

Introduction



Whenever I'm lucky enough to hold any vintage postcard, I'm transported back to my late teens, when I lived and breathed postcards. I recall the time that I couldn't sleep because I'd newly purchased a hatbox from an auction house in Jersey. It was crammed full of old postcards, three ancient postcard albums and assorted ancient ephemera. The smell of age was so seductive. I ritualistically lifted the hatbox from my bedside up onto my bedspread, opened it and lusted over the beauty and rich history lying inside. The next day, I showed my hatbox of postcards to a reluctant chimneysweep who'd come to sweep my mother's chimney. When I looked at his puzzled, slightly wary face, he and I both knew I was addicted to postcards.

Some of my fantasy cards are mounted in frames on my kitchen wall, well protected from my cooking over the years. One wooden, glass-fronted frame is dedicated to three cards depicting a photomontage of many babies. The first card shows a woman standing among the reeds and using a large net to fish for babies in a river. The second card is called an initial card, showing a large letter N with infants' heads peeking out from huge, white lilies that run up each side of the enormous letter. Most of the children are smiling, but some look somewhat disgruntled or bemused.

The third card in the frame on my kitchen wall depicts an old swimming pool next to what might be a boat house or double-storey changing area. Over thirty children and babies are crammed inside the strange building and over twenty are in the water. The crudity of the photomontage lends an even more bizarre quality to the card, with little care taken to ensure that the perspective

is at all credible. Some of the babies would be at least a monstrous ten feet in height if perspective were to be taken into consideration.



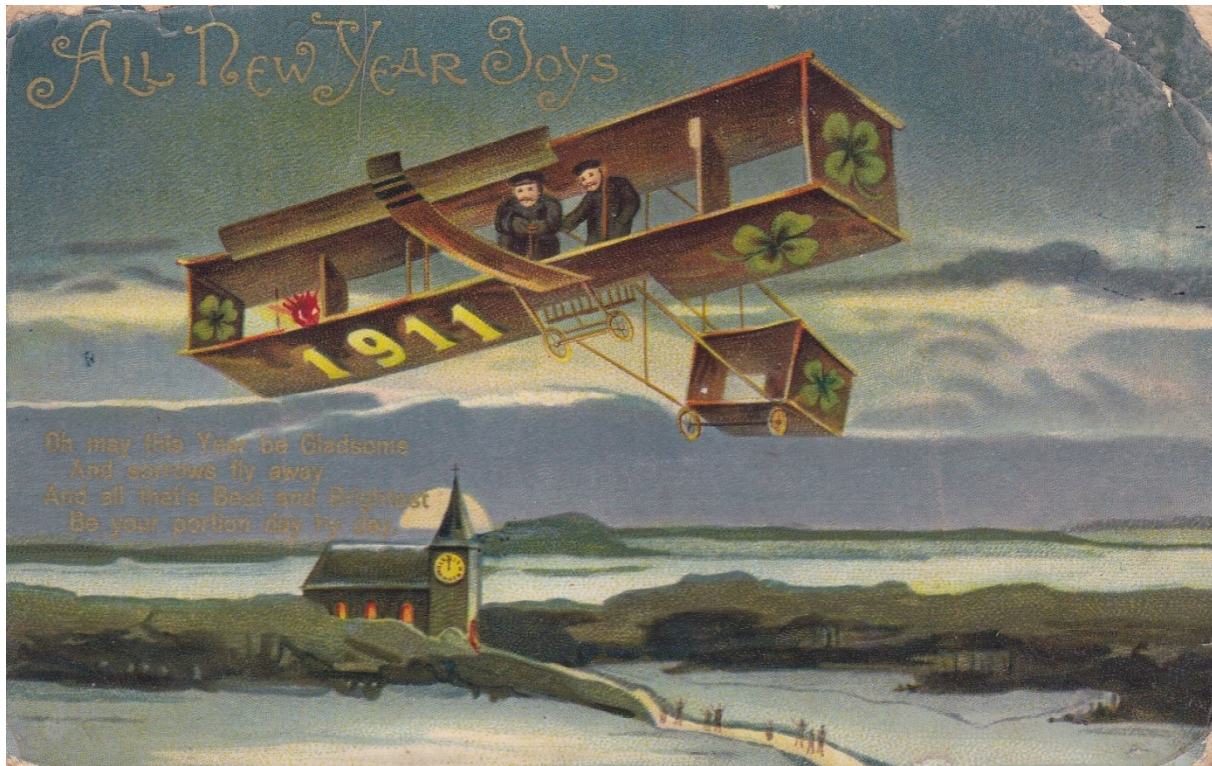
Most of my two thousand cards are stored upstairs in my bedroom inside two large metal files that slide open to reveal my treasures. Each card sits snugly inside its protective cellophane sleeve. I've spent many happy hours taking random cards that take my fancy out of their effective safety jackets to read whatever the senders had to say on the back of the postcards. Thoughts that I might be snooping on peoples' private lives are swiftly dismissed. I also enjoyed categorising my postcard collection, filing them into their relevant sections, although they often could be filed under many different categories at the same time. When given the opportunity, over the decades I've added to my collection, following on from when I started obsessively collecting them in the early 1970s. Unlike so many of my past pursuits, I've never fallen out of love with postcards. If I were to ever be forced through penury to sell any of my collection, I

certainly would never sell all of them. I'd ensure I kept a firm grip on all my favourite fantasy and novelty cards. They mean too much to me.

What had started as merely an idea for a final thesis at Art College, where I was studying for a Graphic Design degree, rapidly escalated into a gripping hobby, one which threatened to leave me a penniless art student. I became an avid, some might say fanatical, collector of small pieces of yellowing card, three and a half by five and a half inches. The price of buying cards in most junk shops, antique shops, auction sales or from postcard dealers, on or offline, rockets as supply diminishes and demand remains keen. Sotheby's and other auctioneers have been selling the rarer, more select cards for hundreds of pounds. The price of the cards in the average postcard dealer's shoe box or files reflects their new-found respectability. When I started collecting postcards forty years ago, it was one of the fastest growing hobbies among folk who have the collecting bug. All over the modern world, deltiophiles are still going strong. It's a thrill to own so many items, some of which are well over a century old, items that reflect and document distant times so accurately.

William Ouillette had already compiled a book called *Fantasy Postcards*. Many other books on postcards have been published. I could have utilised their examples in this book, but I deliberately set out to unearth my own examples by the rooting around in junk shops, antique shops and auction sales. More recently, I've bought several cards on eBay. Ouillette admitted his book has a minimum of words because he maintains that his chosen examples speak for themselves. I decided to try to put into words some observations that he chose to omit. My writing reflects that there are many varieties of postcards. In my original thesis on fantasy in postcards, I not only dealt with the accepted categories of fantasy postcard, but also with the wider classification of cards. I saw fantasy elements in certain cards which might seem perfectly ordinary to other people and attempted to justify my claim. Some of my examples in my original thesis had less to do with fantasy than others, but I included them because they interested me.

Most postcards come down to us from the Golden Age of Postcards, which was from 1900-1918, although they've been in existence since 1869. Coloured picture postcards only came into their own in Britain in 1900. Fantasy also crops up in slightly more modern cards, but to me, more modern fantasy cards are not as extraordinary as their predecessors and fail to excite in the same way that the Edwardian ones do. This is despite modern manufacturers and publishers having the work of the Surrealists and Dadaists to draw inspiration from. Modern cards similar to Edwardian fantasy postcards can be found today, but the intrinsic quality of the old style of printing is mostly missing. This is due to most of them having a high-gloss finish and more garish-coloured ink which trumpets the fact they are obvious facsimiles. They fail to impart the same degree of satisfaction to the viewer; the sharp edges have mostly disappeared, rendering them a pale imitation of the genuine article, which is the Edwardian postcard basking in its Golden Age.



When my postcard addiction began back in the late 1970s, I could only bear to purchase one or two examples of the more modern fantasy postcard; all I could afford went into buying original pre-1924 cards. I now possess, salivate over, hoard in files and display in frames around my house, roughly two thousand old postcards of all types, but my favourite category is my fantasy postcard collection. A few of these are the ones I've chosen to display in large frames for anybody lucky enough to see and enjoy. I think it would be sad to imprison the most beautiful examples of their kind inside my cold, metal files. They deserve to be easily seen, even though I might be somehow diminishing their financial value by exposing the cards to decades of exposure to light. I'll live with that risk, as their value to me is not financial. Their quirky beauty as they look down at me from my walls delights me daily, which to me is priceless.



Among the postcard producers back in the latter years of the 1970s, my favourite publishers were the Medici Society. They published a postcard by Margaret W. Tarrant called 'Peter's Friends' which has a whimsical magic about it. I bought a similar, older card which only shows the still existing statue of Peter Pan. My older card left out the fairies and children, allowing the statue's magic to speak for itself, but I decided not to include it here, as I prefer Margaret W. Tarrant's version.



Molly Brett's card is drawn solely from her imagination, unlike some photographed cards, old and new, which used real animals dressed in human costumes, posed in often awkward situations and positions that would be painful even for a human being, let alone for the unfortunate animal. The slightly disturbing image of the dog on the next postcard illustrates this.



Not all depictions of animals were cuddly, as is shown in the next card, which was sent to the lucky recipient in 1908. It's a creepy-looking illustration, appearing to be more like a man with the head of an ass than an ass in human clothing. It's a fantastical image which is no doubt poking fun at a target.



The Paris Exhibition of 1900 helped to popularise postcard collecting throughout the world as well as in France and Great Britain. The especially constructed 'fantastic, other-world buildings,' which were erected around the base of the Eiffel Tower, were an excellent subject for souvenir postcards. People would climb all the way to the top of the Tower in order to post a card to boast they'd climbed up there. The same exhibition brought about the production of a large number of novelty type, hold-to-light postcards.

So great was the growing number of dedicated deltiophiles, otherwise known as postcard collectors, only a short time elapsed before a Glaswegian newspaper editor wrote, 'In ten years, Europe will be buried beneath picture postcards.' His statement turned out to be unnecessarily alarmist, as did some other fanciful predictions published on the subject of the growing interest in sending and collecting postcards. Postcards evoked a strange effect on the populace, like a spreading fever. According to a lady writing to the editor of the Picture Postcard Magazine in

1900, travellers who'd clambered to the summit of Mount Rigi in Switzerland, 'made a rush for the hotel and fought for the picture postcards. Five minutes later, everybody was writing away for dear life. Nobody troubled about the glorious view. I believe that the entire party had come up, not for the sake of the experience or the scenery, but to write postcards and to post them on the summit.' Certain ambitious, adventurous people would use postcards to perform great feats of skill. One of the most curious involved an elderly Norwegian who spent from 1900 to 1904 writing a 46,000-word novel onto a single postcard.

The largest postcard in the world was seven feet by four feet, made of plasterboard and was delivered by truck. Funnily enough, it was sent on St Patrick's Day. A factor which helped to produce such a plethora of fantasy was the small size of workable area on a postcard, allowing the artist to move speedily from one idea to another without the risk of becoming bored and therefore boring. Ideas were speedily generated and shot out into an eager world, hungry for entertainment.



The materials used to make the average postcard were mostly perishable. They have a transitory quality, well-suited to fantasy. Many of the materials stuck on to the more old-fashioned postcards were even more ephemeral, such as tissue, lace, hair, feathers, glitter, real flowers and grasses. The delicate pink roses on my postcard of the woman in the enormous, improbable hat are fabricated from real velvet which has been stuck onto the surface of the card. The rest of the card is printed.