

TELLING A STORY: POSTCARDS ARE A PLUS!

Jim Etherington is led down a new path

The purpose of this article is to describe why and how a thematic collector has integrated postcards into his collection and club displays. To support this discussion a number of postcards are illustrated and the reason for their inclusion explained.

Why might postcards be included in a thematic collection? Like many thematic collectors I have come to view postcards as a useful and illustrative adjunct to my collecting interests. Some purist might raise their hands in horror and exclaim such items have no place in a philatelic exhibit. However it is my contention, while fully acknowledging postcards are inadmissible for thematic competition purposes, that the inclusion of postcards can greatly enhance and extend a themed philatelic collection.

For a long time now I have been developing the story of 1940 from a British perspective. Many aspects of the story can easily be told using the wealth of available philatelic material. However on occasions postcards can be introduced into the collection to either elaborate or extend a particular aspect of the story or in some instances provide the opportunity to introduce a topic that would have otherwise had to be omitted due to the absence of relevant philatelic items.

Before continuing I must emphasise I am a newcomer to postcard collecting and this should be borne in mind by any reader who is an 'expert' in this field. I have not researched the availability of cards, rather have come across relevant cards in dealers boxes and then trawled the Internet looking for examples in the same series or by the same artist. One restriction I have placed upon myself is that the postcards used must be closely contemporaneous with the events being described. I consider it a bonus if the card is postally used in 1940 and the message is relevant to my story.

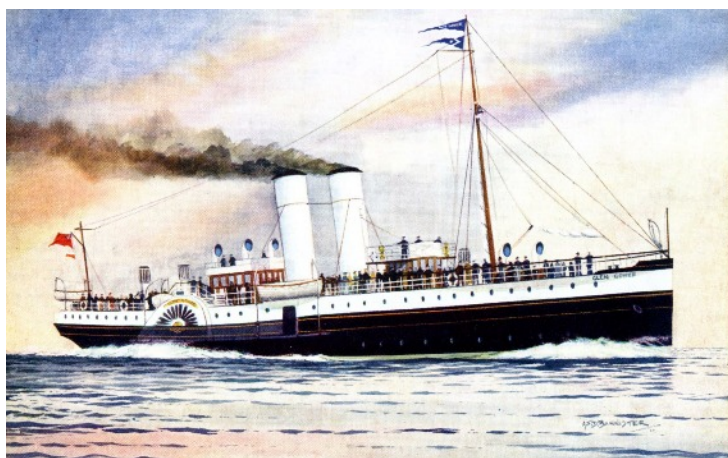
My first excursion into actively seeking out postcards to help illustrate my story of 1940 was prompted by a decision to find images of all the ships, mainly cruise liners, requisitioned by the Admiralty and hurriedly converted into Armed Merchant Cruisers. Many were commissioned during the first six months of the war and immediately went into service either as members of the Northern Patrol or as Atlantic convoy escorts. One such ship was the S.S. *Chitral* (fig 1 inside front cover). Built by A Stephen & Sons Ltd, Glasgow, for the P & O Steam Navigation Co Ltd, she was launched in 1925. Requisitioned by the Admiralty in August 1939 and commissioned in October the same year, H.M.S. *Chitral* served with the Northern Patrol from that date until February 1941 when she transferred to Atlantic convoy duties.

The British Expeditionary Force is an important aspect of the 1940 story, and there is a considerable amount of postal history including Field Post Office datestamps, Post Office instructional cachets and military postal stationery available to give an account of its presence in France. Unfortunately there is only one stamp from Grenada / Grenadines bearing an image of the B.E.F., a column of light tanks being observed by a lone Frenchman with his donkey. This paucity of illustrative items can be addressed by the introduction of postcards. A numbered series of sepia postcards entitled 'Britain Prepared' (fig 2, inside front cover) includes twelve cards (nos. 13 to 24 of the series) depicting various photo images of the B.E.F.

taken soon after its arrival in France. The first, entitled “Here we are again”, records the arrival of British troops in France. Others include images of a military vehicle being unloaded from a ship, Bren gun carriers passing through a French village, a Military Policeman directing traffic and a line of prone soldiers having their feet examined.

The remaining cards in this series include images of Royal Navy ships (nos. 1-12) and R.A.F. aircraft (nos. 25-38). Although entitled “Britain Prepared” the aircraft depicted, apart from the Spitfire and Hurricane, indicate just how unprepared Britain was at the beginning of the war. Included are the outdated, and by 1940, obsolete Overstrands, Harrows and Wellesleys. By introducing these cards into the collection this point can be forcefully made.

Staying with the B.E.F. theme I recently discovered a very colourful series of French cards, ‘Les Editions Militaires Illustrées’. Using paintings by the French illustrator Maurice Toussaint and entitled ‘Armée Britannique’ the subjects include uniformed ‘Infanterie’, ‘Artillerie’, ‘Officers Généraux’, ‘Highlander’ (resplendent in kilt) and ‘Aviateurs’. Toussaint (1882-1974) was an acknowledged authority on military uniforms having published books on the French armies of the Ancien Regime and the First and Second Republics. Hence this group of cards provide an excellent source to illustrate the uniforms and kit worn members of the B.E.F.



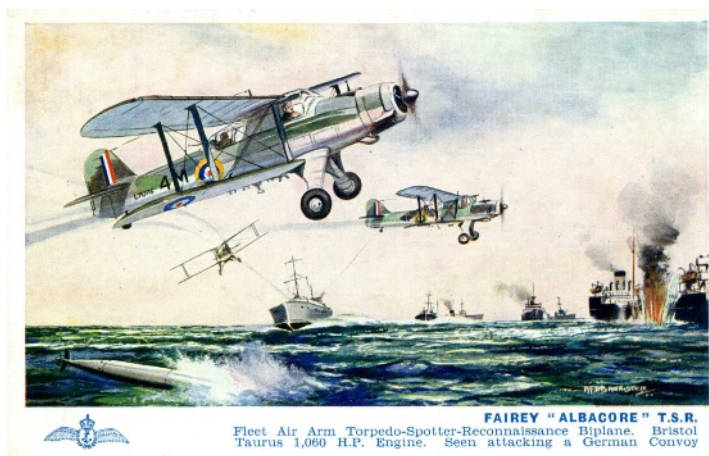
The SS Glen Gower as it appeared prior to the outbreak of war



A painting entitled ‘Armée Anglaise – Infanterie – Tenue de Campagne’ by Mauri(ce) Toussaint dated 1939 provides an excellent image of members of the B.E.F. in France during 1939-40.

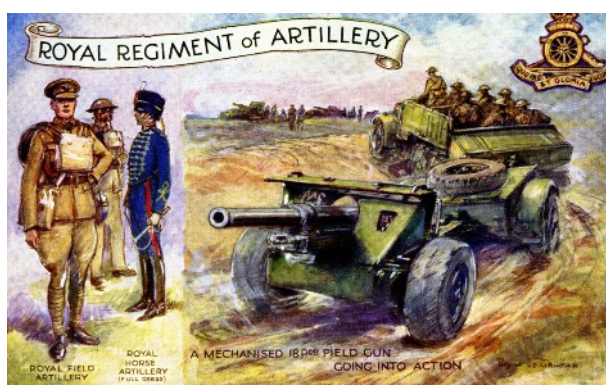
Two or three stamps depict the evacuation from the Dunkirk beaches of elements of the B.E.F. A few of the ‘small ships’ that braved the Channel crossing also appear on stamps, but these may be added to by using postcards produced by Salmon’s showing the work of illustrator A.F.D. Bannister. Bannister had painted pictures of a number of pleasure boats, including the SS *Glen Gower*, that were subsequently requisitioned by the Admiralty at the outbreak of the war. Previously engaged on excursions and cross channel trips the *Glen Gower* was converted to a minesweeper and attached to the 8th Flotilla on the Tyne. She undertook three trips to Dunkirk and according to Admiralty records transported a total of 1,235 men back to England.

Little is known about Bannister, but according to the date that often accompanied his signature on the postcards he was producing artwork for Salmon's for a period spanning the late 1930s to the early 1950s. During the war period his subjects included Royal Navy warships and a large number of Allied aircraft. In the absence of relevant philatelic items some of these can be used 'to fill the gap'. A good example of this is his depiction of Fleet Air Arm Fairey Albacores attacking German shipping (below). During March 1940 No 826 Squadron took delivery of the first Albacores to enter service. Following the fall of France Albacores of the Fleet Air Arm and Coastal Command frequently attacked German merchant ships that regularly sailed along the French coast.



Bannister's dramatic image of a torpedo attack by Fairey Albacore against German merchant shipping

A third series of relevant cards I have recently come across are based on paintings by Bryan de Grineau and produced by Valentine's. Born Charles William Grineau in 1883, this artist made his name during the inter-war years producing illustrations for *Motor* and other automobile magazines, mainly of racing cars. From the outbreak of war he worked as a war artist, many of his sketches appearing in *Illustrated London News*. To date I have found three cards, 'Royal Regiment of Artillery', 'Royal Air Force' and 'Fleet Air Arm', all designed in a similar format with uniformed figures to the left of a typical scenario of their activities. The first of these is ideal for illustrating Britain's preparations for defence against German invasion.



The 'Royal Regiment of Artillery' as portrayed by Bryan de Grineau. Unfortunately the work is not dated, but the gun and vehicle is indicative of the war period.

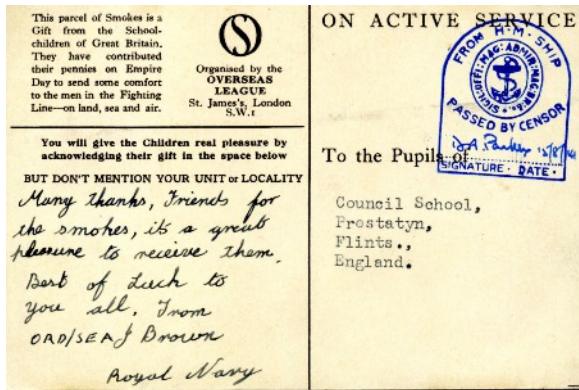
Two further series of postcards being found useful to add illustrative detail to the collection and provide opportunities to extend the story are entitled 'London Under Fire' and 'Heroic Deeds of the War'. The Blitz may be evidenced philatelicly using covers bearing explanatory cachets such as 'Damaged by Enemy Action' or 'Delayed by Enemy Action'. Pictorial images of the devastation caused by enemy bombing are less easy to find, although some Commonwealth countries, notably St Helena, have more recently issued stamps relating to the London Blitz. The 'London under Fire' cards produced by Photochrom Co Ltd graphically record the after effects of bombing and include images entitled 'The G.P.O. from Newgate Street' (over), 'Looking down Ludgate Hill' and 'St Paul's Cathedral from Cannon Street'.



'The G.P.O. from Newgate Street' is typical of the 'London under Fire' series of cards produced by Photochrom.



SECTION LEADER (Special Constabulary) BRANDON MOSS, G.C.
Photo: Coventry Constabulary
 In the great Air Raid on Coventry, November 1940, SPECIAL CONSTABULARY BRANDON MOSS led a rescue party to free people trapped under a demolished house. When conditions became critical, he continued working alone, and succeeded in saving three people. He then led a rescue party to another demolished building, and although the workers became exhausted after many hours, he continued on throughout the night, with falling beams and debris around him.—For his bravery and fortitude he was awarded the George Cross.



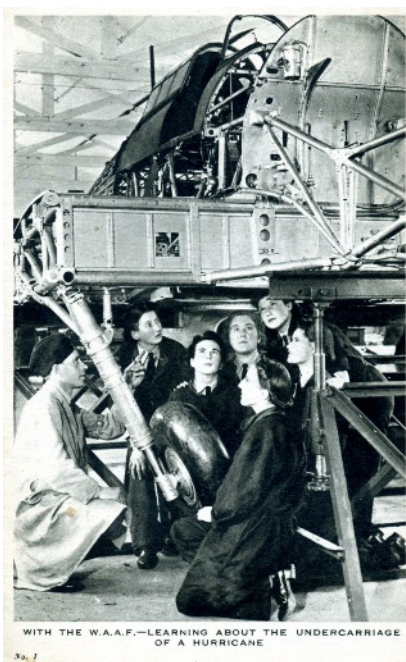
Other people among those portrayed in the 'Heroic Deeds of the War' series are Cobben Kain, Mary Cornish and John Hannah. The reverse side of the 'Heroic Deeds of the War' card is a seaman thanking children of Prostatyn Council School for their gift of cigarettes.

Even more difficult, if not impossible, to illustrate without the aid of postcards are the individual feats of heroism performed during 1940. As the title suggests the 'Heroic Deeds of the War' series provide such illustrations. Produced for the Overseas League for members of the armed forces to acknowledge receipt of cigarette parcels, these cards include a portrait of the person, the scene of their heroism and text giving a brief account of the heroic deed. The card illustrated above records the action of Section Leader (Special Constabulary) Brandon Moss, G.C.,

The text reads:-

'In the great Air Raid on Coventry, November 1940, Special Constable Brandon Moss led a rescue party to free people trapped under a demolished house. When conditions became critical, he continued working alone, and succeeded in saving three people. He then led a rescue party to another demolished building and although the workers became exhausted after many hours, he continued on throughout the night, with falling beams and debris around him. – For this bravery and fortitude he was awarded the George Cross.'

Finally postcards recording the changing role of women during the war help support and extend this aspect of the story. A numbered series published by Raphael Tuck & Sons Ltd entitled 'With the W.A.A.F.' show clearly women within the armed forces taking over the roles previously undertaken by their male colleagues. Card 1 shows members of the WAAF,



together with their male instructor 'Learning about the undercarriage of a Hurricane'. A second, Card 3, shows three WAAF 'Flight mechanics checking valve timing', this time not under a man's watchful eye.

On considering what I have just written I am left in quandary. I was going to conclude with the caveat that when mounting your collection the arrangement of material is your choice, but for display purposes I was going to suggest that perhaps one should guard against an over use of postcards in what is primarily a philatelic display. However the writing of this article has drawn my attention to the large number of postcards so far accumulated, leaving me wondering whether I should develop a parallel collection, still telling the same story of 1940, but using exclusively postcards. Hum! 📖

Card No 1 of the 'With the W.A.A.F.' series entitled 'Learning about the undercarriage of a Hurricane'

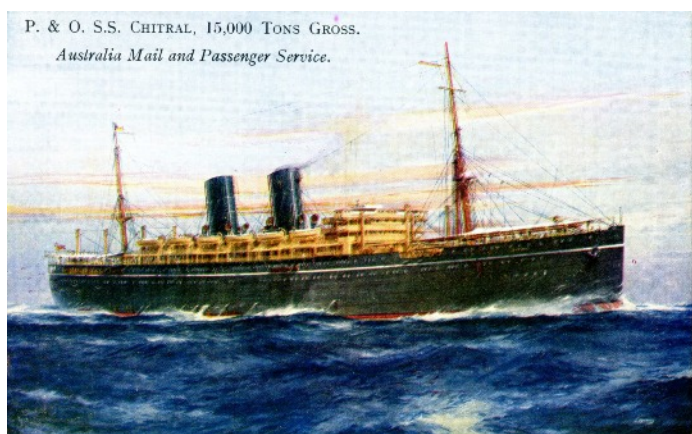


Fig 1 S.S. Chitral before conversion to an Armed Merchant Cruiser



Fig 2 The first card in the Photochrom published "Britain Prepared" series depicting members of the B.E.F. Each card bears the statement 'Passed by Press and Censorship Bureau'.