

THE HUNDRED PARISHES SOCIETY

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On a recent visit to Thaxted's Tourist Information Centre, I could not resist buying their new set of postcards, featuring some of the town's well-known views. Nowadays, it is quite unusual to see postcards for sale – and even rarer to receive one in the post. How times have changed.

Picture postcards became extremely popular in the UK after the introduction in 1902 of the format with a picture on the front and a divided back - half for the address and the other half for a message. Pictures were generally black and white but sometimes coloured. Popularity waned after the First World War but it remained customary to send postcards to family and friends from somewhere visited on holiday or a day out. That custom has now almost died out, no doubt due in part to the availability – albeit only in this century - of more immediate means of exchanging messages and photos electronically.

Many people used picture postcards for sending short messages. Until 1918 it cost only an old halfpenny to send a card – that's 480 cards for a Pound (today's price is 66 pence per card). In those early days, there could be as many as five postal deliveries in a day, at least in towns, so it was not unreasonable to expect a reply the same day.

It wasn't just seaside towns that sold postcards; almost every town and village had its own postcard or set of postcards. Within the Hundred Parishes, it seems that only one parish has never had a postcard – Flitch Green, which became a parish only in 2008. Many of those old cards have survived. They often provide a revealing insight into our past and into an earlier way of life, for example buildings, roads, transport and dress.

Ken McDonald, Secretary.