



First World War Christmas Card

North Herts Museum update: Merry Christmas from 100 years ago

As you open your Christmas cards this year, imagine opening one like the one above, beautifully embroidered by hand, and sent to you from the front line of the First World War. This card helped to connect soldiers to their families at home, and they would have waited eagerly for a reply.

Silk postcards grew in popularity from 1915, though they first appeared around 1900. Some estimates suggest as many as 10 million cards were produced during the First World War. Each card was produced as part of a cottage industry which saw mostly women engaged in intricate designs being hand embroidered onto strips of silk mesh, the design being repeated as many as 25 times on a strip. This was then sent to a factory for cutting and mounting as postcards and greetings cards. The cards themselves were bought from civilians trying to scrape a living from supplying soldiers' needs in the immediate war zone. They were not cheap, each one costing as much as three times the daily pay of the average soldier. Although they are postcards, they were often sold and sent home in an envelope to protect their contents.

There is a huge range; some had sentimental messages, such as "friendship", "birthday greetings", "Home Sweet Home" and some cards celebrated festivals and holidays. Many had delicately opening pockets with a small card insert. Others would give "Greetings from France" or poignant messages "from the trenches".

Today this card connects us to events that occurred 100 years ago, and reminds us of the people who were not so different from us.

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