

Silk Postcards

Novelty postcards crafted from card and silk first appeared around 1898, originating from France and Switzerland. Prior to war, convents around the soon-to-be invaded areas of Belgium and Northern France had been accustomed to embroidering church vestments, alongside commercial articles for sale to visitors, to financially support their ministry for God. The advent of war opened a new source of revenue for the nuns, to support their work.



During the First World War, many Allied officers and soldiers based in France sent silk embroidered postcards to their loved ones back home, in particular to Britain and Canada. From 1917, when American soldiers had arrived in northern France, they also started to send these cards to their families and friends. Many of the cards were illustrated with patriotic symbols, flags, slogans, or sentimental texts.



The embroidery has often been said to be the work of Belgian and French refugee women, organised by the nuns, as a means to eke out a meagre existence. However, to satisfy demand, Paris workshops were set up and employed assembly line style workers to mass produce the cards.

Identical designs were embroidered with coloured silk onto a starched strip/roll of silk/organdie, usually 25 times, although some rolls have been discovered with 400 such designs, each separately worked! Once embroidered, they were sent to "finishing factories" for mass cutting/mounting onto card backing. An embossed frame was secured over the top of each card, which was finally "trimmed"/completed.



They were rarely posted in the open mail, but sent home via courier to loved ones in brown transparent envelopes, protecting the message in transit and complying with post office regulations that they did not "inconvenience post office machinery". There were no stamps on these cards as troops were entitled to free postage. Thousands of designs were created in basic design groups of sentimental, patriotic, and regimental/military services.

