

THE ADVENTURE OF POSTCARDS...



The origins of the postcard

The first illustrated postcard was sent in 1840 by British man of letters Theodore Hook to... himself! This visiting card was rediscovered in 2002 and is the oldest missive ever sent. It is a unique yet rather obscure object.

It was at the Austro-German postal conference of 1865 that the idea of postcards emerged. In 1869, small illustrated visiting cards were introduced into circulation and were a roaring success. Within the first few days, 140,000 had been sold and that figure had risen to 10 million by the end of the year. Many other nations quickly followed suit.

The Franco-Prussian War: postcards sneak across the French border. When Paris was under siege, postcards were sent over enemy lines by hot air balloon so that the city could keep its communications open.

After the French were defeated at the Battle of Sedan, French statesman Léon Gambetta created a camp near the town of Le Mans for what would eventually become the regional voluntary army known as the *Armée de Bretagne*. It attracted nearly 80,000 men, who gained moral support from correspondence with their families – until paper began to run out. A local bookseller, Léon Besnardeau, came up with the idea of making small rectangles from the covers of notebooks whose sheets he had already sold. Once he had exhausted his own supply, he had white cards printed by Oberthur in the city of Rennes. The illustration's inscription – *Souvenir de la Défense Nationale* or "A souvenir of our defence of the nation" – suggests that the card was made after the Franco-Prussian War for soldiers who had returned to pay their respects. Léon Besnardeau hence played a significant role in the development of the postcard, even if he was not its inventor.

1872: postcards gain legal recognition in France. Two models priced at 10 and 15 *centimes* appeared. 7,412,700 were sold in the first week.

The cards were exclusively printed by the official *Administration des Postes* and sold in post offices and tobacconists' shops. They measured 8 x 12cm, with a blank side for writing on and a printed side for the address.

1875: the rules of postcard production were relaxed, with the only remaining requirement being that size and weight matched the official model. Businesses seized their chance to print various promotional editions. It was legally decreed that postcards must not offend public morality or institutions.

1889: France's first illustrated postcards were created for the Paris *Exposition Universelle*. Within 20 days, 57,500 copies of five engravings of the Eiffel Tower by Léon-Charles Libonis were sold.

It was a man from Marseille, Dominique Piazza, who first ventured into using photos instead of engravings when he wanted to send pictures of his home city to an exiled friend. Piazza developed a commercial product, but he could not get the patent. Parisian printers and publishers would later take up the idea. In this way, postcards democratised photography, which up until then had been an elite preserve.

1900s to 1920s: the golden age

The early 20th century was a glorious time for postcards:

- Free compulsory education meant hitherto neglected social classes were able to read and write.
 - Every village had a post office.
- More people were gradually becoming able to go on holiday, which helped postcard sales.
- Postcards became an important way to pass on information, given the frequency of postal collections.
 - Postcards were cheaper to send than letters.

Postcards were available for purchase everywhere, with everyone from jewellers to garages, newsagents, grocers, cafes, cobblers and even pharmacies becoming publishers. From this point they were sold for around 15 *centimes* apiece, and were already becoming collector's items which were accessible to the entire population. In 1900, France was home to 38 million people, yet it produced 8 million cards and 33 collector's magazines.

Initially only the picture side of the card could be written upon, as the other side was for the address alone. From 1 May 1904, missives could be written on the same 9 x 14cm side as the address, leaving an entire face for the picture.

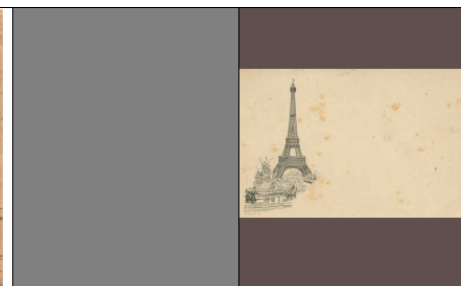
Never were more postcards and letters written than during the Great War: 6 to 7 billion were sent by soldiers to their loved ones – that is an average of nearly 1,000 cards per soldier. Produced by private or official organisations, they were a way to pass on propaganda and love letters. Some creators even dared to put out satirical or anti-war cards, but by 1915 they found themselves censored.

Post-World War One: a decline

From 1880 to 1920, 2 billion postcards were sent. They only started to go into decline once the war had ended.

There were many reasons for this:

- Cars gave tourists the freedom to travel beyond the places where postcards were sold in abundance.
- Amateur photographers could take their own snaps as souvenirs.
- Artisanal production methods were replaced by industry and regional printing became rarer as it struggled to produce the expected quality.
- Postcards became less frequently needed for passing on information as illustrated newspapers, telephones and radios grew in significance.



The 1950s and 60s: the arrival of colour

Unlike previous decades, the 1950s and 60s saw technical developments that boosted postcards' quality. Black and white cards were made more attractive thanks to wider use of bromide production methods. Photographers started offering aerial views, and glossy postcards with shaped edges were the order of the day.

Colour photos started appearing in the 1950s, but it was not until the mid-1960s that they could be attractively reproduced.

Society was changing rapidly, and producers avoided picturing characters or cars on their postcards so they did not date too quickly. This was a trend that had begun in the 1930s and 40s, but it became more widespread in this era. The consequence was that views of towns and villages represented real life to a much lesser degree.

Post-1970: a renewal

Renewed interest in postcards was fuelled by collectors. There was no shortage of people seeking out artefacts from the golden age of the postcard. The first collector's catalogues started appearing.

Postcard publishers were spurred on and inspired by this renaissance. They started making innovative products with multiple images, reproductions of paintings or posters, humorous pictures and so on. They brought new levels of attention to photos and the look of the cards. New formats were invented in the 1990s, with new grades of paper and the emergence of e-cards.

Now measuring 10.5 x 15cm and printed in colour, postcards had become a way of establishing social links from the sender to a proud addressee who would display this mark of friendship in his or her home.

Today, postcards are sold in more places than any other item right across the globe. Millions are still made in France and the appetite for them remains keen. Despite the availability of online resources and virtual cards, physical copies are still sought after



A FINE SOUVENIR OF BRITTANY

An ever-fertile ground for postcards

Thanks to its history, languages, flag, traditions and varied local dress and heritage, Brittany has long been a source of fascination.



Ever since the first train arrived in Nantes in 1840, Brittany has welcomed countless visitors. This was a land that inspired painters and writers who were looking for a total break from ordinary home life. Their work helped give the area its image as a romantic, poetic and spiritual place.

The first regional stereotypes appeared around this time. These bespoke a purportedly isolated wilderness of filth, poverty, alcoholism, odd customs and incomprehensible dialects. This was an image that lasted for nearly a century.

In the early 20th century the Breton coastline and its seaside resorts attracted a flourishing clientele. As the decades wore on this phenomenon continued to grow until the advent of paid holiday created mass tourism. Some of the holidaymakers were all those natives of the region who had left to start a new life in Paris or elsewhere.

An ideal place for postcard producers

Postcards found a very receptive audience in Brittany. Of all France's regions, this was one where postcard production and design was particularly varied and fertile. By the early 20th century, Parisian or regional publishers were seeing to industrially producing postcards for Brittany's cities. Local publishers captured daily life the countryside and villages. There were numerous photographer-publishers across Brittany. At first they explored on foot or on bicycles; later they used trains or cars to immortalise thousands of scenes, some posed, some not. Le Doaré, Hamonic, Villard, Waron, Laurent, Artaud and many more became well-known names among collectors.

VIEWS OF BRITTANY'S LANDSCAPE

Moments frozen in time

For more than a century, postcard producers and photographers covered the length and breadth of Brittany, immortalising towns, villages, the coast, rural landscapes and much more. Their postcards are moments frozen in time that capture profound changes at various stages of history. The landscape has been slowly remodelled by the development of road and rail networks, the expansion of tourism, economic factors and, finally, rural exodus.



But the millions of postcards created between 1890 and 1920 let us compare and observe some of the often rather arresting changes in the area over these short decades. Thanks to these little missives, anyone and everyone can step back into the past and see how their home has evolved since 1900.

Agriculture

Agricultural production intensified in Brittany during the 20th century, becoming increasingly mechanised and reorganised by changing groupings of land. The appearance of crops like artichokes or cauliflowers was a sign of these changes in the Breton countryside, as were the types of tools used. Steam engines, for instance, started to arrive in the fields.

Coastal activities

At the dawn of the last century, 50,000 people were making their livelihoods from the ocean. As well as fishing out at sea, some people harvested shellfish, seaweed or salt while others were involved in related industries such as canning. Fishing became progressively more professional and ports began to specialise: Douarnenez dealt in sardines, Paimpol in cod, Guilvinec in langoustines, and so on. As fishing developed, so did postcards: they depicted the debut of oyster farming and tuna fishing, which was particularly attractive to photographers who enjoyed the symmetry of the catch. Seaweed harvests also left their mark on the Breton coast for a long time. In the mid-20th century, pleasure boats and sailing developed, so regattas started appearing on postcards.

Industry

Brittany was no stranger to industrialisation and the deep changes that came with it. Photographers visited factories to fulfil a kind of social reportage in which they made staged portraits of workers, as can be seen in the many photos taken inside industrial buildings.

Producers used cards to showcase the diversity of the era's industrial infrastructure, including seaside canning factories, textile mills, shipyards and even power plants. The quality of rural life rose but the high days of the 19th century ended with the collapse of the country textile industry and the sardine crisis. The people of Brittany started moving towards cities, including Paris. Postcards bore witness to this rural exodus and the poverty that accompanied it. It is this more than anything that gave the region the bad reputation which dogged it for some time.

Transport

Everyday life in Brittany was radically changed by the arrival of trains, but so too was the landscape. Nantes was the first town with a line to Paris. The other major western cities were next to have a connection, and they in turn were then linked to coastal towns by smaller trains. Many postcards captured the infrastructure which came with these developments, such as viaducts and stations. The goings on in ports were also of interest to photographers, who snapped the various works, ferry arrivals and merchant ships docked in the quays.

Tourism

The coast was still a slightly fearful place for the people of the early 19th century. Yet the curative powers that its romantic allure would seem to suggest meant that seaside tourism gradually developed. Postcards depicted not only the growing success of the tourist industry, but also changing swimwear fashions. Harvesting shellfish was no longer shown on postcards as a means of subsistence – it was also a fun diversion for tourists. This changing perspective on life at the seashore was indicative of how society was altering the way it saw the coast.

The Second World War

The 1939-1945 war forced a slowdown in postcard production. Yet despite this progressive decline, the French and German authorities used them to disseminate pictures of the damage done by enemy bombardments. Swathes of Brest, Saint-Nazaire, Lorient, Nantes and Saint-Malo were ruined, and by capturing the vast urban destruction postcards became a political propaganda tool.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

In the collective imagination, Brittany is synonymous with the seashore. Tourists looking for fresh ocean air have flocked to the wild coastline. Postcards have not failed to reflect this and they show the region's landscape at its most beautiful. They showcase the lonesome heaths and rugged rocks torn at by wild seas. These "picture-postcard" images feed into holidaymakers' desire to share a totally other experience at the ends of the earth. Producers love these coastal views, taking in ports but also beaches, casinos and other tourist attractions. The first seaside resorts were much discussed by travellers and found the perfect advertising material in the postcard.

THE PHOTOGRAPHER'S STUDIO: THE ART OF PORTRAITS

The first generation of professional photographers started out in portraiture. Photography developed massively as of the 1880s. Brittany had 80 professional photographers by 1865 in its major towns, but smaller, rather modest studios were slowly opening in country towns and villages.



Before cameras had advanced enough to become household objects, people went to photographers' boutiques unless a mobile studio was visiting the area. In just a few hours they were able to develop highly accomplished images on paper with postcard pre-printing on the back. As they were sent only to friends and family, just a handful of such cards would be created each time.

Strike a pose for your peers...

If a photo was needed to mark an important life event or show a person's belonging to a social group, photographers would take shots of staged figures positioned on a set. People posed, unsmiling, in their best clothes and with an unreadable expression. Symbolic objects would also be on show, for example a cross would stand for faith, a book for education and a sculpted item of furniture for social ascension. Traditional costume and a headdress – markers of community affiliations – were *de rigueur*.

... or for people further afield

Such portraits gave rise simultaneously to numerous series of stock regional figures. In the early 20th century, it was not rare in various types of shop to find portraits of "natives" beside postcards of notable sites.

Major national publishers sent their photographers across Brittany. The local people were stunned and flattered by this interest from Parisians with their large cameras, so they proudly posed in their traditional dress knowing they would appear on thousands of postcards.

Although they were staged to fit stereotypes, these portraits are a glimpse into past lives of humble people who have rarely been captured in painting. Thanks to the postcard, everyone was able to get their photo taken for just a few *centimes* after many years in which portraiture was reserved solely for the elite.



PHOTOGRAPHY AND REPRODUCTION: POSTCARD SERIES

Photography

There is a direct link between postcards and photography, and technical advances strongly influenced their development. In the early days, people had to sit for 20 minutes for a black and white photo. By the 1900s, photographers had to be chemists, opticians and mechanics, without forgetting their painterly eye for a scene.



Printing postcards

The techniques used to produce postcards also had an effect on the way they were sold. Production methods changed so that low-cost mass reproduction became possible after years of small-scale printing, and as a result these little cards became affordable by all. Once the shot had been taken, it could be developed. From bromocolor to heliotype, typography, photogravure, *luxochromie*, neobromure, mexichrome and etching, printing techniques were diversifying as never before, especially as some printers developed their own jealously guarded methods. But of the many techniques, a handful stand out as true influences on the history of the postcard.

Late 19th century: lithography quickly became the preserve of art editions

This technique cannot be used in photography. It was very popular for illustrations and imagined scenes.

The 1900s: phototype and photo cards

Despite the fact it created clean, fine grained images and a way of printing that allowed postcards to grow in popularity in the early 20th century, phototype was abandoned. It cost too much, demanding numerous skilled workers and a considerable amount of time. With photo cards, photos could be developed by any amateur or professional photographer on the back of a postcard, but this craft did not last long.

Post-World War One, phototype was overtaken by helio-engraving

However the results of this change were unconvincing, in that mass production was favoured over artistic creativity – this was the era of yellowy cards and toning in blue, purple, green and so on.

The 1950s: the golden age of bromide

This technique would be discarded in favour of offset printing the following decade. It required professional equipment and training. Images could be produced on an industrial scale without compromising their quality.

The 1960s to 1970s: offset printing takes over

The first presses of this kind appeared in 1910 but it was not until the 1930s that they started to take off. It has become the top method for postcard creation, allowing high-quality, low-cost mass production.

21st century: the emergence of digital

Because it is so flexible and quick, this technique lets users create more models in reduced print runs while keeping prices low. However it has still not threatened offset printing when it comes to major editions and printing on card stock.

From black and white to colour

In the early 20th century, tens of workers spent all day with their paintbrushes, colouring in hundreds of postcards printed in black and white. Stencilling made the painters' work easier and quicker, but it was a task that eventually became mechanised rather than done by hand. It was not until the 1960s that quality cards were available in CMYK colour.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

There are numerous portraits of fishermen posing proudly for posterity or at their daily tasks (Sea dog, Brave, Cabin boy and his Captain, Island sailors and other Sea folk). Photographers were looking for "real" faces, and these Breton seamen with their craggy features and calloused hands battered by their lifestyles were the perfect models. They were away searching for sardines, tuna and cod for the best part of the year and they personified the hard life at sea from which they bravely made a living for their families. They were often pictured with their fishing rods or traps in hand, preparing fish soup or enjoying a smoke on their pipes. They are also shown covered in medals for their many rescue operations at sea. Consider, for example, René Autret, Captain of the Amiral Roze who 141 times was at the helm of a craft of little more than 10 metres and saved the lives of 233 people. He was awarded the Légion d'honneur in 1891.

DES IMAGES A DECODER

DECODING IMAGES

In the course of the 20th century, postcard producers kept up with their clientele and a changing society. Each era had a unique style and genre, and with these permutations came a changing image of Brittany.

Pre-World War One

During its golden age (1900–1920), the postcard was an often-favoured medium for sending information and news of events. Even the humblest country village was visited by the photographer. Certain themes, like the church, town hall and school, started to recur.

Local people were asked to play their part in street scenes, preferably in traditional dress. A picturesque, exotic vision of Brittany is the one that emerged most often. Traditional trades were also favoured; tasks done by factory workers or simple employees were recorded less frequently.

The inter-war period

Brittany changed after World War One: people abandoned their traditional clothes and carts were being replaced by cars. But postcards did not illustrate this modernisation. What they displayed was nostalgia for a way of life that was disappearing in Brittany. Publishers resorted to using old shots, where the stereotypes of “exotic Brittany” were still in evidence. They then moved onto more “timeless” images. Shots featuring people gave way to panoramas. Postcards were slowly losing their heart and soul.

Post-World War Two

By the 1950s, Brittany had accepted modernity and was looking to the future, leaving behind its austere, insular image. Postcard producers took to the skies to take aerial shots of monuments, towns and coastlines. This new generation of postcards was characterised by new urban scenes, modern constructions and major civil infrastructure. Multi-view pictures helped make the postcard a successful way of promoting tourism.

Closer to home

Artistic style was the order of the day in the 1980s. Advances in technology meant producers could let their creative juices flow and show off their originality. Postcards sometimes pictured a Brittany embellished by imaginative flourishes by enhancing manmade or natural views.

The age of ethnographic reportage had definitively ended, as Brittany displayed a modern image of itself.

The development of mass tourism meant that postcards largely depicted resorts, and it had become hard to find pictures of Brittany’s more hidden-away destinations. Economic crisis started to bite in the 21st century, and society started looking back over its origins. Traditional festivals were not just about regional togetherness – they also promoted reappropriated heritage and pride in Breton identity.



A WINDOW INTO PRIVATE LIVES

Postcards had always been used for communications. Like the telephone, internet or social networks today, postcards at the time were an affordable, easy and efficient way to bridge the distance between people and ease the pain of separation. Correspondence was by no means superficial. Readers get a real sense of daily life in France at the time, sometimes in all its private family details.

A souvenir of Brittany

Among the most frequently used phrases are “hello” and “a souvenir of...” as a little memento for friends and relatives. Many postcards with a message were written in summer. Postcards let people tell stories about their travels, with a few words scribbled on the back and a holiday picture on the front. Favourite subjects included health, the weather and the beauty of holidaymakers’ surroundings.

The price of words

After 1900, the Post Office had rules and rates which appear somewhat odd: certain sign-offs, such as *Amitiés*, *Amicale poignée de main* and *Bien à vous* (all roughly equivalent to “best wishes”) were accepted, while *Ca va bien* (“I’m fine”), *Revenez vite* (“come back soon”) and *Charmante journée* (“have a lovely day”) were taxed. Any correspondence of 5 words or less also benefitted from reduced postage rates. Postmasters had to be vigilant and check that the rules were respected.

Anyone who studies old correspondence will note peculiar phrasing, handwriting, expressions and uses of language which bear witness to the highly codified relationships and conversational style of the era.

The all-purpose postcard

Traders and craftsmen very quickly realised the potential of postcards to act as advertising, bills, notes, orders and so on.

Post was delivered and collected several times a day, at least twice (or sometimes even three times) in some districts. Hence postcards were used to make or cancel appointments and dates, with missives like “I’ll be there tomorrow at 11am...”

“I’m writing to you from the Front...”

The post was vital during World War One.

Soldiers used their downtime to have their photos taken and send them as cards to their loved ones. Photographers on the frontline were among the era’s most profitable tradesmen. Because of army franking, postcards could be sent for free and were an easy, popular way to send news from the Front. But there was censorship and the troops were not allowed to give information about their exact location, the number of casualties, future offensives or fellow soldiers’ morale. They were also obliged to write in French and not any other language they might speak at home, so their correspondence could be edited.

A Breton card – but in French

Of the millions of postcards sent in Brittany, only a few had greetings written in the local Breton or Gallo languages. Their backs also rarely featured messages written in Brittany’s regional language. In 1881-1882, the law decreed that (in theory) Breton should be absolutely banned from schools, and in 1902 a further law repressed the use of Breton by clergymen (but with only limited success). Other factors acted against the language, such as the development of railways, the advent of the tourism industry, and the melting pot of peoples created by the Great War. Although Breton was still the language used by families and in village or church life in the early 20th century, the people of Brittany were becoming increasingly bilingual and inclined to chat in French.



LE COSTUME BRETON SOUS TOUTES LES COUTURES

TOP TO TOE IN BRETON DRESS

Breton dress is unique because it is so diverse. Although different local styles of Breton folk dress started multiplying in the early 18th century, they garnered real attention after the French Revolution. In the mid-19th century, painter François-Hippolyte Lalaisse (1810–1884) documented their full range, which led postcard producers to take up the subject with gusto – Breton costumes were big sellers. They launched many hugely successful series: from 1900 to 1930, Joseph Villard (1838–1898) then Emile Hamonic (1861–1943) produced collections on “Breton headdresses” or “Breton folk dress”.

A few inconsistencies often appear on postcards: the producers muddled the huge numbers of styles, and sometimes the area mentioned in card’s caption does not match the clothing.

Brittany dressed up to the nines

Photographers focussed on headwear or ceremonial garb. They sometimes asked their “characters” to wear them in routine settings where in reality they would have been out of place.

Women were depicted far more often than men: photographers loved to capture the details of the many variations in their dress.

Postcards were much less often made in the Haute-Bretagne area of the region. One key factor in this was that, here, traditional dress was abandoned for more urban styles sooner, in the early 20th century. So photographers focussed much more heavily on Basse-Bretagne and the salt-harvesting Guérande region, the latter a rare part of Haute-Bretagne to keep traditional styles.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

The famous Breton top popularised by Coco Chanel (and later Jean-Paul Gaultier) is no match for the many styles of work clothes worn by Brittany’s sailors. They wore ultra-practical clothes which ideally would last a lifetime and survive not just giant waves and storms, but also the rigours of daily life. The colours resembled those used on the boats: ochre like the sails which were tanned with a mix of lard, seawater and pine bark, or blue like the sardine nets which were soaked in iron sulphate. In bad weather, waxed trousers, jackets and hats would keep these sea dogs dry. Seafarers were often shown wearing berets, but fishermen from Le Léon in northern Finistère wore strange hats known as calaboussen.

Cultural heritage Breton folk dress started to go into decline in the early 20th century. Reasons for this included the prestige of Parisian style and the now-successful ready-to-wear fashion business, as well as the need to adapt to new working patterns and transport; but the World Wars also played their part by revolutionising daily life. Yet postcards depicting the people of Brittany in traditional dress kept an image of this regional idiosyncrasy alive for some time. Today these cards are precious evidence. They let us study the way fashions changed in each area, and they allow Celtic revivalists to make authentic clothes and contemporary designers to reinvent them.



NOT QUITE REALISM, NOT QUITE CARICATURE

Postcards: witnesses to an era

The output of regional and national postcard producers between 1890 and 1920 can easily be likened to photo reportage.

Where other media were missing, postcards immortalised numerous news events such as shipwrecks, accidents and political or religious occurrences. It also represented town and village architecture, economic activities and the whole gamut of details from daily life. It held up a mirror to realities of Breton society which were changing, and sometimes even disappearing. These iconic documents of a caption which gives information and pinpoints the location of cards' subjects. This quality, unique among historic photography, perfectly complements historical records of a lost era.

Caricaturing a rural society

The exotic, picturesque vision of Brittany that had its origins in the 19th century was highly saleable. Photographers exaggerated and caricatured the region as strange and stuck in the past, in representations which occasionally tended towards being mocking, condescending or even insulting. Bretons were depicted as wild, dirty, drunken yokels. Their poverty, language and rural origins were mocked and caricatured, hence the frequently crude clichés about the region's people.



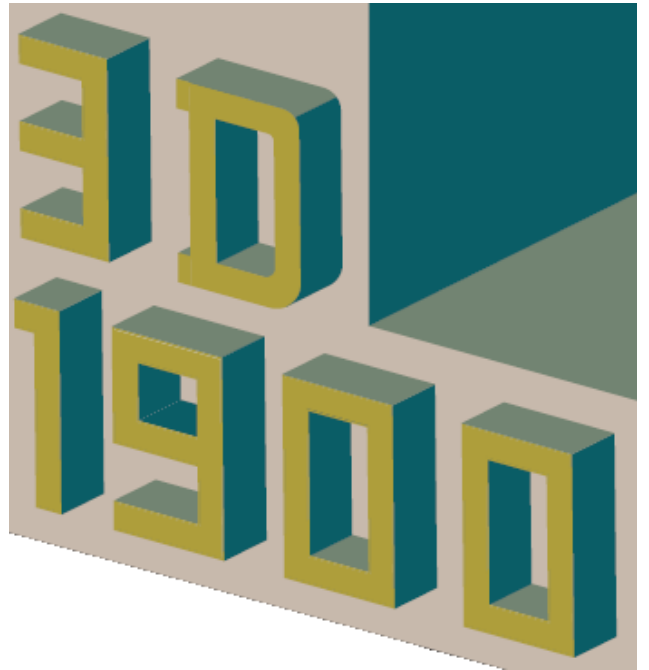
EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

Postcards show us a hard seafaring life which required courage and humility. Producers sometimes overplayed these qualities by depicting, for instance, an anxious wife awaiting her husband's return, hardened sailors or very young apprentices. Although there are no archive documents to prove their existence, the frightening "wreckers" who pillaged shipwrecked vessels have long lived in legend. Postcards showed coastal people's poverty, which was exacerbated by sardine crises and large families which sometimes had to be cared for by a widow. This hardship was difficult to escape. Although Brittany is a maritime region, most of its country families never saw the sea.

Postcards had become objects of mass consumption and were therefore of great financial importance to publishers. For this reason they were liable to use these stereotypes in many, often staged, series. Various tricks were used to dress up these photos including retouching, staging sometimes ridiculous or crude scenes in real or fake settings, using silly captions, and using child “models” or picturesque characters with unusual features. Photographers and publishers of the time owned their own sets, models and costumes, the latter either bought or made. Models might be family or friends, employees or simply people they met on their travels. For these reasons, it is important to pay close attention to the scenes snapped in many photos if we want to get a glimpse of real Breton society, rather than a false representation.



3D IN THE 1900S



Stereoscopy appeared in the mid-19th century and is considered to have revolutionised photography.

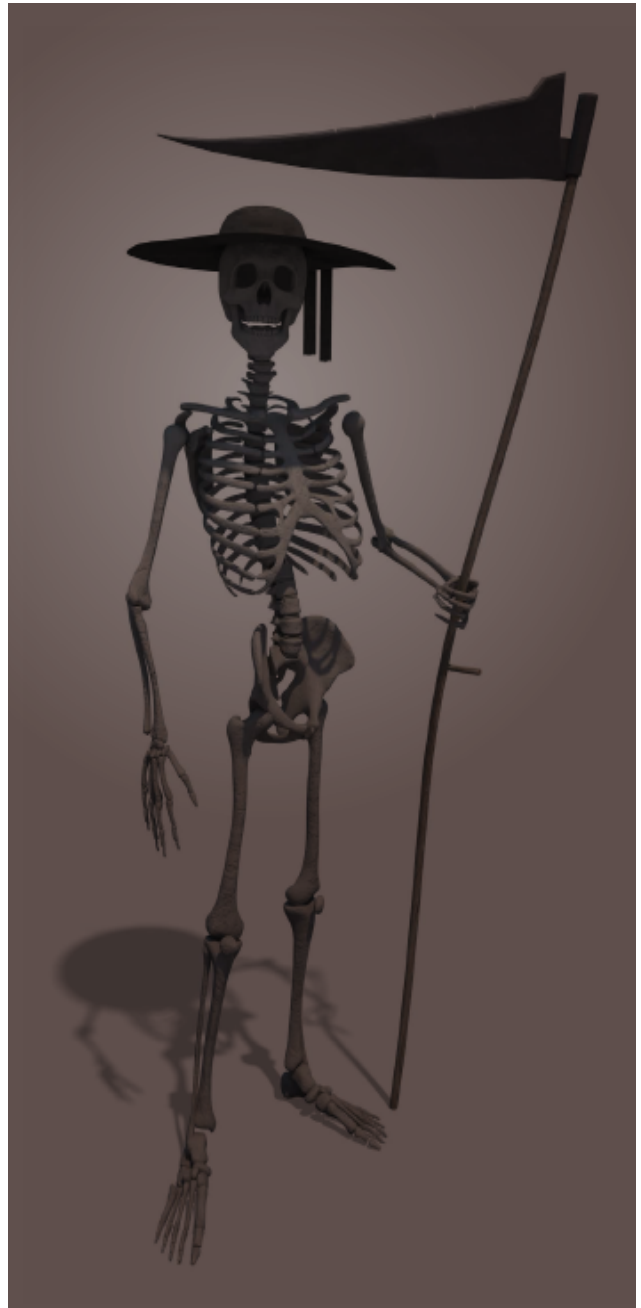
This image, displayed as a pair, can be viewed using a stereoscope. Bringing together two images gives the illusion of relief and an instant, almost animated 3D view.

This new technology which let people see the world in a different way was a huge success. Postcard producers made full use of it and stereoscopic cards were an important way for tourists to communicate. Because of stereoscope, people could enjoy relief views of landscapes and see street scenes move as in real life.

ANKOU (Kinect device)

Ankou, henchman of Death, collects the souls of the recently deceased in his creaking cart.

But should you hear the wheels of his cart slowly turning or you spot him with his scythe, it might not be long until you too shuffle off this mortal coil!





RELIGION, FAITH, BELIEFS AND SUPERSTITION

Breton faith

In the 1900s, Bretons were deeply religious people who regularly attended church and obeyed its clergy: evangelism and pilgrimages were always a roaring success. Their daily lives, social interaction and rites of passage were established around Catholicism. Prayers and mass set the order of the week, religious festivals punctuated the year and ceremonies marked new stages in life.

Religion's importance also left deep traces on the landscape – Brittany is scattered with thousands of chapels, crosses and churches. But as important to Bretons' faith were ancestral beliefs and practices.

From legend to belief

In Brittany, Christianity coexisted with other forms of worship, such as veneration of healer saints, springs, trees and rocks. Neither the clergy nor official state educators were able to eradicate them.

When they were ill, Breton country dwellers did not go to the doctor. Instead they used curative plants and visited men and women dubbed witches, bone-setters, or other terms for healers.

This wide-ranging mix of ancestral practices and Catholic religious traditions was utterly remarkable.

Hundreds of pilgrimages attracted many travellers, writers, painters and photographers all seeking to capture Breton devotion, the intensity of which was expressed at these joyous collective gatherings.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

There is a real truth behind the French saying that “to know how to pray, you need to have been a sailor”. Faced with an immense, tempestuous ocean, people tended to find strategies to attract Providence's favour. When they were at risk of wrecks or sinking, crews turned to prayer, vowing to fulfil a promise if they saw land again. That is why seafarers' votive offerings might be pictures, engraved plaques, or model ships. Sailors carried these in procession each year and offered them as thanks to the Virgin Mary. Every new ship was christened when it was first launched. This religious ceremony meant that God boarded the vessel with its men. Before each year's fishing campaign, tricked out boats and ships were blessed by the priest so that the crews were protected all year long. There were many portents of death in Brittany. If a wife in the Plouézec area had not heard from her sailor husband for some time, a candle placed near the statue of Saint-Loup revealed all: if the flame was clear and bright, he was fine, but if it sputtered or suddenly went out, he had surely died. Only the husband's memory remained. This was marked on a wall of all those lost at sea in the cemetery in Ploubazlanec, or in a practice known as Proëlla in Ouessant. Here a small wax cross was mourned and then even buried in place of the body which would never return.

MAKE MUSIC, SING, DANCE AND BE MERRY

Folkloric images on postcards often featured music, dance and traditional song. In the early 1900s, the first Breton festivals started to appear with their competitions for musicians, dancers and for costume. They were hugely popular. These events attracted photographers, who sometimes presented the music and dance in a rather elitist way despite the fact that these were popular practices with ancient roots in Brittany. As was the case for traditional dress, the Haute-Bretagne region was little represented on postcards here, as it fitted in less well with the stereotype.



Chants and songs

Singing was omnipresent in everyday life. People sang when they danced and worked, after dinner or in the fields, on boats and in canning factories... This aspect of life was little represented in postcards, its only traces being in the small number of female singers of odes and laments.

But Théodore Botrel's songs were widely disseminated and the success of his songs and poems was helped by publisher Emile Hamonic. Hundreds of thousands of postcards bearing his image dressed in various costumes were sold and his popularity was assured when couplets from his songs were printed on cards.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

Maritime songs told of fortunes at sea, the beauty of young women and seamen's courage. Chanting was also a way of providing rhythm for repetitive tasks, encouraging those whose morale and energy had sunk. Similarly, dance was a way of reinvigorating female workers after long hours at work. The sea has been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for hundreds of songwriters and performers. Théodore Botrel is one of the best known in France, with his famous La Paimpolaise, as is singer Fréhel, who was born Marguerite Boulc'h but took her stage name from a local cape. Another celebrated name was Suzy Solidor, who changed her name from Suzanne Rocher to adopt the name of a seaside tower, and who sang about the ocean and the girls of Saint-Malo... Bretons could buy the lyrics to Botrel's songs on postcards containing one verse apiece. To get hold of the entire song, they would need to buy more than one card: 6 for La Paimpolaise, 6 for Tricot de laine, and 8 for Deux gabiers.

Musicians

While everyone used to sing and dance, only men played instruments. Pairings of bombards and Breton bagpipes were very often represented, while other instruments were side-lined, such as violins, accordions, hurdy-gurdies, clarinets, fifes, drums and veuze pipes. Bombard and Breton bagpipe players perched on barrels were great favourites of card producers, and while they were accurate they quickly became a stereotype of Breton music. However postcards did reflect what musicians were really doing in the early 20th century: they played a part at every communal, celebratory event, be it religious or secular. They were also seen among army regiments during the Great War, where their role was to uphold the troops' morale. They also sailed on fishing boats with accordion players.

Dance

A constant accompaniment to songs and music, dance was a very important part of country people's daily lives. In the past, any kind of singing or music playing was a reason to dance. As with bombard and Breton bagpipe players, we see major dance styles reflected on postcards but these were often wrongly identified. Although many cards showed outdoor dancing, far fewer had pictures of the dance cafes or dance halls which held weekly events.



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BRETON PRIDE IN A STRONG IDENTITY

Postcards show how invested the Breton people were in their culture and identity. They document the people's struggle to gain recognition for their social convictions throughout the decades. The earliest postcards illustrated the regionalism espoused by such Breton intellectuals as Anatole Le Braz and Charles Le Goffic, who were founders of the Union Régionaliste Bretonne in 1898.



Passion for Breton identity was also spread by druids and traditional poets, the intellectuals within Brittany's culture.

Cards also illustrate more recent struggles, such as protection of the Breton language via new Diwan schools and bilingual French-Breton schools established over the past 50 years.

Yet another battle over Breton identity remains current today, touching the region's very borders. Debates have continued about unifying Brittany with the Loire-Atlantique region since the French administrative areas were first created in 1956.

The Breton people are not only committed to their identities, but to their religion, society and environment too.

Postcards show how involved Breton people were in these issues. When France was voting in legislation to separate Church and state in 1905, they set up barricades to stop inventories of church goods being drawn up.

Brittany also rose up against working conditions when they were considered to be unfair. The people would hold demonstrations and occupy factories.

The Breton people's struggles have also encompassed ecological issues, and postcards have illustrated this with pictures of clean-up operations on beaches ravaged by the oil spills that have regularly washed up on Breton shores over the past four decades.

Postcards have also been used to carry anti-nuclear messages, coordinated by the *Fédération Antinucléaire Bretagne*. A significant part of the region's struggles in this regard were the three years spent demonstrating against the building of a power station in Plogoff, Finistère.

EXHIBIT IN THE EXHIBIT : The Sea

Breton fishermen were stubborn, with short tempers which could soon lead them into revolt in defence of their livelihoods. They loved their homeland. It was not just geographical identity that gave them such commitment. The reasons went far deeper into the realm of cultural belonging, and this stood whether they were navigating around the world or back in their own port. Like music, dance and language, the ocean was a way in which Breton identity was forged. When oil tankers like the Amoco Cadiz, Tanio and Erika spilt their load off the Breton coast, the sandy beaches were awash with pollution thousands birds died. Thousands of volunteers came to the aid of these natural heritage sites which were key to Brittany's seafaring identity and once a real picture-postcard scene. Over a period of months, they cleaned away the thick, toxic oil which was so devastating to the environment.

PLAYONG WITH STYLES



In 1905, it was permitted to create cards in materials other than paper, so long as they respected weight and sizing rules. Hence the appearance of cards made of wood, cork, leather, metal, celluloid (plastic) and woven or braided cloth.

These cards were hand-crafted in small numbers, and were often ingenious. They had puzzles, buzzers, stereoscopic views, pop-ups, trick effects, cut-outs, filters, fans, disks, holes, scratchboards, optical illusions, and many other singularities. Various other items were attached, such as hair, feathers and dried flowers. Although they were often fragile, they were sent without an envelope and finally found a home in family albums, where they were carefully preserved.

Effervescent creativity

Cards were sent out for every special moment of the year, for major life events and to say simple things or more sober messages. Everything became part of the language (flowers, stamps, colours, and so on) when it came to expressing sentiments and future events. But on a more serious level, the cards reflected the mores of a society in which relationships were quite formalised.

The cards also expressed the styles of the day, changing with the decades and advances in technology. To us today, they might look beautiful, ultra-kitsch or hideous!

Postmen often delivered plenty of homemade cards which were occasionally odd. Everything that was around the right thickness, able to take a stamp and postmark and to fit through a letterbox was accepted. This was how the now often exhibited Mail Art was born.