shall ask waiter at café to find out for me. H.H. is here for a week - stay with Frau Wagner. love. ST.* The photo is a classic Hoffman image of circa 1932/33. The message written in pencil had been erased but was decipherable in raking light. The 15pf Bismarck stamp was partially removed and unfortunately took with it the date and place of posting (BE remains on the fragmentary postmark, which could well be Berlin, and an 'a' at the bottom). The slogan part of the cancel is complete, enjoining the recipient to support the Hitler Youth (with a picture of a hut). A clear pencil date 1937 seems a later addition in another hand, though nothing is incompatible with that as a year of sending. I would have guessed a date of 1935/6. What is of course completely unrecapturable is Mrs Turner's reaction to this image two or three years before the War. And what its fate was in the years up to April 2000 when I bought it at a London fair from a Worthing dealer?

Fig. 25



Mr Chas Albert Kays in Cumberland, Maryland receives from Vera in Miami this highly datable card on which the American Post Office have confirmed back and front that it was sent on the correct day, as already implied in the inscription, and received in Washington the day after. Ambiguity is further removed by a special Air Cancellation and the presence of the 5c Air Mail commemorative stamp. Vera writes, just in case Chas hasn't got the point, *Thought you might like this as a souvenir.*

Fig. 26





July 4th 1914. Aunt Daddies to Master W J Baker, The Beacon School, Crowborough, Essex, / am sending you this post-card of a biplane. I saw 12 aeroplanes flying at Aldershot on the King's Birthday... Aunts and Uncles, as will emerge in these pages, are good at choosing the right cards for the growing boy and girl. The skeletal elegance of the Wright Flyer still characterises Farman's plane. But war is only a month away and by December less fragile-looking German planes would be dropping bombs on Dover and aerial warfare will have begun in earnest. Fig. 27

## FEMINISM

Women were of course invented before the beginning of the century but the realisation of their proper role in society and their acquisition of rights has been perhaps its most important single development. From a voteless, socially subjugated and legally disadvantaged condition in 1900 to the ambiguities of the post-feminist state in the 1990's it has been an epic tale that here, inevitably, has to be conjured from a sequence of telling fragments. Needless to say it is not only the images that tell the story but the content and style of the messages which speak, in sum, so eloquently of the relations between women. In some small way the easiness of communication via the postcard (as well as its use as a propaganda vehicle) has played a part in the long process of emancipation.

## AVIATION

The stirring story of flight is coterminous with a century which began with empty skies and ended with ailing satellite stations and talk of litter in space. Concorde as it streaks overhead still looks new but was built only sixty years after the Wright brothers convincingly demonstrated to the outside world the possibility of controlled powered flight (08a). There is as yet, amazingly enough, no really substantial study of aviation postcards. Collectors however have long known that with respect to the early years of flight the postcard provides the most comprehensive pictorial coverage. Aviation was initially regarded as a sport and early aviators were more photographed than any other kind of sporting hero. Every flying machine and every wrecked aircraft became a postcard and in the messages on such cards are hidden eye witness accounts of many feats and tragedies.

## OTHER TRANSPORT

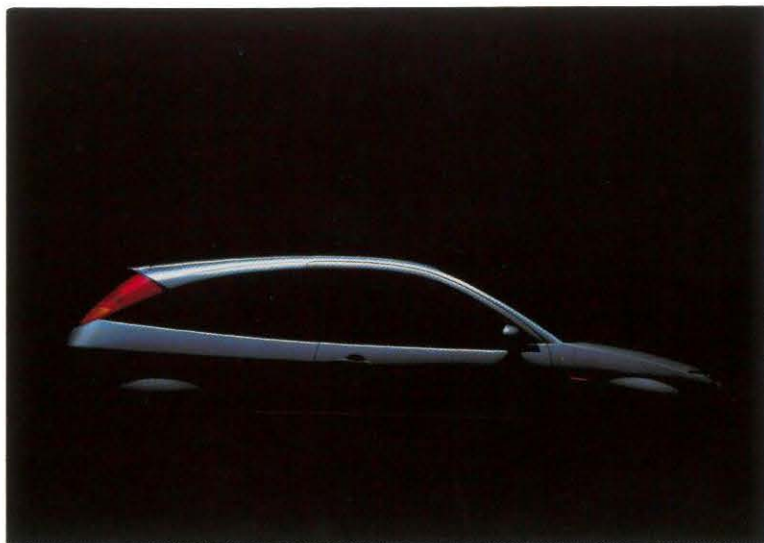
The automobile was also born with the century speeding from 3 to 300 miles per hour in 3 decades. Singly, in groups and in jams it is seen in every urban card. The postcard was and is one of the primary methods of promotion for the motor industry, from the advent of the Model T Ford (see 10a) to its distant successor the Ford Focus which in 1998 is advertised in a graphic mode as stylistically distant as the vehicles themselves. No better social indicator could be found than the two saloons advertised in 33p & 33q.

The comic card gleefully covers the rise of the automobile, its uses, abuses and related snobberies and itself provides a sociological history of succeeding models and their drivers.

The train, and truck, the boat and hovercraft all make their appearances and the London bus becomes a familiar sight around Eros as type succeeds type from the horsedrawn Tilling to the conductorless buses of today. I confess to not being a maritime enthusiast and in this book ships most often tend to sail into view when they bear messages that reinforce their interest.

## THE CINEMA

Also born with the century was the cinema whose first (often almost furtive) appearances, mixed in with other entertainments as a sideshow (Fig 29), gave no intimation of its future as the dominant artistic and entertainment medium of the century. Motion Picture stars replaced stage actresses as collectable faces and in their wake came a seemingly endless series of the Hollywood homes of film



December 30th 1998. David Johnson responds to the Star Trek Quiz in the Radio Times. The question would pose no problem for a Trekkie since the answer is Captain James Tiberius Kirk. Though less graphically artful than 10a, this advertisement follows the same format that has served Ford Motors for ninety years; i.e., show the car clearly without any distracting elements. What would a Model T owner, or even Henry Ford himself, think if given a sudden future glimpse of this Ford Focus. Fig. 28



celebrities, as well as a succession of pictures of stars signing their footprints on the Pavement of Fame outside Grauman's (later Mann's) Chinese Theatre (an essential rite of passage into superstardom).

In random fashion the cards in this book also collide with the cinema via the films being shown at the London Pavilion in Piccadilly Circus. These include, as well as run of the mill cinema fodder, such landmark features as *Blow Up*, *Nanook of the North*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *The Graduate* and *Quatermass* (as well as the odd James Bond). However, it is the sudden view of a suburban Picture Palace that stirs my memories of a thousand and one nights of youthful movie-going, especially in those years when Granadas and Majestics had ceased to be the lit-up magnets of their district (Fig 30). For the cinema was always modern, and films were the safe currency of conversation, as they are in those messages which speak of arrangements to see this or that picture or merely 'going to the flicks'. For a very long period the latest film was the most vitally contemporary experience available to the average man, woman and child.

## ARCHITECTURE

The local Odeon was also likely in any High Street to be the most advanced building to be met with until well after World War II. For the British at least, architecture was something that happened somewhere else. What we had was buildings, invariably anonymous. Luckily bad and good buildings carry equal rations of the story of their time. Each urban card if massively researched would reveal a tale of blighted careers, forgotten awards, local government scams etc. Every skyscraper on the New York skyline must hide a similar saga.

In singling out some of the century's most influential buildings it is no accident that the book begins with a major new exhibition space, the Grand Palais in Paris, built with all the stylistic rhetoric of its own day, and that it approaches its end with the equivalent construction of the 1990's, The Guggenheim Bilbao, the finest song of structure and surface of that decade. At intervals throughout the century it is the Exhibition/Exposition that has given architects a special license to make radical constructions with innovation as part of the brief. Unluckily the century ends with the least attractive of them, London's Millennium Dome (or technically speaking, tent). This fails to recapitulate the excitement of what London offered exactly halfway through the century in the Festival of Britain, or indeed any of the other signature buildings of International Expositions.

## FASHION

Fashion, like architecture, is everywhere present and also divides into specific and accidental encounters. Even though there are cards that feature individual fashions, almost all inhabited views show what is the prevailing dress for different climates or occasions from ball-gown to beachwear. The latter makes the full cycle from total cover up in 1900 to almost nothing at all in 2000. Fashion is also a perennial theme of comic cards which usually show the latest outrage in women's outfits and, very occasionally, an outburst of male peacockry. Year by year rebellion is signalled in the way women dress or do their hair. Shock is registered by apoplectic fathers, and dazzled approval by young men.

Fashion advertisements show the vertical journey from haute couture, via the big store to the rag trade equivalent of Tupperware which promises that for a few dollars you will walk out of the clothes party looking like a million.



July 13th 1908. FR playing the season in Rothesay with Fyfe & Fyfes writes to Sam Ventura (who has a name redolent of the Halls and the Pier) in Holloway, *So glad to hear that things are looking up although the weather has again turned against us. Hope it gets fine next week as the Glasgow Fair commences then - its the time to make money, at least 'clear something' off the bad weeks. Have no more news so must conclude...* The novelty of the cinema (Bioscope To-night at 10) seems not to have entirely eased the fortunes of this troupe. Fig. 29



July 22nd 1967. Andrew Tack writes to John Keatly in Mindford, Norfolk, *I thought I would have heard from you when you were coming up here... so drop me a line won't you... job is great with plenty of women about so I am enjoying it.* The scene dates from 1955, still good times for the cinema though television is an ever increasing threat. Quite a routine bill at the Gant's Hill Odeon however, with *Playgirl*, starring Shelley Winters, and *Taza Son Of Cochise*, starring Rock Hudson. The design of all the Odeons in Britain was under the direction of Harry Weedon, sometimes referred to as the Lutyens of the High street. Fig. 30





This Fashion Conscious Group  
Featured in Glamour and Woman's Day  
For BEELINE FASHIONS

March 9th 1965. Janet McKibbin sends a Beeline invitation to Miss Ruby Martin in Goshen, Indiana for 7.30 on March the 16th with the usual printed message, 'It will be a lot of fun seeing and perhaps even modelling the latest fashions. I think it is a terrific way for a few of us to get together.' She adds her own exhortation (Did she do this for everyone in order to personalise the messages?), *Come early so we can visit!* This is the archetypal sixties room. One knows the chairs, the carpet, even the picture, perfectly. See 66a to observe that little was to change in a year. Fig. 31

Anyone who has designed the costumes for a play is only too aware of how difficult it is to dress a crowd convincingly: no one would mistake a stage crowd for the real thing. Any postcard of a largish group of people will show why. Even in those eras when fashion is at its most distinctive people contrive to look particular rather than generalised. Though you might put a date on a card as a whole, many individuals will be dressed as if for ten or even twenty years earlier (just as not everyone in a street crowded with cars is driving this year's model).

## ETHNIC

What we do know about a crowd in a Western street is that they are not by the postcard trader's definition, Ethnic. Although I have had many dealings with ethnography (as found in museums) it is a term I have always had trouble with since it seems merely to mean 'people we find peculiar'. This does not appear to include ourselves, even if I, a Welshman, am talking to a Jewish trader. The assumption is that all those human beings so bizarrely dressed that one sees in Piccadilly Circus or on the beaches of Blackpool or Miami are, in some special degree, normal, whereas people of different colour and customs in faraway places are distinctly odd. My own response is to view all the people in this book as anthropological curiosities and all their activities as manifestly ethnic. The pure human being at uncomplicated ease in his environment, where all freakishness falls away, occurs rarely. The Australian in 66k is an example. Picture of his ancestors were, however, produced and sent in quite a different spirit, as in fig 32 where the message endorses the intention of the card. Certainly it would need pages of ethnographic detail (analysis of bonds of kinship, expertise in exotic dress, explanation of regalia etc.) to elucidate, even for me, the esoteric panoply of 69d & 69e. If it ever reached a postcard dealer's box in the Congo it would surely go straight in the section marked Ethnic.

There is a subsection that crops up in most stocks called Ethnic Glamour which seems to mean black women without their clothes on. This tempts one to question which are the greater anthropological curiosities, the subjects or their collectors.

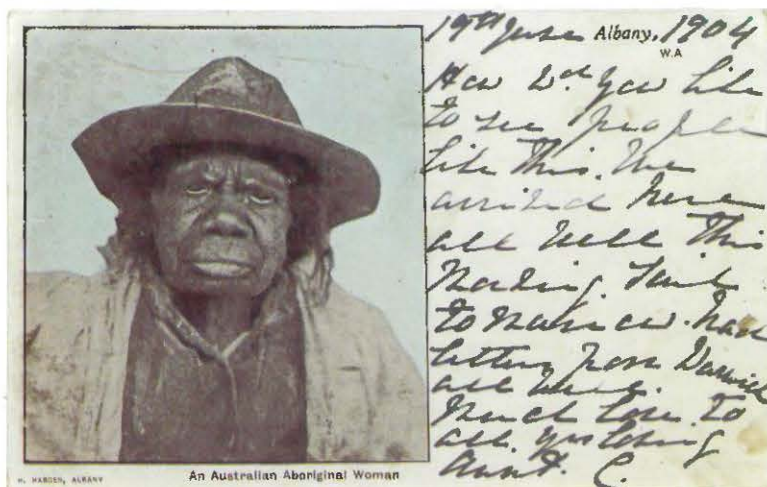
For ultimate confusion in this realm one would have to go where the wires of race, design, ritual and location are tangled beyond any ethnographer's powers of analysis (see 75k).

## ADVERTISING

Right from the beginning of its history those with something to sell or something to promote soon discovered the efficacy of the postcard. In America, as has been mentioned, the first real picture postcards were promotional and the total number sent afforded the Columbia Exposition not only a profit but an advertising mail shot with all the work done for free by those who put them in the post.

Almost every card advertises something if only the good taste of its sender. Resorts and beauty spots often add their self glorifying details on the backs of cards or, as in the case of Skegness, develop a marketing logo and a slogan (one of the first of such devices?) to tell you that Skegness Is So Bracing.

By the beginning of World War I almost every firm had its own postcard and many local traders sent out photographic cards of their shopfronts dressed all over for the occasion. Successful poster campaigns often had a lucky second life as postcards.



June 19th 1904. Aunt C writes to Master Randolph Maitland in Fife from Albany, Western Australia, *How Wd. you like to see people like this. We arrived here all well... had letters from Warwick all well. Much love to you all.* Master Maitland had probably never seen a face quite like this and the card was in all likelihood not meant to give the best impression of the Aborigine. Ninety years later the same face could serve to embody primeval wisdom and spiritual wealth. Fig. 32



One of the smartest moves in advertising was to invest in a hoarding at a much photographed site. Consider the extra publicity gained by companies whose named products appear bright and large in Piccadilly Circus. Bovril led the way with their huge electric sign in 1910. Millions who had never been to Piccadilly Circus learned the name and soon were told, with equally illuminated firmness, that Guinness was Good for Them etc.

Services that involved correspondence to remind their clients of deliveries or appointments were quick to see the benefits of combining publicity with the necessary to & fro of mail. The hairdresser for example who thought to nudge a customer's memory could simultaneously tempt them with new stylistic inventions (72m). Restaurants and hotels, even theatres, offered complimentary cards to their patrons in tacit return for free dissemination. Some merchandising operations became postcard-based as in the case of home-selling ventures like Tupperware Parties. However nightmarish the prospect would seem of shelves full of yellow and azure plastic, the campaign has been a global success.

By the sixties and seventies promotional habits had changed. The new brand of advertising manager would hardly stoop to use a common postcard. In the nineties all was transformed again by the ubiquitous rack cards with their smart graphics and cryptic, ironic or oblique pictorial strategies (compare the Boomerang card for Selfridges, 99f, with 32a and 35d).

The two booksellers' advertisements below indicate the wide possibilities now open. Both Shipley's and Waterstone's issue their own cards. Shipley in the Charing Cross Road revisits the traditional shopfront card, which emphasises his individuality as a specialist seller of fine books on the arts. The giant chain of Waterstone's characteristically grasps the modern nettle in a card, that pointedly uses their website as their address.

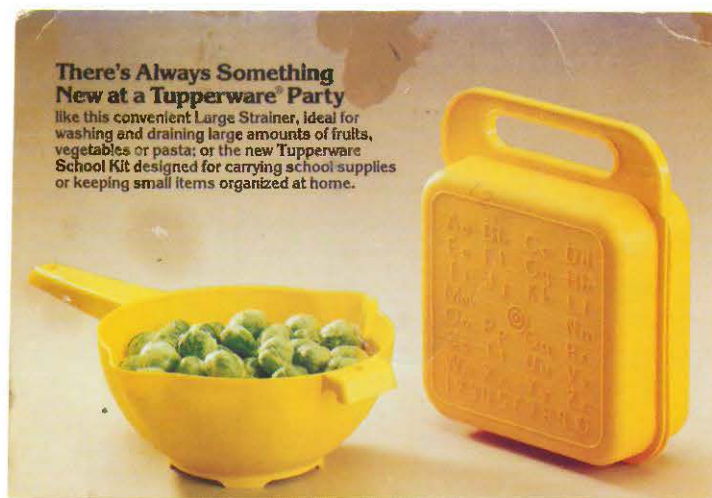
## COMIC CARDS

PC may be the standard abbreviation for postcard but it hardly suits the comic sort. They are there in effect to subvert correctness of any kind. Their job would seem to be to deflate pomposity, to undermine orthodoxy and to push against convention and taboo. The other, paradoxical, side of their coin is that by trading in ready-made prejudice they actually endorse its attitudes. In sexual matters, by verbal wink and pictorial nudge, they may even reinforce the taboo they mean to attack. Even so they have sometimes served to embolden the faint hearted to embolden the timid.

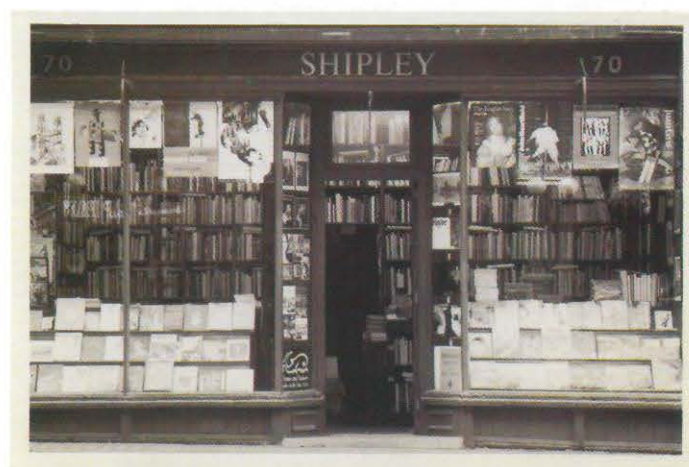
There are more comic cards in this book than I would have originally expected. Partly this is because of the frequently high level of their artistry. More often it is because in terms of the preoccupations and trends of the time the comic postcard gets there first. Whether it be the latest in fashion, television, pop music or even political change, the comic is always up to date.

In early years the photographic card responds to disaster and records it with astonishing speed. The cartoon artist, however, does not actually have to wait for anything to happen. He merely makes it up. It would be hard to find a picture of a television in any other form earlier than 35a.

Being the author of everything in his images he has to get things absolutely right; and of the moment. One false move with regard to dress, furniture, coiffure or car style and his work has no currency. No one's job is more literally on the line.



November 16th 1982. Linda Moentmann does not give Debbie Miller in St Louis, Mo. much notice for her Tupperware Party on the 18th but urges her to *Bring a friend and receive a special gift*. Still going strong (see 56n). Tupperware Home Parties no longer offer 'A work of art for 39 cents' (as Earl Silas Tupper described his original bowl) but, more importantly, some sort of social life for isolated wives. **Fig. 33**



	<p><b>ORDER</b></p> <p>You can order any book securely by credit card to be delivered direct to your door or anywhere around the world</p>		<p><b>W MAGAZINE</b></p> <p>Get the low-down on the best in new writing from W Magazine</p>	
<p><b>BOOKSEEKER</b></p> <p>You can search through our extensive guide to book and CD-Rom titles</p>		<p><b>CLUB</b></p> <p>Join our on-line club and you can take part in on-line chat with readers worldwide and receive regular book recommendations</p>		<p><b>DIARY</b></p> <p>Find out about literary events taking place worldwide, and in your local Waterstone's shop</p>

**Waterstone's bookshop on the internet**  
www.waterstones.co.uk

November 19th 1995. DS to TP in London, *Not an RP but very much in the high style, like the shop & you were right, it was here & not too expensive*. **Fig. 34**

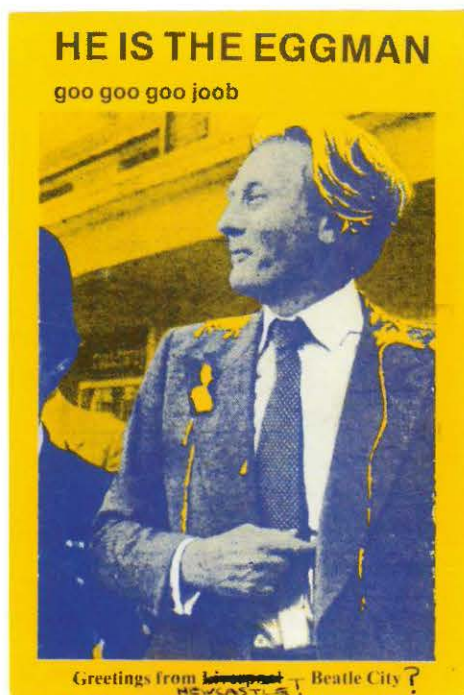
January 25th 1999. Jack Feldman in Watford enters the Radio Times 'Win a Health Farm Break/Weight Watchers', and uses Waterstone's free card. **Fig. 35**

A dilemma for the book buyer. Do we have to forgo the one in order to have the benefits of the other? All the dot.coms of the world do not quite equal the learning and experience of a specialist bookseller, yet convenience, coffee and all the extras, are quite a lure. Something for Jack Feldman to think about at the Weight Watchers' farm (where, if he has won, he will, if he is lucky, lose).





August 23rd 1993. Michael in Taunton to Mr & Mrs F in New Malden, sunny so far - forecast was wrong - cloudy, outbreaks of rain. There are several camp chores to do. So far I've done the cooks wash up. Tomorrow I'll be doing the shopping... Besley is the last inheritor of a populist style of cartoon card and has an unerring eye for detail. (as in the determined rusticity of the table and converted barrel chair). **Fig. 36**



February 25th 1989. D sends this card from Newcastle upon Tyne to Michael P in Wandsworth and only adds the words, *Gooble Wooble doo?* Mr Heseltine held many a tricky portfolio and the egg throwing incident of August 2nd 1982 (in Kirby when he was, thanklessly, Minister for Inner Cities) was only a prelude to other attacks. A few months after this card was sent he was sprayed with red paint by students supporting the Greenham Common Women. A colourful career. **Fig. 37**

This is achieved as much by what is left out as by what is put in. The photographer is at the mercy of what is there. Pity John Hinde's representative who had to make photos to prove that holiday camp life is one long round of smiling delight (72n etc.). He only has to enter a lounge and set up his equipment for at least one of its occupants to lapse into a stupor. The comic artist on the other hand draws his juke box, dresses his crowd in the latest gear and writes on a notice board the top bands of the hour (65r) with not a dowdy aunt or comatose adolescent to be seen.

For the same reason the comic card quickly goes out of date yet if it is a recyclable gag it can, like an ageing song, be reissued with all its elements revived. I am sure I met the splendid joke 'Bach's Organ Works' (69q) in a 1930's version with a more bashful couple passing a rustic church but have not been able to trace it. McGill certainly revised his bread and butter winners many times in a long career.

Least durable of comic drawings (though, as time capsules, often valuable for a book such as this) are those dealing with once burning political issues. Nothing is more opaque than an old political joke. The stalest bread on the table of humour is an unrecognisable politician dealing with a forgotten controversy accompanied by a topical caption which now reads like a verbal cobweb.

The universal figures of little man, nagging wife, nosy do-gooder, obtuse policeman, pompous official, querulous cleric are all still with us and were there among Chaucer's pilgrims seven hundred years ago. The poor evanescent politician, be he red or blue, fades to nothing as the years pass. Who in the next generation will remember Mr Heseltine and who even now could say when and where and why he had an egg thrown at him? Certainly more people will know the source of the caption (I am the Eggman) than its target. Heseltine (who even as we speak is stepping out of the limelight) will join Balfour and his Education Bill (see 03q) in the attic of historical obscurity.

Some cartoon cards rely on catchphrases from long jettisoned television shows or from radio programmes that boomed out of the giant sets of the past, or even from the music hall stage. Perhaps a gnarled hand belonging to one who remembers everyone saying, 'Bow Wow' (see 16s) is now turning these very pages. I myself vividly recall the now completely unfunny catchphrases of Tommy Handley's ITMA that in wartime made even my father laugh. Yet, despite the unrecoverable reference of the humour, Tempest's drawing is magnificently sure and Mrs X's message is of a frankness that puts most comic cards to shame.

It is the saucy seaside postcard that for many people still defines the genre. Early in the century the risqué joke matched the heightened spirits and lowered morals of a Wakes Week (when industrial towns especially in the North of England shut down in turn and their workers migrated en bloc to the nearest seaside resort) or, somewhat later, the statutory fortnight by the sea, or even a charabanc jaunt for the day. By the 1980's their time had essentially passed and the endless racks of ribaldry had started to disappear. The last posted card that I have in the classic small format (Fig 38) is appropriately a piece of broad bottomed humour in every sense and comes from the House of Bamforth (purveyors of sauce to the multitude throughout the century). The style makes it attributable to Arnold Taylor who first makes his appearance in these pages in 1929 and seventy years later in 1999 was hale enough to attend the opening celebrations of the Bamforth Museum in Holmfirth. The message symptomatically is brassier than the card itself. None of the successors of the lineage (Taylor himself was apprenticed to Doug Tempest) had brought new



life to the comic PC and by 1990 its artists cast around in vain for any remaining taboo (91o), for life had by now left everything hanging out.

Newcomers had to find a different slant on the world as did Besley who emerged in the 1970's with his own brand of lugubrious humour. His cartoons tend to capture the blight of weather, traffic jams and a sense of alienation from things rural and coastal that reflected the decline of traditional holidaymaking. Perhaps the seaside postcard should have migrated, with its purchasers, to Torremolinos and Benidorm in the seventies.

The undisputed King of the genre is of course Donald McGill who first appears here one year after his postcard debut (06o) and bows out in the year of his death, in 1963, aged 87 (having completed his batch of cards for the following year). Not surprisingly his cards had started to look a little old-fashioned by the sixties but for half a century he kept his style flexible, even managing to accommodate to the poor paper, limited colour and ragged printing of World War II (I have not seen a single example of these austerity cards where the colours were in register; see 43m). The sheer application and quality of draughtsmanship that underlay his output can best be seen in what could be called his White Period around World War I.

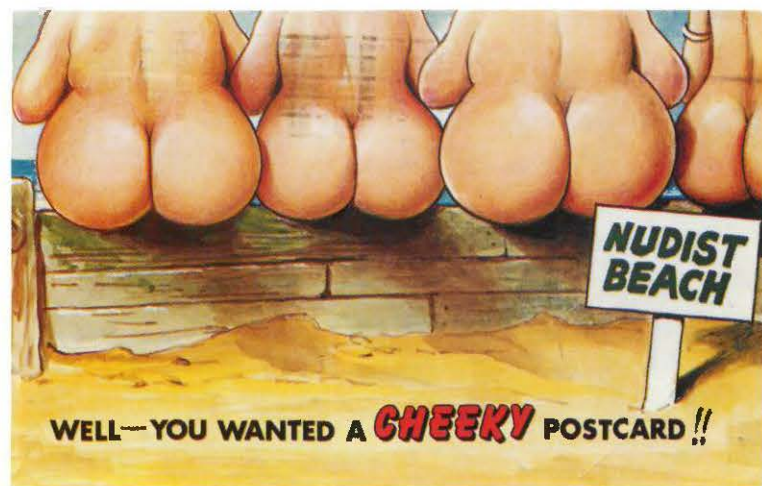
He lived a quiet bourgeois family life in South East London and maintained an ingeniously innocent front with regard to his world of archetypes and their playlets of sexual innuendo. When on trial for obscenity in Lincoln in 1954 he claimed ignorance of the obvious hidden meanings behind his drawings, thereby putting the onus of impropriety on his questioners. Even with the notorious Stick of Rock, Cock (a self evidently outrageous piece of ithyphallic gigantism) he claimed it was merely one of a series of figures carrying large sticks of rock in various ways (see 14p).

What was more surprising than this last litigious stand of provincial puritanism is that, for the fifty years before, his work had not seriously been called into question. Indeed, a cartoon by Harry Partlett (who signed himself Comicus) issued sometime around 1910 makes McGill seem quite restrained (Fig 40).

So prodigious was McGill's output that George Orwell, in his famous essay, assumed the signature hid a whole cottage industry of comic draughtsmen. This lofty publicity only increased McGill's notoriety and his celebrity came to overshadow the skills and achievements of Tempest and Taylor and the gentler humour of Reg Maurice who were his equals.

The infrequency of competitive examples confirms the absence of a parallel tradition in the United States or any other English speaking country. Most comic cards in America are adapted from cartoon characters established outside the world of the postcard. Light hearted greetings cards abound and political cartoons can be both blunt and pointed, yet American postcard humour tends to be more purely visual. This can be seen from the running joke (which has been running for most of the century) of Exaggeration, where vast single fruit weigh down waggons and huge rabbits are hunted. Often these are local boasts (as to which State's apples etc. are the biggest). Variations on the theme exists in their thousands (see Fig 5).

Although no professional artists in the US seem to have made a lifetime's career with comic cards there was, during World War II, a group of largely anonymous servicemen artists, some extremely expert and stylistically individual (e.g. 42a), who produced cartoons of life in the forces. Private Breger who served in Europe and drew many of his cards in Britain (44r & 44s) is the outstanding case. He also



June 23rd 1989. From Lyme Regis to Miss W in Romford, *Bonjour Bots*, *How's it hanging weather here is good - I'm on the beach admiring some horny talent at the moment. Loadsablocks (I get off with a scouser called Adam) and we've met lots of talent. Is Jason still brain of Britain? Got to go got some talent looking at us luv ex-Wedge (Maddy) PS Work next Friday ok?* This is more or less the end of the line for the standard saucy seaside card. What was once thought to be corruption, and debasement of morals, turns out to have been innocence itself. Fig. 38



September 4th 1961. Fred & Jean are in Weymouth and write home to Jean's Dad in Sunbury-on-Thames, *Everything O.K. Still very hot. Saw a table-tennis demonstration last night with Bergman and the Jap World Cham.* This is the card that raised the blood pressure of watch committees and became material evidence at McGill's trial for obscenity. Fig. 39