

POSTCARD COLLECTING FOR THE NEWCOMER

by Paul Braithwaite. <http://www.paulbraithwaite.moonfruit.com>

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A starter pack for new collectors.

May be circulated as free copy.



This is a card by publisher Tuck in their "Oilette" series which has volume collector interest. More notably, it is in the "London Life" series. Street-life, children and music are also collectable themes.

REASONS FOR COLLECTING

Modern society thrives on images in all situations including newspapers, magazines, advertising, product catalogues, greeting cards, calenders and so on. Add to the list those of more immediate family relevance such as wedding photos, children, friends and holidays.



A local amateur football team in Romsey by local photographer Test Valley Studio could be sought for family history reasons, football fans and local history. Multiple appeal is better for investment, rather than a particularly obscure card which has little demand.

We keep some pictures but only enjoy others for a short time. How we make the

choices are mostly personal and depend upon family, artistic taste, hobbies and relevance to our own lives. This applies to old and modern picture postcards and there are millions still available because someone, somewhere, will enjoy them.

Popular reasons for collecting cards might be put into a list, including:

- Nostalgia, pictures of where we have lived in the past, or type of car we owned, or some other memories;
- Family history, usually portrait cards or special events;
- Artistic taste, usually art designs rather than view cards;
- A hobby or intellectual interest, such as womens' institute, boy scouts, car racing, or story of a particular topic like teddy bears, corn mills or policing;
- Contemporary souvenir such as musician or film star portraits, or space travel.



It was only in 1902 that anything other than an address was allowed on the face side. Pictures and any message from the sender had to be on the back side. These days we call the address side the "back" and the division was to separate message from address after 1902. These "undivided back" cards are collected as postal history as well as for their subjects. Another Tuck card, here of Kenilworth Castle.

Some people collect cards for specialist reasons:

- The stamps;
- A particular publisher, often a local business and the collection is allied to an interest in local history research;
- Some other facet of postcard history itself, such as cards for balloon post.

PLANNING A COLLECTION - BUDGET

Before charging off to find and buy postcards it is worth thinking about a few practical matters. Most important is your budget. Items not popular with collectors are generally quite cheap and this covers both commonly found cards and those of topics so obscure that buyers cannot be found. There are, of course, also cheap cards because they are damaged in some way such as buffed edges, marks or dealers stamps (see later).

The most sought after cards command a higher price. A busy town scene of the 1900s, for example, could typically be priced around £30 or £40 per card. Cards by artists tend to be relatively expensive with those of prolific but less sought names at say £4 but top names nearer £20 plus and art nouveau style by mainstream painters attracting hundreds of pounds each. The rarest postcards of any kind are now selling at auction at prices well over £1,000. Old cards can, however, still be found for less than fifty pence!



The unusual subject might appeal for that very reason as well as policing, punishment and far-east interest in this card published by a tobacco store in Hong Kong

Are you buying cards to illustrate some hobby or interest? If so you are likely to want quite a lot of cards and you must decide what can be afforded. Since there is usually no timescale to purchases the outlay can, of course, be spread over any period. Be aware that prices have a habit of rising gradually all the time and as more obscure topics get added to the list of collectables then currently cheap cards start to no longer be affordable.

Occasionally there are those who buy purely as investment and are not regarded as collectors in a general sense. Those folks need to fully appreciate the intricacies of the postcard world and gamble on the fickle nature of trends where particular products have a price cycle in the auction world, as they do with other "antiques," for example paintings.



A Daily Mail card with official war picture of trench life. Subjects like war, railways, and cathedrals are massive. Collectors must decide on much more specific themes, here it could be Highland Pipers:- there will still be thousands of relevant cards.



This comic card, like many pre-WWI cards in Britain, was printed in Germany. If this appeals, you might buy according to your sense of humour, by the artist or on a theme such as wine.

PLANNING A COLLECTION - STORAGE

Postcards have the great benefit of being small and are entirely suitable in the contemporary world of small homes and desire for clutter-free living. A shoebox will hold, perhaps, five hundred (unprotected) cards which will serve the average collector.

Care needs to be taken. An actual shoebox, and indeed any packaging cardboard is likely to leach acids and cause the cards to deteriorate. Specialist card boxes for archive conservation could be sought.



COVENTRY SALVATION ARMY BAND. *Music, Photo*
Coventry Salvation Army Band by local publisher Maule. Could appeal to local historians, brass band enthusiasts and family historians.

The popular means of storage, however, amongst collectors is to place postcards into special, clear plastic sleeves or pouches made at the appropriate sizes. This permits handling without adding to hand-sweat, marks or edge damage. Large albums are also available with pages of plastic pages capable of holding about eight cards per page. Old fashioned photo albums are best avoided.

ACQUIRING CARDS

Many start collecting on impulse. Folks are having a normal day and happen upon some cards and one or more fit with a particular interest or have some other appeal. They are bought on impulse. Where to go from there?



Cards produced after 1950 are generally grouped as "modern." They tend to have a following distinct from those who seek Edwardian cards. This card by T & A Niedlander celebrated the 50th anniversary of Munich Oktoberfest in 1984. Many modern cards are issued for advertising and can be had free but others often only cost around fifty pence. It is thus a great way to acquire good designs at a low budget.

Everyday sources are market stalls and second-hand shops, together with jumble sales, car-boot events and so on. Some secondhand booksellers have a box or two of postcards. The few surviving stamp-collector shops also usually have postcards. Some antiques sellers also have postcards but these tend towards vendors who know the market and will price accordingly.

There are many dealers and they attend specialist postcard fairs, or allied events such as stamps or cigarette cards. Most fairs are well established and commonly occur on an annual cycle. They are usually advertised in local newspapers. The dealers acquire cards from private sellers but especially at auctions. A service is therefore provided by breaking down former collections to make individual cards available to others. The prices, of course, include their profit! If buying in relative bulk do not be afraid to ask for a reasonable discount.

Auction houses offer lots of postcards from time to time, although there are a few specialists. These are unlikely to appeal to newcomers unless prepared to buy whole albums to get a particular card or two.



Local historians focus on real-photo street scenes like this one of Long Eaton. Unfortunately the crease across the middle lowers its possible value.

The details of specialist sellers are available in postcard annuals which also give guidance on prevailing prices.

The internet is obviously a rich source. Many dealers have their own web sites and show illustrations of the cards on offer. Auction houses will announce when relevant sales are due. Big sites such as amazon and ebay also include postcards. A problem with this means of acquisition is that the site and the dealer will add their profits as well as needing to pay postage, so that the overall price becomes high. On the other hand we can browse the net at moments to suit ourselves and compare to the cost of going from town to town on the off-chance of finding postcards. If searching the net it is best to enter a very particular topic name because "postcard" on its own will attract millions of useless results.



Those interested in trade or retailing might look at advertising cards. They were often printed in bulk and given away so be cautious of high prices unless you are sure of scarcity. This "G.P. Government Tea" card dates to 1906.

And a warning! There are, sadly, facsimile copies of some of the rarest cards where price of the original attracts the unscrupulous to offer theirs at similar rates.

CARD CONDITION

After the subject matter of each postcard, its' condition is the most critical. Defects will have a significant effect on price:

- creases,
- tears, or holes,
- buffed edges and corners,
- marks and stains,
- missing applique, flap or pull-out pictures,
- dealers stamps or labels,
- stamp removed.
- general fading or decay of the picture.
- bleaching of real-photo types due to inadequate washing and stop of developing process at time of production.

Collectors generally focus on clean, crisp and undamaged cards. Whether postally used is more a matter of choice but messages are also a theme of collecting in itself!



Some themes, like cats, remain enormously popular with collectors but were also originally printed by the million, so once again you need to sort the rare from common. Card by J. Salmon.

LEARN MORE

It pays to learn more because prices reflect the comparative merit of any card.

The price of local studies subjects vary according to scarcity of the view, so you need to check what are common. Fortunately most towns have now been subject to at least one book of old images, so this can be checked.

Artist work is more difficult for the newcomer who should therefore be careful. There are a growing number of specialist books about postcard artists in a compendium style but very few monographs. Look out also for the postcard annuals and price guides which usually have relevant listings. Even old postcard books found in second-hand shops will give some indication of which artists are most collectable.



Tea Pluckers on an estate in Sri Lanka. Card by Lake House Printers, Sri Lanka. Appeal to tea collectors, Sri Lanka and anyone who holidayed there!

Look at abebooks.co.uk on the web or one of the similar bookseller sites under a search for postcard titles. The cost of a book is likely to repay itself.

Those who get a taste for the hobby in Britain look to the specialist magazine "Picture Postcard Monthly." Similar publications are available in other countries. There are also many books on the overall history of picture postcards and you may be able to access them at a town library.

Finally, there are postcard collector clubs scattered about the country. They primarily organise meetings and have a range of events such as talks, card displays and dealer offerings. A few clubs pursue study such as their local postcard publishers. Mostly club members tend to specialise in view cards of their particular locality.



The Great Railway Disaster on the G.N.R. at Grantham, Sept. 10th, 1906.
This railway smash is typical of hundreds of disasters and accidents which local publishers recorded in postcards. As a printed version this one has less value than a real-photo type. Value depends on rarity and newcomers should spend time on research before paying huge sums of money.