

# Wargrave Local History Society

## Latest News - October 2015

### The History of Postcard Collecting

The October meeting of the Wargrave Local History Society, was an illustrated presentation by Roy Sheppard on the History of Postcard Collecting - how it began and how it has changed over the years.

Roy, with his wife Ann, had been collecting postcards for 40 years. They collect 'anything interesting', especially of the Maidenhead, Cookham, Wargrave, Sonning and Woodley area, and finding that they had some surplus to their needs, began dealing in cards some 30 years ago.

Postcards were originally developed as a way to send a brief message without needing a separate envelope and stamp. The very first were produced in Austria, being issued on October 1st 1869. The Post Office in Britain followed exactly a year later, selling cards pre-printed with a ½d stamp. The GPO was a member of the Universal Postal Union, and in 1874 agreement was made by the UPU for postcards to be sent internationally. The first British cards that could be sent overseas were produced in July 1875, with a 1¼d stamp printed on them. The earliest postcards were a little larger than a standard envelope, but these tended to get creased when tied into bundles with the rest of the mail, so in November 1870 the size was reduced slightly to avoid this problem. Some cards were pre-printed with advertising material, such as for Suttons Seeds, but the cards were not supposed to have pictures on at this time. The Art Journal, however, produced some with a picture on in 1880 - at this time, such cards were then sent to the GPO to have the stamp printed onto the other side. Special issues appeared to commemorate some exhibitions, in 1890 - 93 - but still British cards had to be sent to have a stamp printed on them by the General Post Office.

In September 1894, however, other people were allowed to print postcards, to which a stamp could be attached and these could include an illustration. These cards were to a standard size of 115mm x 89mm. Later, the UPU adopted a postcard size of 140mm x 89mm, which was used by many other countries. Of course, when these arrived in this country, they were handled through the postal network, and in due course this larger size was adopted here as well.

In the early days, there was little interest in collecting cards, but with the introduction of cards with artwork showing the topography of the country, so the cards became 'collectable'. The interest grew in the late Victorian era, but the period from 1902 - 1910 was the 'Golden Age of Postcards'. The regulations had been changed to allow 'divided backs', whereby the message was on one half of the card, the address on the other, and the illustration filled the other side - previously only a short message could be written on a postcard on the same side as the picture. The postcards had pictures of places or topics, and millions of them were sent every month. With many postal deliveries per day - 6 in city areas - and a postage rate of just ½d per card they were used as the 'message service of their day, and could be used to make an order for goods, summon a tradesman, etc, with a reply received later in the day. The range of topics and places shown was vast, and collecting the cards became a craze for the masses. Almost every house would have had an album in which to keep the cards.

The craze, however did not last for very long, in part due to the rise in popularity of the cinema, but in WW1 many, many, cards were exchanged between troops and their loved ones. These would include sentimental messages, or artistic illustrations of members of the military by artists such as Harry Payne. In 1918, the postage rate was doubled, to 1d. Through the 1920s and 30s the postcards were used less regularly, as they were sent for special occasions, such as Christmas or Easter, or from people on holiday, rather than as 'everyday messages'. The cards would include the saucy seaside pictures, by artists such as Donald McGill, as well as seaside scenes - although such cards are not so popular with today's collectors.

Later postcards, known to collectors as ‘moderns’. Were of a reduced quality, glossy or deckle edged, and to a larger size than the earlier standard.

In 1975, the Victoria and Albert Museum took an exhibition of postcards on tour around the UK, and this sparked a resurgence of interest in collecting cards. There are now thought to be about 15 – 20,000 deltiologists, as they are known.

As well as advertising cards, (many for brands or products no longer available), the postcards illustrate changes in social history or places. Others would give an insight into notable historic events – one posted from South Africa in October 1899 saying the writer ‘expects war to break out’ soon – the Boer War began 9 days later, whilst another from that period showed a ‘concentration camp’ – a very early use of the description. In Britain, expensive embossed chromo-litho cards were produced with patriotic messages. Raphael Tuck was a producer of artistic cards, starting from the first day such could be sold, and later promoted postcard sales with competitions (in 1907 with prizes totalling £6,666).

Other novel cards included the ‘hold to light’ style, in which pieces of coloured tissue were sandwiched between two layers of card with appropriate holes in, so that when held up the light could shine through ‘windows’ in the image. Other aspects of social history Roy showed included workers in the Burberry coat factory in Reading, a railway signal box at Balham guarded by army and police during a strike in 1911, an early bi-plane at Hungerford, various rural trades, such as hurdle making, wheelwrights, and a school teaching basket making to the blind. The range of topics is vast.



Two local cards were of particular interest. One of Money Row Green, near Holyport, was part of the ‘Bill’ series produced by a local Maidenhead publisher, and had 2 children sitting on the verge of the road. Roy had discovered that the girl was his aunt, and the boy his father! Another local card (above) showed the



Woodclyffe Hall in Wargrave in use during WW1 as a military hospital. One of the patients had been identified as Frank Armitage, who had been shot on the Somme. Returned to the field hospital, he was thought not likely to survive, so had been left outside overnight, but as he was still alive the next morning, was taken inside for treatment, and in due course came to Wargrave. Here he met Lillian Tucker from Twyford, one of several girls who would visit to keep company with the soldiers – they married in 1920, and had 5 children.

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The next meeting will be on Tuesday, November 10th, when Anthony Poulton-Smith - the author of a recent book on *Berkshire's Place Names*, will explain their origins, meanings, and how they have changed, whilst on Tuesday, December 8th, the Society will hold its *Christmas Party* and then on Tuesday, January 12th, Phil Davis will tell us about *Families and Aspects of the History of Hennerton*.

For more information about the Society, see our website [www.wargravehistory.org.uk/](http://www.wargravehistory.org.uk/)