

4th March “The Golden Age of the Picture Postcard” a talk by Clive Holliday using a power point presentation of approximately 100 postcards.

Clive started his presentation with a seaside joke postcard produced by Bamforths. The words on the card had a double meaning. This particular one has the question “Do you ever get a little tickle?” Older cards however can be more interesting and can tell us much about the times when they were produced. The next card was a photographic view of West Bognor from the pier. This shows bathing huts from the days when people changed into their bathing suits and hats in the privacy of the hut which was then drawn by a horse into the sea. This card dates from the period when George V uttered his famous words about Bognor! A postcard of Weymouth shows men and women “promenading” on the sea front. The ladies here are wearing large hats and some are carrying parasols to protect them from the sun. Again bathing huts are in evidence. One of the earliest postcards was produced in October 1869. An example of this type of card was posted in Belgium in 1877. It had the stamp printed on one side. The British Post Office copied this idea and in 1870 this was the first English Carte de Poste. The first British cards were designed with the address on one side and the message on the other so the postman wouldn't have time to read it! By 1895 the picture was on one side of the card with a small space for a message and the address was on the reverse. In 1901 the size of the card was standardised at three and a half inches by five and a half inches. The pictures became bigger and the space for the message became smaller. This was the golden age of the postcard. People collected them, they put them in albums, swapped them and joined collectors clubs. In 1902 the British Post Office changed the design of the postcard so that one side was divided to write the message and the address and the picture was on the whole of the other side. Before the reverse was divided the picture side sometimes included a flap or space for the message.

Different countries produced different types of cards. The Japanese were skilled in hand coloured tinted cards. These were produced with the card passing along a production line of different colourists. The French produced studio shots of young children beautifully lit by candlelight. Even leather cards were made in Canada. A German card of 1905 features a lady showing her ankle, this was quite racy for the time and would have driven grandpa crazy!

Bamforths were the leaders in the production of postcards until WWI when the Americans took over the lead. A postcard showing a painting of three cats in a line with the words “Who said ghosts? I did”, was based on a picture by Louis Wain. He was the artist who drew cats in human situations. His pictures are now very collectable and this particular postcard is worth about £10. Sadly Louis Wain's mind deteriorated and he ended his days in an institution for the insane. He was still drawing cats but his pictures became increasingly bizarre. The American Company, Harrison Fisher, produced a set of six cards featuring the senses. These were sight, taste, smell, hearing, touch and last but not least “common sense”. We all know that in today's digital age photographs can be manipulated. Early postcards were also “doctored”. Close examination of some cards show the same people appearing twice, the same herd of cows occurring in various places, shadows in scenes that are moonlit and the same country yokel brings greetings from “Darzet”, “Zummerset” and “Dere ol Devon”! Upturned boats feature as cosy homes in two cards. One was French and the other was from Loch Long in Scotland. Clive visited Loch Long and enquired about the whereabouts of the boat

and was told that it had blown away! On a recent holiday in Wimborne Clive tried to recreate the same scene as shown on a post card of East Street. The original card was black and white and included Frisby's the shoe shop. Frisby's was still there but Clive was informed that the original shop in the card had burnt down and had been rebuilt. Picture postcards of royalty were very popular. One card features four generations ie Queen Victoria, Edward VII, George V and Edward VIII. Other cards of the royal family show Prince John who tragically died very young; Queen Mary; Cicely Cavendish a direct descendant of Bess of Hardwick; the present Queen Elizabeth II as a baby and the children of the last Tsar of Russia. The world of glamour was represented in a postcard of Gladys Cooper. She was a stage actress and mother-in-law to Robert Morley. She was considered a beauty of her day and was a star of stage, films and TV.

The cameras in the early days of postcards required long exposure times and models posing for a picture often had a fixed expression because they had to stay still for a long time. Additionally any animals used were often stuffed ones so that they did not move! Postcards are snap shots in time and are historical records of the period. One card features a charabanc outing. The vehicle shows a maximum speed for the vehicle as 20mph and the ladies on the coach are all wearing the cloche hats that were fashionable at the time. Many thousands of cards were sent home during WWI. The messages on the cards were often censored with a black pen or words were cut out for security reasons. The Daily Mail produced postcards in aid of an army charity one of which shows the firing of a Howitzer gun. These cards are known as "Battle postcards". The most popular cards sent during this period were the woven cards with ornate silk embroidered designs. A black edged card was produced on 12 October 1915 to commemorate the death by German firing squad of the nurse Edith Cavell. Men held as prisoners of war by the Japanese were allowed to send postcards home but were not allowed to write them themselves. The POWs ticked items on a prepared list and the Japanese then typed these details onto a postcard. The prisoner then signed the card. One resourceful Chesterfield man sent a card with dots on it which when joined up revealed a morse code message. In 1908 Donald McGill was a prolific producer of seaside joke postcards. These cards were renowned for their double meanings and were very popular. Some people took exception to the cards and McGill was sent to prison for a short period. He claimed that any misinterpretation of the message was in the mind of the beholder. One typical McGill card features a nurse being rebuked with the message "No, no nurse, I said prick his boil"! This accompanied by much laughter concluded Clive's talk on the golden age of the picture postcard. A vote of thanks was given by Clyde Anderson.