"I should have wrote a letter tonight:" a Literacy Studies perspective on the Edwardian postcard

Abstract

At the turn of the twentieth century the letter existed in a symbiotic relationship to the postcard. After 1902 when the Post Office permitted one half of one side of a picture postcard for a written message, postcard writing and collecting became extremely popular in Britain as elsewhere in Europe. People embraced this new attractive, cheap and fast communications technology, that demanded brevity and often a relative informality in comparison to the letter. This chapter is founded on a study of three thousand postcards written and sent between 1902 and 1910. A Literacy Studies approach, endeavouring for a contextualised understanding of vernacular writing, is deployed in a case study of postcard correspondence centred on two young working class people: Ruby Ingrey and Arthur Waddelow. Much is revealed about their lives utilising information from the censuses and other historical records, and in particular about the interplay between postcards and letters in Edwardian Britain.

Bio

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To understand the position of the letter in British society at the beginning of the twentieth century, it is vital to understand the picture postcard. This innovative communications technology enlarged the range of possibilities open to ordinary people to take part in epistolary culture and indeed shape a new genre. This chapter is based upon a study of three thousand picture postcards written and posted between 1901 and 1910, the golden era of the picture postcard. Since many postcards have been preserved over the decades since by collectors, interested in their images, they offer an opportunity to study an element of vernacular epistolary culture that has been largely overlooked.

Taking a perspective from Literacy Studies, I aim to contribute to a new multidisciplinary dialogue epitomised by this publication exploring epistolary culture. Part of this drive is to develop new methodologies for analysis: here we show how the major concerns of Literacy Studies can be furthered through the flexible use of historical approaches.

Writing postcards in an era of change

Edwardian postcards have been largely overlooked as a rapid written communications technology, epitomising the sense of a society as living in a "culture of speed"[1]. Blom[2] (2008: 2) wrote of the Edwardian period:

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[1] Christopher Keep, Blinded by the type: Gender and information technology at the turn of the century, in: *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23 (2001): 149-173 (p.151).

[2]Philipp Blom, *The Vertigo Years: Change and Culture in the West, 1900-1914*. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2008), p.2.

> Then as now, rapid changes in technology, globalization, communication technologies and changes in the social fabric dominated conversations and newspapers articles; then as now, cultures of mass consumption stamped their mark on the time; then as now, the feeling of living in an accelerating world…. was overwhelming.

In its own time, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the picture postcard was considered to epitomise the spirit of the era, "a candid revelation of our pursuits and pastimes, our customs and costumes, our morals and manners"[3]. The early postcard represented a new epistolary space, one which suited the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth with its greater than ever social and physical mobility[4]. In Britain, the picture postcard was at the centre of the Edwardians' new communications landscape, to borrow a term from the contemporary digital revolution[5]. First developed in Austria in 1869, the postcard was very quickly adopted across Europe[6]. The British Post Office carried vast quantities of written communications among people of virtually all social sectors[7]. The rapid speed of deliveries in the late Victorian and Edwardian period led to a sense of something like sychronicity, since letters and cards could arrive from early in the morning till late at night[8]. The Manchester Weekly Times predicted in 1890, "The work of correspondence will be reduced to a minimum when one has only to carry a pack of

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[3] James Douglas, *Adventures in London*. (London: Cassell & Company Ltd, 1909), p. 377.

[4] Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence*. (New York: Routledge, 2010). Bernhard Siegert, *Relays: Literature as an Epoch of the Postal System*. (Trans. Kevin Repp.) (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

[5] Gunther Kress, (1998) Visual and verbal modes of representation in electronically mediated communication: the potentials of new forms of texts, in: Ilana Snyder (ed.). *Page to Screen: Taking Literacy into the Electronic Era* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.3-79.

[6] David Vincent, The Rise of Mass Literacy: Reading and Writing in Modern Europe. (Cambridge: Polity, 2000).

[7] Vincent, *The Rise of Mass Literacy*.

[8] Martin Daunton, *Royal Mail: The Post office Since 1840* (London: Athlone Press, 1985).

postcards in one's pocket, write one's thought in pencil as soon as it occurs, and despatch it through the first messenger or the first receiving box one comes across.[9]"

At the same time as facilitating the rise of the postcard, The Post Office carefully circumscribed its use. Early postcards were pre-printed, rigidly sized, and pre-stamped; the whole of one side had to be taken up by the address and the other side could only contain the message. People began using postcards in part owing to the degree of brevity needed which had the potential to mitigate against at least some of the formalities of letter writing, taught in schools and through etiquette manuals[10]. In 1899 *The Times* suggested, 'The postcard with its entire freedom from ceremony of formality, is such an obvious boon to thousands, if not millions, of correspondents in these days.[11]'

In 1894 the Post Office allowed images to appear on postcards, allowing a short message to be written in the margin. In 1902 there was a further innovation that dramatically increased the attractiveness and popularity of the postcard. New Post Office regulations permitted one whole side to be taken up by an illustration; the other side was divided between half for the stamp, postmark and address and half for the written message. Although still a small space for writing, the possibility for combining a short but meaningful message with a picture was tremendously appealing, despite the challenge to privacy through the loss of an envelope. Photographers and printers spotted the opportunities, helped by the availability of

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[9] Manchester Weekly Times, 4 June 1890.

[10] Nigel Hall and Julia Gillen, Purchasing pre-packed words: complaint and reproach in early British postcards, in: Martyn Lyons (ed.) *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19th and Early 20th- Century Europe*. (Berne: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 101-118.

[11] *The Times*, 1 November 1899.

cheap paper and advances in accessible printing techniques[12]. Within two years postcard sending rose dramatically, reaching almost a billion cards a year at the end of the Edwardian period. Evidence from the Postmaster General's annual reports reveals that during the reign of Edward VII (1901-1910) the total number of postcards posted in Britain was almost six billion, getting on for 200 cards per person[13].

With six or even more deliveries a day in towns and cities, and with a halfpenny stamp, rapid responsivity was enabled in a simple, cheap way[14]. For the first time in British history there was a means of communication that could be perceived as near-synchronous, in which a significant part of the overall message could be conveyed by a picture, which gave the potential to avoid lengthy letter writing and for some permitted an informal spontaneity. In their highly accessible multimodality, Edwardian postcards offered an opportunity not equalled for a century until multimodal emails and text messages became commonplace. To a large extent then 1902 was the year that writing postcards became a breakthrough communications technology in Britain, at approximately the same date the craze was discerned across many European countries[15]. These cheap and attractive objects seemed appropriate to a newly mobile age, in which people were moving about far more quickly, easily and frequently than before: for example the railways system in Britain was at its

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[12] Richard Carline, *Pictures in the Post: The Story of the Picture Postcard and its Place in the History of Popular Art* (London: Gordon Fraser Gallery, 1971).

[13] Julia Gillen and Nigel Hall, Edwardian postcards: illuminating ordinary writing, in: David Barton and Uta Papen (eds.), The Anthropology of Writing (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 169-189.

[14] Frank Staff, *The Picture Postcard and its Origins 2nd edn*. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1979).

[15] Bjarne Rogan, An entangled object: the picture postcard as souvenir and collectible, exchange and ritual communication, in: *Cultural Analysis* 4 (2005), 1-27.

zenith, far more extensive than today's network[16]. "In ten years Europe will be buried beneath picture postcards," worried the Glasgow Evening News in October 1903[17].

Literacy Studies

Our approach is founded on a Literacy Studies perspective, in applying historical understandings to the sociolinguistics of writing. Literacy Studies is an interdisciplinary enterprise with a focus on everyday writing and reading by "ordinary" people rather than the elite, for purposes that make sense to them in their everyday lives. An important aim by its founders and very much continuing today is to try to shift from notions of writing and reading as decontextualized skills, acquired and essentially cognitive, towards understandings of practices within social settings. In the USA Heath undertook ethnographic approaches to reveal how children in different communities appropriated understandings of literacy practices from their communities, imbibing norms and values that then formed dis/continuities with school environments[18]. Street, again using the strength of anthropological fieldwork, this time in Iran, showed how different literacy practices can be valued differently in diverse societies, but that such valuations are never neutral but rather ideological[19]. In their study of everyday literacy practices in one town in England, Barton and Hamilton uncovered great diversity of activities and

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[16] Paul Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 1992).

[17] cited by Carline, *Pictures in the Post*, p. 9.

[18] Shirley Brice Heath, *Ways with Words* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[19] Brian Street, *Literacy in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

purposes, including finding that letter writing was "the most widespread form of sustained writing encountered"[20].

Our particular orientation to Literacy Studies in this research is one which foregrounds a historical approach. Some scholars have argued that the obvious challenge to possibilities for conducting ethnographnic fieldwork mean that Literacy Studies has neglected historical topics[21]. Others disagree, seeing opportunities for the creative application of historical methods in deepening the essential aim, to approach, to the degree possible, a holistic understanding of situated practices around reading and writing texts. Indeed Hymes credited history as a discipline as a vital antecedent and source of inspiration for Literacy Studies[22]. As yet nevertheless relatively few works that locate themselves centrally in Literacy Studies overtly bridge a historical and contemporary approach to literacy[23].

The collection by Barton and Hall is a significant predecessor to the research discussed in this paper in being concerned with epistolary literacies, bringing to bear a Literacy Studies approach to a variety of practices, historical and contemporary. That collection of studies viewed the writing of letters as "embedded in particular

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[20] David Barton and Mary Hamilton, *Local Literacies: reading and writing in one community* (London: Routledge, 1998). p. 2.

[21] Bill Green and Philip Cormack, Historical inquiry in literacy education: calling on Clio, in: Jennifer Rowsell and Kate Pahl (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015). pp 185-204.

[22] Dell Hymes, What is ethnography? in: Perry Gilmore and Allan Glatthorn. (eds.), *Children In and Out of School: Ethnography and Education*. (Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1982). pp. 21-32.

[23] But see Charles Bazerman, *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988) and David Barton and Nigel Hall (eds.), *Letter Writing as a Social Practice*. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999).

social situations, and like all other types of literacy objects and events the activity gains its meaning and significance from being situated in cultural beliefs, values, and practices."[24]. Hall's[25] work in that collection examined the social history of artefacts associated with letter writing in the nineteenth century, chiming with an evolving interest in the sociolinguistics of writing in the materiality of writing technologies[26].

The key to Literacy Studies then is the understanding that texts are produced and read in specific situations by people in complex meaning-making practices[27]. Following Bazerman and Prior, my research is designed to approach: "a means of examining communicative practice so as to uncover signs of social identities, institutions and norms as well as the means by which these social formations are established, negotiated, enacted, and changed through communicative practice"[28].

The Edwardian Postcard Project

Working with Nigel Hall, I have collected and transcribed three thousand cards that were sent through the post within Great Britain and Ireland between 1901 and 1910.

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[24] Barton and Hall *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* p. 1.

[25] Nigel Hall, The materiality of letter writing: a nineteenth century perspective, in: Barton and Hall *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* pp. 83-108.

[26] Julia Gillen, Writing Edwardian Postcards in: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 17 (2013), 488-521; Theresa Lillis, *The Sociolinguistics of Writing* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

[27] David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language 2nd edn*. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

[28] Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior, Introduction, in: Charles Bazerman and Paul Prior (eds.), *What Writing Does and How It Does It: An Introduction to Analyzing Texts and Texual Practices*. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004). pp. 1-10 (p. 3).

Transcriptions have preserved spelling and other features of orthography such as line endings and original punctuation. We have investigated the addressees through available census records, especially those of 1901 and 1911, supplemented by engagement with other public records such as commercial directories and maps. (In the UK a national census has been taken every ten years; detailed records are released once they are a hundred years' old.) Occasionally references within the correspondence such as to family relationships have also allowed us to identify and similarly contextualise senders. The Project has a number of aims including the investigation of literacy practices and skills, the relationship of the texts and images, regulation of writing on the postcard, and the positioning of the postcard in relation to public/private boundaries. In this chapter I want to give a glimpse into how the postcards can be used to explore people's social and material practices with postcards, including in relation to the letter, but also more broadly to illustrate what can be uncovered about the relationships of epistolary practices with the concerns of their everyday lives.

For this paper I construct a case study of 34 cards involving Ruby Ingrey and Arthur Waddelow; including 14 cards sent from him to her. I also draw on the entire collection as background. I endeavour to show how a partial set of correspondence, mostly consisting of postcards from Arthur to Ruby, that feature considerable repetition of content and concerning very everyday topics, nonetheless are extremely illuminating as to the contemporary epistolary practices. In addition they can be recruited to a lively and, as always once the lens is focussed on the singular case, rich narrative of personal lives.

Ruby Ingrey and Arthur Waddelow

Ruby M. G. Ingrey was born in 1890 in Islington, London, the last child of seven children of Robert and Emma Ingrey. Robert, Ruby's father, worked as a cattle labourer at the Caledonian Road cattle market abattoir. In the 1891 census the family were living at 88 Goodinge Road, a short distance from the market. Two sons were errand boys for the Post Office, suggesting a certain level of literacy skills. By the 1901 census, only the three girls were still at home, the younger two still at school. By 1911, the parents and only Ruby were living at 32 Market Street, Islington across the road from the market.). In addition to these 1901 and 1911 addresses there are four other addresses for Ruby on the cards that were sent to her from 1901-1910. Thus there are six addresses for the family in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and there may have been others both before and after the cards we have. The family led a fairly peripatetic existence in this period, possibly suggesting difficulties with rent or other household concerns, but always stayed close to the market.

We have 34 postcards sent to the Ingrey family and in particular 14 sent to Ruby from Arthur between 13th August 1908 and 9th September 1909. Arthur Waddelow was born in 1886 in Peterborough but the family then moved to London. It is possible that Ruby met Arthur as a result of being at school with his sister, Florence. In 1901 Arthur had been a messenger on the railway and living with his family. By the time of the correspondence beginning, he was serving in the Royal Navy; when on leave he would come back to the family home. Arthur Waddelow was 22 then when Card 1 was posted from Chatham, where Royal Navy ships were built, repaired and refitted. His primary role was as a stoker rather than a fighting sailor.

Postcard text 1 Arthur Waddelow – Ruby Ingrey 13th August 1908

Miss R. Ingrey

No 6 Crown Mansions

Liverpool Road
London

Dear R. Just a line to
let you know I shall be
home on Saturday I will
come round to meet you
about the usual time with
the bike if the weather is
fine but it does not look
very promising down here
at present it has been
raining hard I hope
you have not been doing
any more damage to yourself
this week
Arthur

What do we learn from the 65 words of this card? In terms of epistolary communications it is fairly short, but it takes up the whole of the space regulated for the message on postcards and so is appropriate in length for its medium. Yet at the same time awareness of brevity is signalled in the beginning acknowledgement that it is "just a line." What do we learn about the relationship between Arthur and Ruby? The first thing is that they seem to know each other fairly well and the second is that this card does not read as if is their first such communication. Judging from the cards in our collection, it is quite unusual for an unrelated young man to abandon the propriety and formality of 'Dear Miss _____' when writing to a young woman. The use of the initial 'R' is quite informal and suggests a high level of

familiarity and friendship, and it is always used in his cards to Ruby. This sense of easy familiarity is reinforced by the mention of meeting her at the usual time and the final admonition. When Arthur talks about coming home, he is coming from the naval base at Chatham, and the reference to the 'usual time' suggest that his coming home is a regular event when his ship is based there.

The next two cards we have sent from Arthur to Ruby were also posted in Chatham. See the second of these, transcribed as postcard text 2, for example, also addressed to Miss Ingrey at Crown Mansions.

Postcard text 2 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 3rd September 1908
Dear R. hope to be
home tomorrow but I
cannot say for certain
if I do I will come up
by train sorry could not
come up on Wednesday
night but the weather was
too bad if I get home
on Friday night I will
call round as soon as
possible. Arthur.

Arthur's cards are mostly fairly similar in layout, orthography topic and even vocabulary. They generally start with the news that he will be coming home, but then almost straight away move to a degree of uncertainty and end with an intent to call round or meet up. He mostly cites the weather as the problem, but it is also the case that people in the Royal Navy might never be in full control of their movements

and absences. Apart from the occasional final full stop, there is a complete absence of punctuation in these cards (and this is pretty much true for all his cards) but his handwriting is strong, clear, legible and fluent. He gets his points across clearly. Such cards do suggest that meeting up with Ruby as soon as possible is always his priority. This does imply a fairly close relationship, and part of the interest in this set of cards is trying to work out exactly what is the relationship between them, as well as the patterns of communication between them. Several cards mention letters such as card 3, sent to No. 6 North Terrace, Hermitage Road, Finsbury Park:

Postcard text 3, Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey, 15th October 1908
Dear R. I shall
be home tomorrow
night all being
well. I have not
received a letter
from you yet, but
I expect there is
one coming. Expect you
will ride bike to school
if the weather is fine
so I will come to meet
you on mine.
Arthur

In card 3, the reference to Ruby riding to school is probably a reference to a typing school, as in 1911 she was recorded to be working as a typist. This card reveals that there was certainly a two-sided correspondence and that it involved letters.

There is then quite a long break, almost six months, until the next card in our possession. Almost certainly there would have been some cards and letters during this gap; there is no suggestion in the next card that there has been a long gap in the exchanges. Arthur's words continue to be written in the same style and have a similar content, again referring to a letter as an element of their correspondence and using the card to make short term plans. Card 4 was sent to No 60 Bride Street, Westbourne Road, Barnsbury.

Postcard text 4 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 8th April 1909

Dear R.
I received your
letter alright
pleased to hear
you had a good
ride shall be home
tomorrow about
seven hope to see
you round home
Arthur

It is now interesting to consider two cards sent by people other than Arthur which are significant for our knowledge of Ruby and Arthur and their epistolary practices. The first is the only card we have which was posted to Arthur. It is from his sister Florrie and was posted from Parson Drove in Cambridgeshire.

Postcard text 5 Florrie Waddelow to Arthur Waddelow 5th July 1909

A Waddelow
H.M.S Sunfish
G P O
London.

Dear Arthur
Just a line to
let you know we are
enjoying ourselves, and
having love-ly weather
We had a fine ride to
Hunstanton on Saturday
it is 37 miles each way
Lena went as well so
don't you think we did
well. We have been to
Crowland and Peterborough
and we are going to
Peterborough again
thursday, I expect have not
room for any more news Love from all
Florrie.

The first information this card offers us is that at this point Arthur was at this point based on H.M.S. Sunfish. This was an A Class destroyer, launched on 23rd May, 1896

and broken up in 1920[29]. The second point of interest is that the card is postmarked 'Parson Drove'. Parson Drove is a small Domesday-Book village in Cambridgeshire, which still has many 16th-century buildings, and it is where Arthur's mother Sarah, was born. The village is 19 miles from Peterborough where Arthur was born. Florrie was also born in Peterborough. The third point is that both the younger Waddelows and the younger Ingreys must have been fairly fit. In the above card Florrie writes about cycling (and it would have been cycling not travelling by car) 74 miles in a day, hence the note of achievement 'don't you think we did well'. In several of the cards from Arthur to Ruby there are references to cycling (as in four of the cards so far). Some historians of cycling have labelled the 1890s as the 'great cycling craze' but this was primarily the upper and middle classes for bicycles at that time were very expensive. It was not until the Edwardian period that bicycles became far more accessible. These cards of Ruby and Arthur illustrate how significant the bicycle had become for the working classes, including for women.

Nine days after the card from Florrie is one which offers the strongest indication of Ruby and Arthur having a close relationship. It is the only card we have written by Ruby and was sent by her to her parents at 60 Bride Street, on 14th July, 1909. Like Florrie's it was posted in Parson Drove.

Postcard text 6, Ruby Ingrey to Mr and Mrs Ingrey 14th July 1909

"Jubilee Colt
Dearest mother, & Dad
Just a card to

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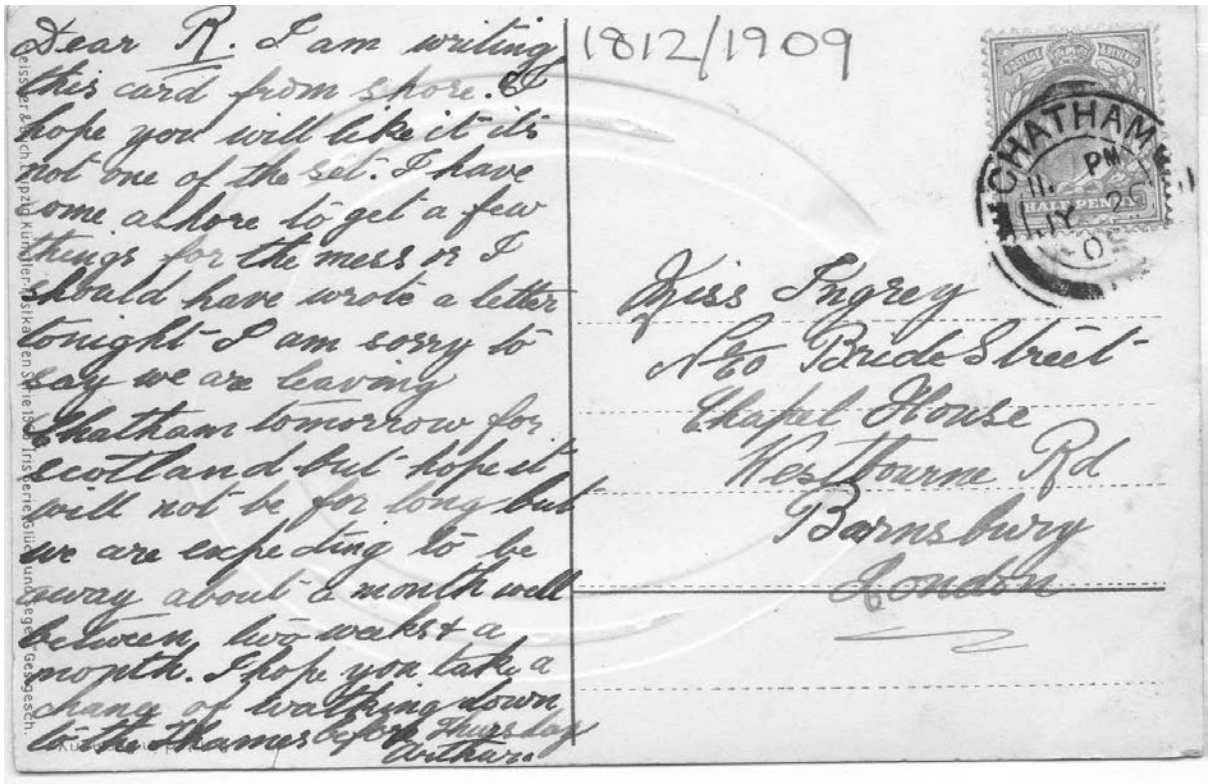
[29] James Joseph Colledge and Ben Warlow, *Ships of the Royal Navy rev. ed.* (London: Chatham Publishing, [1969] 2006).

let you know that
we arrived at
Parson Drove quite
safely. Weather is
simply lovely, it
has been very hot
today here. Arthur
had a mishap.
this morning going
down to Kings X.
He must have gone
over something very
sharp as he had
a split in
one of the tyres.
Love from A & R.

Ruby's writing is very clear, legible and grammatical, and unlike Arthur, she does use punctuation. She indeed appears to be a person who regularly utilises literacy skills in her job. The reference to Arthur having damaged his tyre while on the way to Kings Cross suggests that they got the train there as it then, as now, serves Cambridgeshire. More importantly, for the questions about the trajectory of their relationship, is the destination. Was Arthur taking Ruby to meet his relatives still living in Cambridgeshire? Was this Arthur displaying his 'girl' to his wider family. Does this suggest that the relationship had become a very close one?

Among our cards sent to Ruby by people other than Arthur, there are several that mention him. On 24th October, 1908, Arthur's sister Florrie sends Ruby a postcard saying she 'had a letter from Arthur, and he said they are having the gate made larger, so I shall be able to walk in comfortably'. On 28th October, 1908, Ruby's correspondent Emmie writes, 'I hope A is keeping well & saucy as ever'. In the following year, on 10th July 1909 another postcard from Emmie says 'Am glad to say Dad is keeping very well hope Arthur is keeping well'. On 19th September 1909, Emmie again writes to Ruby saying, 'I hope all are well at home also Arthur …'. Ruby did have a sister, Emmie, but we have been unable to ascertain that this is her sister. Thus it seems that at the very least Arthur's sister and Ruby's intimate Emmie consider them a pair.

The next card to be considered from Arthur to Ruby, still at this time at No. 60 Bride Street, explicitly addresses the difference in function between the short card and the letter. The original card appears as Figures 1 and 2.



Insert figure 1 here (Caption: Postcard 7 – message side)

Insert figure 2 here (Caption: Postcard 7 – picture side)

Postcard text 7 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 20th July 1909

Dear R. I am writing
this card from shore. I
hope you will like it its
not one of the set. I have
come ashore to get a few
things for the mess ?? I
should have wrote a letter
tonight I am sorry to
say we are leaving
Chatham tomorrow for
Scotland but hope it

will not be for long
but we are expecting to be
away for about a month ???
between two weeks of a
month. I hope you take a
change of walking down
to the Thames before Thursday
Arthur

The card, being an attractive object, has an additional function as a gift; collecting postcards was one of the main reasons for their popularity in Edwardian times. Ruby's collection must have remained intact for some time, probably some decades, for it to be acquired by us[30]. This card contains an apology for not writing a letter; it would appear that this would be the more substantial and so perhaps in a sense more valued element of correspondence. Perhaps the failure to write a letter and send the shorter and easier postcard instead is to some sense mitigated through the choice of the card as being desirable enough to add to a collection.

For the first time in this sequence we learn that Arthur's ship is leaving Chatham for a while. It is possible to wonder how much notice the crew had of the ship's departure; Arthur indicates it may have been very little. The next two cards are posted in Cromarty, Scotland and contained Scottish views; indeed Arthur must have bought a bundle because several subsequent cards, although posted from

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[30] We bought the cards not in an album, but as loose cards in boxes sold by dealers, and did not for some time realise we had a set of related correspondence. See Julia Gillen and Nigel Hall, Any mermaids? Tracing early postcard mobilities, in: John Urry, Monika Büscher and Katian Witchger (eds.), *Mobile Methods* (London: Routledge, 2010) pp. 20-35.

Chatham, have Scottish views. Perhaps with greater distance and lack of opportunity to see one another, the topic of letters takes on a greater weight; such is the theme of the next card.

Postcard text 8 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 3rd August 1909

Dear R. Still staying
at Cromerty. Have not
received your letter but
expect you sent one.
Have had a letter from
Fred said you were going
for a ride on Saturday,
I hope you enjoyed your
selves. I only wish I had
been with you. Will write letter
later on. Arthur.

There appears a wistful tone; even in such a brief communication a reader can have a sense of the distanced Arthur mulling over the contents of Fred's letter. Arthur's promise to write a letter conveys a sense that the sending of a card alone is insufficient for the depth of the epistolary relationship. Ten days later Arthur is back in the relative proximity of Chatham, but his plans to see Ruby have been disturbed; he was late getting back to his boat one evening and so has been grounded.

Postcard text 9 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 13th August 1909

Dear R. I am sorry

to have to tell you I
shall not be home to go
for a ride with you
on Saturday as I was late
getting on board on
Wednesday morning
ran into a fog just
this side of ??anstead
so I have got to remain
on board for three days
but expect to be home
on Sunday morning
will come round home
to see you as soon as I
can, have no time to write
a letter. From Arthur.

By our next card, two weeks later, things appear back to usual with postcards being used to discuss immediate arrangements, yet still being entwined with the more valued, more private, genre of the letter.

Postcard text 10 Arthur Waddelow to Ruby Ingrey 27th August 1909

Dear R Pleased
to receive such a
nice letter from you
hope to be home
tomorrow about the

same time, I will
come round to see
you as soon as I
can hope you are
quite well
Arthur

This is not the end of our cards; the sequence continues a little longer in the same vein. But what eventually happened to the relationship between Arthur and Ruby?

There was no romantic finale as in the final quarter of 1916 Ruby married her brother-in-law, Percival Joseph Barham, a despatch clerk living in Islington. They already had one child and later had another. Ruby M. G. Barham died, age 71, in 1961. Arthur Waddelow stayed single for longer, marrying in 1919. When he died in 1947 he was described as a retired postman.

Conclusions: the relationship between the picture postcard and the letter in the Edwardian era

Our collection of three thousand cards from this period shows that letter writing and postcard writing coexisted comfortably for individuals. One in five mention letters, either sending, receiving or promising one. It is clear that postcards were a valuable innovation nonetheless. Indeed back in 1865 von Stephan, the original proposer of the postcard to the Austro-German Postal Conference, displayed a prescient understanding of the utility of the postcard and the part it could come to the play in the busy lives of Arthur and Ruby:

"The present form of the letter does not however yet allow of sufficient simplicity and brevity for a large class of communications. It is not simple enough, because note-paper has to be selected and folded, envelopes obtained and closed, and stamps affixed. It is not brief enough, because, if a letter be written, convention necessitates something more than the bare communication. This is irksome both to the sender and the receiver"[31].

There is considerable evidence from our collections that Arthur and Ruby's sense of the symbiotic worth of postcards in relation to letters was shared more generally. Overall a letter was worth more to the receiver in that it was a sign of greater effort being taken. It was likely to be longer, it would be more private and it cost twice as much to send. However, the postcard being an attractive object through its selected image, could also possess a value that the letter could not. Many cards refer to the collections of addressees; others make an explicit point in relation to the image and its meaningfulness to the correspondents. Presumably many others carried an image that had a significant shared meaning, without this needing to be referred to explicitly.

One card, sent from Warwick to London, makes this dual, somewhat ambivalent cultural evaluation of the relationship between the postcard and the letter particularly evident:

Postcard text 13, Herbert to Mrs Hart 22nd August 1903
(2) You will think that
I am making this do

[31] Heinrich von Stephan, from an address to the 1865 Austro German Postal Conference, reprinted in Staff, *The Picture Postcard and its Origins* p. 44.

for a letter, but it
is not so. On second
thoughts I send you
a second card to
give you a little more
idea of Warwick. You
must come here some day. With love
Herbert

So in beginning his message with "(2)" Herbert (the name of the one of Mrs Hart's sons so possibly his identity) is as explicit as he can be that he has deliberately sent two cards in order to share two related images. The cost of sending two postcards equals that of one letter, so that knowledge would have made his insistence all the more persuasive.

The writing practices of Edwardian postcard users, their appropriation of the innovation and the diversity of ways in which they made use of the opportunities offered, provide us with windows into their performances of social identities and relationships, illuminating a fascinating communications technology, semiotic artefact and social practice. While an exploration of the demographic characteristics of postcard users is beyond our scope in this paper, I can mention that our census investigations demonstrate use of postcards from the lowliest homes to the highest. Picture postcards were a central aspect of epistolary culture in the beginning of the twentieth century. With rising costs of new materials, the struggle for better working conditions for postmen and then many changes attributable to the Great War, the postcard faded into occasional use. During the Edwardian era, however, the letter itself needs to be understood in its symbiotic relation to the postcard.