

Postcards in the internet age| Lifestyle| localecrets

- In a world of instant photo sharing and selfies, sending a postcard to family and friends may be old fashioned, but millions of people -- myself included -- much prefer coming home to find a postcard on the door mat. That's perhaps why, even as usage declines with the rise of the mobile, the humble postcard is holding its own and even being reborn for the internet age.

As recently as 2009 travel organisation ABTA initiated a poll to discover how many of us were continuing to send postcards, finding 53% of people preferred a physical postcard to a digital greeting, and forecast 130 million postcards were likely to be sent that year. That figure may have since declined, but postcards, once the equivalent of texts today, like books, persistently defy predictions of their imminent demise.



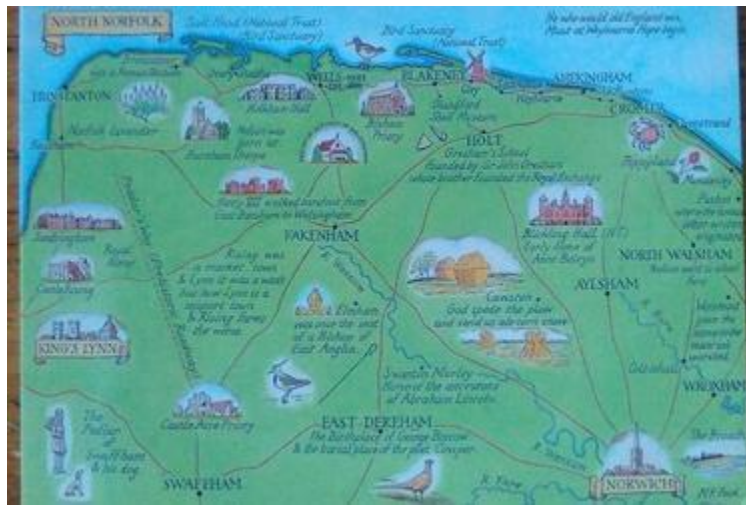
As a postcard collector since as long as I can remember, or 'deltiologist' as us collectors are apparently called, I was delighted to join [Postcrossing](#), a web project set up by Portuguese student Paulo Magalhaes in 2005, which fosters swapping postcards with likeminded strangers around the world, just because they like to receive postcards.

I have received postcards from strangers everywhere, with messages on all kinds of subjects -- their hometowns, or a subject that interests them, or something they feel describes who they are best -- which I find hugely exciting!

The website now has 626,000 members, of which I am one having signed up around ten years ago. Since its inception 36,189,028 postcards have been sent whilst 433,027 are currently 'travelling', meaning they are on the way to their recipients.

But that's not the only sign of life in the old postcard. Souvenir shops, tourist information offices and many other places still sell them, and a number of dedicated print magazines and websites champion the cause, whilst collector and trader fairs are held regularly around the country.

Collectors have a lot of scope because postcards have a long history, with the first one sent in 1840 to Theodore Hook, a writer living in London. It is thought he may have sent to himself as a joke. Theodore's postcard, the world's oldest, sold for



£27,000 in 2002, and experts believe the card confirms picture postcards were invented in the UK.

But it was a long time before the idea took off. The post office allowed privately published postcards to be posted from 1894. Plain postcards were introduced in 1870, with some picture postcards being sent but these were rare. The popularity of picture postcards in the UK gained speed around 1902 after postcards featuring subjects such as the Boer War and royal events were published, whilst around the same time the post office also began to allow addresses and messages to be written on one side. As a result the UK became the first country to introduce the postcard style still used today.

'It's possibly hard to imagine now in a text-crazy world – but postcards were the texts of their day in Edwardian times (1901-1910) and up to the end of WW1,' said Mark Wingham, editor of [Picture Postcard Monthly](#), in a phone interview. 'Every street in the country would have had several collectors with loved ones and friends constantly sending their postcards. The post used to get delivered to homes six times a day, so it was possible for a husband to send his wife a postcard saying he would be late home from work, certain that it would arrive home before he did. Cards were even sent and delivered on Christmas Day.'

Mark and his wife Sally have been running the 56 or 60-page a month magazine since April 2015, taking over from a couple who had been running it for 35 years. With subscribers in 24 countries, and most in Britain, around 90 percent of readers receive it via a yearly subscription. Some are sold online, and the rest are sold at major postcard fairs held around the country most weekends of the year.



Most of the magazine's readers are of the older generation. 'The hobby is desperate to attract a younger wave of collectors, and we are seeing some signs of that with the continuing interest in family research

and all the ancestry sites appearing,' said Mark, adding, 'The country has an amazing network of postcard clubs with enthusiastic members meeting monthly with guest speakers and enjoying social events and outings.'

As you'd expect Mark is a keen collector himself, starting 14 years ago after finding a postcard of his old school at a car boot sale. His collection has reached 6000, the theme of his amazing collection is his home town, Portsmouth.

'Collecting anything can be infectious, postcards particularly, I used to collect coins but with coins you always know what is missing from your collection because there are records for just about every coin minted in. With postcards, you just never know what you are going to find and, apart from some series of cards which are numbered, you know there will always be a chance of finding new cards,' he said, noting that, 'Building a good collection of your home city, town or village, or a theme you like such as military, aviation, animals, artist cards or pretty much anything, is very satisfying, and you feel like you are a temporary custodian of our past in pictures.'

Fellow collector Terry Crawford's interest in postcards began while convelescung, when he encountered postcard dealers at a small stamp fair, and he started collecting cards of the locality, many send back from by soldiers in the WW1 trenches. This hobby culminated in his writing a self-published book, *Wiltshire and the Great War in 1999*. 'My interest in postcards and writing the subsequent book helped me through what would have been a bleak period in my life,' he said.

My own collection doesn't really have a theme although I do have many area map postcards. I enjoy buying a pictoral record of where I have visited, my collection also includes postcards friends have bought for me, or of course sent me, on their own travels. In the 1990s I began pen palling, and had a large number of pen pals across the world, I have always enjoyed connecting with people from other countries and learning about their way of life and culture.

Find out more about collecting, trade fairs, clubs and more also have an excellent [website](#) dedicated to the world of postcards.

ARTICLES

