

TABLE TENNIS POSTCARDS *by Graham Trimming*

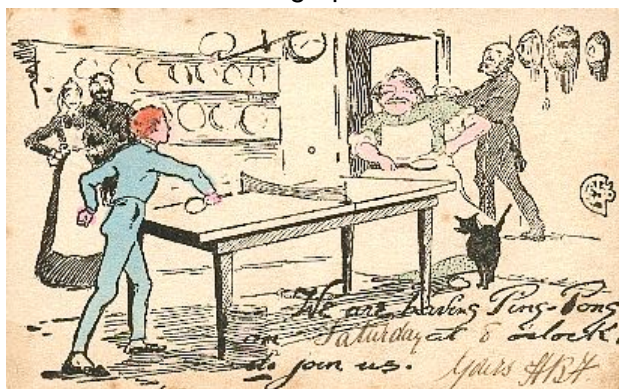
In the November edition of the VETTS Newsletter I noted that there was a copy of a postcard dating from the turn of the last century. With it was posed the question "Has anyone got an original postcard?" I am delighted to say that my own collection of table tennis antiques from the pre-World War I era, which includes boxed sets and other equipment, prints and books, also includes a large number of picture postcards.

The early 1900s are often described as the halcyon days for the picture postcard and they were then a new and important means of communication, prior to the days of (mass) motor transport, telecommunications (and the internet!). Many greetings cards depicted table tennis scenes, mainly in a humorous vein. The early cards had little room for the sender to write much as one side of the card was required to be used for the address only, therefore any message had to be written on the same side as the illustration. Only from 1902 was the divided back permitted, thus allowing messages to be written in the now familiar space.



A few years ago Hans Kreisler kindly furnished me with a copy of the excellent "Catalogus Ansichtkaarten - Tafel Tennis 1900-1918" which features every known table tennis postcard for that era. For the period 1901 to 1905 alone there are 100 entries, mostly but not exclusively British, listed in this publication. My own collection includes over 50 of these, acquired mainly from spasmodic visits during the past several years to a monthly postcard collectors' fair in London.

The first cards to be produced were a set of twelve from the publisher Galyon. The quality of the card used was nothing special and the black ink line drawings were hand coloured. These were party invitation cards typically carrying a message such as "We are having Ping-Pong on _____ at ___ o'clock. Do join us". The sender was required to fill in the gaps. The introduction of these cards was noted in the fourth edition of "The Table Tennis and Pastimes Pioneer" published on 8th February 1902. However, the earliest date known to me for one of these cards is 15th December 1901, a time when Ping-Pong was becoming the craze as an after dinner amusement at the larger houses,



clubs were starting the spring up around the country and the first tournaments were being organised.

The Galyon cards are quite hard to find; much more common are the Raphael Tuck "write away" cards, beautifully drawn and coloured by Lance Thackeray and chromographed in Saxony. It is one of these cards that is reproduced in the November newsletter. Altogether there were thirteen Thackerays, two series of six (623 and 624) and one card that was part of set 642. Even though these cards can be readily found (although it may take a few years to complete the set) they can still command prices of up to £25 each.

There are many other interesting sets for the determined collector to find. William Lyon produced the Premier 1975 series of six cards of comic scenes annotated by quotations from Shakespeare and the same publisher produced coloured line drawings depicting players in evening dress in the



Premier 2020 series. Raphael Tuck, the most respected of postcard publishers at the time, also produced a series entitled "Ping Pong in Fairyland" depicting elves playing table tennis on toadstool tables with cobweb nets and leaves for bats. Gordon Browne drew a series of four cards for John Walker while E. Wrench published two cartoons from the satirical magazine "Punch". There are also cards from South Africa depicting native (and topless) women playing on rickety tables (one of these was also previously included in the VETTS Newsletter), these same pictures

being found on a number of different postcards, and many single cards from various publishers including a Christmas card drawn by the famous cat artist Louis Wain.

I know that there are others within the VETTS membership that share my interest in the sport's heritage and several of these have postcards in their collections. I hope that others might be enthused to start collecting as there are antique fairs and specialist postcard fairs up and down the country and not just in London. Happy hunting!

Illustrations:

Top: the Louis Wain Christmas card (1903)

Middle: one of the first Galyon cards (1901)

Bottom: from the Ping-Pong in Fairyland set by Raphael Tuck (1903)

Those interested in the early history of table tennis might like to know that there exists a Table Tennis Collectors' Society. Gerald Gurney is the mainstay of this organisation and he produces a thrice-yearly journal, which is highly interesting and educational. One of the regular contributors is VETTS referee Alan Duke! Contact Gerald on 01206 230330 for further details.

Also, please visit my web site "<http://freespace.virgin.net/graham.trimming>" to see an article on my own collection of early boxed sets and a photograph of the first ever set called "Gossima".