

Sandbach History Society
Report of the April 2023 meeting
Linda Clarke: The Golden Age of Picture Postcards

Linda Clarke's presentation at the Sandbach History Society's May meeting was "The Golden Age of Picture Postcards". Mrs Clarke explained that when she worked as an archivist at Cheshire Archives and Local Studies she was amazed by the large number of postcards in the collection. Historians are interested in postcards for a number of reasons she said, including showing the changes in places over time and various aspects of changing literacy styles.

She said that during the "Golden Age" – 1900 to 1920 – 3 billion postcards were delivered in Britain. Postcards could be sent and delivered quickly with the Post Office's six deliveries and collections per day in many parts of the country. They were also a cheap form of communication costing ½d. for the card and ½d. for the postage.

It wasn't until 1902 that the message could be written on the same side as the address; prior to that the message was often written around the picture. The Post Office relaxed the rules and a divided back came into being with the message on the left and the address on the right.

The increase in leisure time and the ability to travel meant that postcards with pictures of places visited were particularly popular.

Mrs Clarke said it was interesting to see the use of language on the cards and the standards of literacy. Levels of literacy were improving and manuals were produced on how to write good messages and some cards were produced with sentences started ready for completion by the sender.

Postcards are sent without an envelope and the writers tried all sorts of devices to prevent the postman reading private information on their rounds. Writing in code or shorthand, writing upside down, or in a foreign language were used.

The First World War separated couples and the number of "sweetheart" picture postcards increased rapidly. The speedy communication by postcard also allowed friends and family back home to know that their loved ones were safe and boosted the morale of the troops.

Photographic studios began to produce postcards but these are generally given to others rather than sent through the post.

A holiday postcard was a chance to send a message to someone to say what a lovely time they were having. For many, the postcard is synonymous with the seaside. The Bamforth Company, who had become successful in producing postcards with scenes together with verses from songs or hymns found a market for seaside postcards. They, along with artist Donald McGill, contributed to the production of saucy seaside postcards.

Mrs Clarke ended by saying that the production of postcards declined as people made more use of the telephone for quick communication. She said that there are many people who collect postcards and good examples can be found at flea markets, on eBay, etc.

The talk was followed by the Society's Annual meeting.

This was the last meeting of the Society for the 2022/3 season. There will be a visit to Englesea Brook Chapel and Museum of Primitive Methodism in June and the new season will begin on 5th September at Sandbach Library with a talk by Graham Dodd on "The Great Fire of Nantwich, 1583". For further information about the Society see

www.sandbachhistorysociety.org.uk