

TRC COLLECTION:

**SILK EMBROIDERED
POSTCARDS
FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

Leiden
December 2015

Colophon

Author: Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood

Address: Hogewoerd 164, 2311 HW Leiden, The Netherlands

Date: December 2015

Copyright: Textile Research Centre, Leiden

TRC Collection Catalogues

- *Silk Embroidered Postcards from the First World War* (2015)

Acknowledgements

The TRC would like to thank Dr. Ian Collins for his help in collecting various postcards and his help in writing the text

(<https://sites.google.com/site/embroideredsilkipostcards/home>)

Silk Embroidered Postcards from the First World War

Decorative postcards with a short text were popular in Europe from the early 1900's until the 1950's. Many of these were made in France. The cards included a wide variety of designs and messages, worked in floss silk in various colours. Some ten million embroidered cards were allegedly produced.

Embroidered silk postcards were especially favoured during and just after the First World War (1914-1918). During the war, the range of designs was very varied and included obviously military subjects, such as the flags of the allies (notably Belgium, Britain, Croatia, France, Italy, Portugal, Russia, and the USA), names of regiments, figures of famous generals, and more public subjects such as Christmas, birthdays and New Year best wishes. In addition, many cards carried illustrations of butterflies and flowers, as gentler, more sympathetic images. Comparable cards were made in Germany, but with different designs and texts.

The designs and texts were worked in small, silk gauze panels with colourful, free style embroidery. A wide range of stitches were used, including the back stitch, basket weave stitch, individual cross stitches, herringbone stitch, reverse herringbone stitch (to create a shadow work effect), double running stitch (Holbein stitch), satin stitch, stem stitch, as well as various composite stitches. These embroidered panels were then stuck to a card frame embossed with a decorative edging.

In the past, various questions have been raised about these cards, especially as to how the cards were made, and by whom. Based on surviving examples, it would appear that, for the production of the cards, wide strips of organza cloth were embroidered with series of the required designs. It has often been suggested that the images were hand embroidered by Belgian and French women who had been afflicted by the war. But would they have really been able to hand embroider hundreds of thousands of cards? An important detail in this respect is that none of the individual postcards so far examined show any indication of a drawn or printed design that would have been essential if the embroideries were being made by hand. Another explanation is that the embroideries were machine made, but this brings us to the question, which type of machine was used?

The hand-embroidery machine

A machine that could imitate the appearance of these hand stitches is the *Hand-Embroidery Machine* that was invented in 1828 by Josué Heilmann (1796-1848) in Mulhouse, France. The machine was developed over the following decades by various engineers in Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland (fig. 1).

Basically, this hand-embroidery machine used a pantograph system to transfer the stitches. Each stitch is drawn out on a large scale design and then its position traced by an operator using a point on one arm of the pantograph.

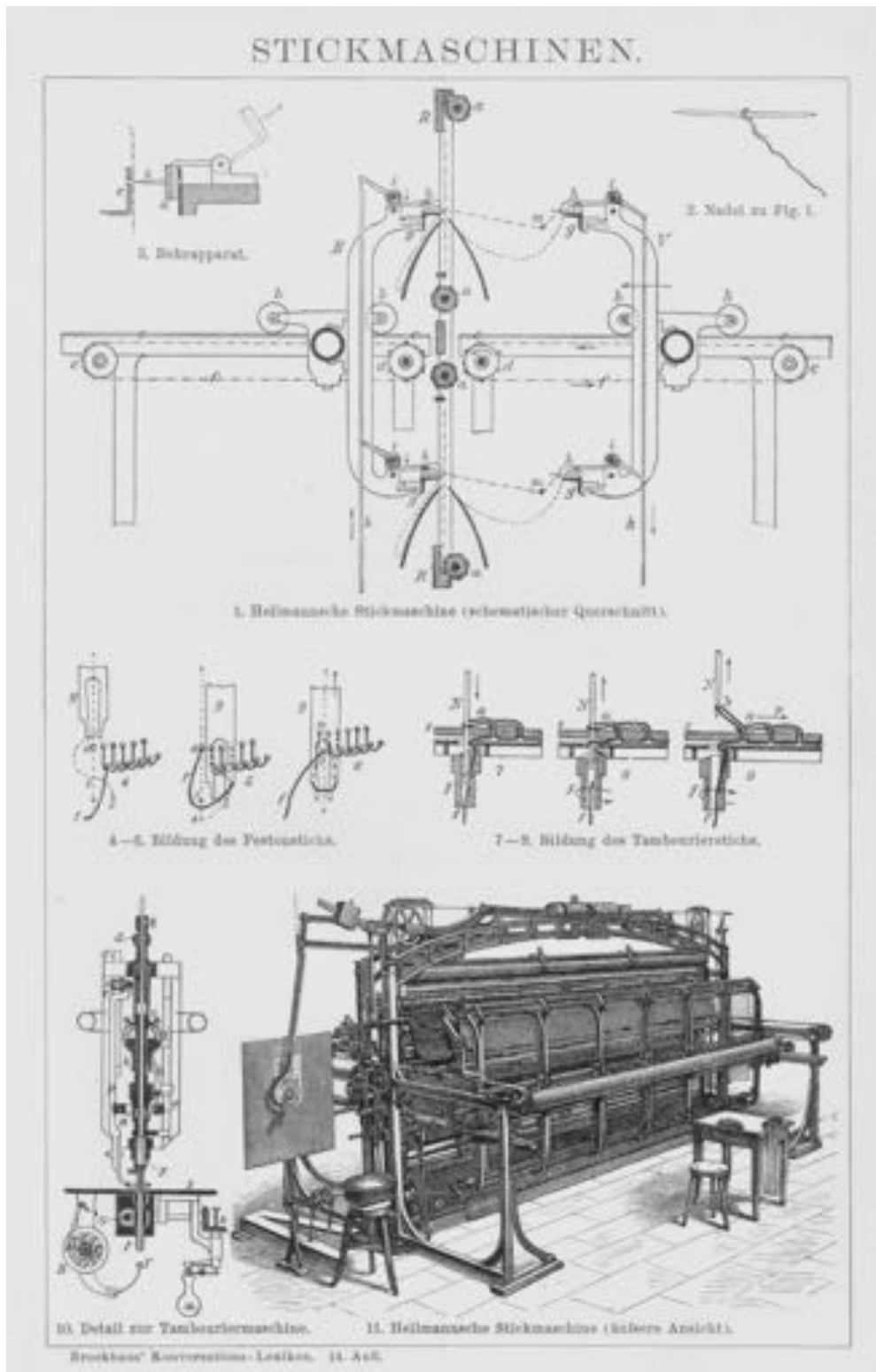


Fig. 1: Illustration from the Brockhaus' Konversations-Lexikon, depicting the working of a hand-embroidery machine (F.A. Brockhaus, 14th edition, 1894-1896, Abb. 1).

A series of needles responds to the movement of the pantograph arm. Each needle has an eye in the middle for the thread, and two sharp ends. The needle is passed backwards and forwards through the ground cloth using a pincer system (double-sided pincer wagons), so imitating the action and appearance of hand embroidery. Each colour in the design is individually stitched (so all the blue parts, for example, are worked, and then the machine is re-threaded with a new colour), until the design is complete. This machine, in various sizes, was used in both domestic and factory settings. Using hand-embroidery machines it was possible to produce hundreds of images on a sheet in one go.

Once embroidered, the strips/sheets of organza cloth were cut up and the individual images were stuck into an embossed card frame. They were then sold to the public, especially the soldiers, at a relatively high price. The companies making and selling these cards could well have made a considerable profit. Perhaps this is the real reason behind the stories of poor refugee women working all hours to hand embroider these cards in order to feed their desperate families. Wouldn't you buy such a card?

Once it was clear that this form of postcards was popular, and lucrative, several companies started producing the cards using other types of embroidery machines, although perhaps not really suitable. These included the Schiffli machine (running and satin stitches; this machine uses a lock stitch with two threads, one on the front and one on the back of the ground material) and the Cornelli machine (chain stitched motifs), but again, the cards produced by these machines were not as well made as those made with the hand-embroidery machine.

HAND-EMBROIDERY MACHINE SHEETS

Cat. no: 01

TRC acc. no: 2015.0421

Object: Postcard

Main text: PEACE 1919

Date: 1919

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 65.5 x 41

Material (s): Silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: A set of 25 images that were pre-embroidered by machine. These are ready to be cut out and glued onto a card ground. The embroidered date indicates that this sheet was prepared in 1918, ready for making into cards and selling in 1919, but the war ended in November 1918 making them unsalable.



Cat. no: 02

TRC acc. no: 2015.0422

Object: Postcard

Main text: 1919 SOUVENIR FROM THE GREAT WAR, plus the dates 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918

Date: 1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 64 x 41

Material (s): Silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: A set of 25 images that were pre-embroidered by machine. These are ready to be cut out and glued onto a card ground. The embroidered date indicates that this sheet was prepared in 1918 ready for making into cards and selling in 1919, but the war ended in November 1918 making them unsalable.



Cat. no: 03

TRC acc. no: 2015.0423

Object: Postcard

Main text: HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Date: 1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 62 x 47

Material (s): Silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: A set of 25 images that were pre-embroidered by machine. These are ready to be cut out and glued onto a card ground. It is likely that these were prepared in 1918 ready for making into postcards and selling in 1919, but the war ended in November 1918 making them unsalable.



MILITARY DESIGNS

Cat. no: 04

TRC acc. no: 2015.0425

Object: Postcard

Main text: "For you alone"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: CM

Size (cm): 14 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine.

Description: The main design consists of a basket of flowers with a British flag attached to the basket's handle. The card frame has an embossed design of lines, flanked by buds and dots (the same embossed design can be found on 2014.0429, cat. no. 13).



In the lower left hand corner on the back of the card is printed: *PARIS DÉPOSÉ FABRICATION FRANÇAISE* with the initials *CM* intertwined (see 2015.0433, which is by the same company).

Cat. no: 05

TRC acc. no: 2015.0428

Object: Postcard

Main text: "SOUVENIR"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: VISÉ, Paris

Size (cm): 14 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The main design consists of a central shield decorated with the British flag, and attached to a red, white and blue ribbon. The shield is flanked by two large, shaded pink flowers (roses?), forget-me-knots and a yellow ribbon.



On the back of the card is hand-written in pencil: Mrs. Stephens 50 Westlake Rd Rotherhithe [a district of London].

In the middle of the back of the card is printed: *Modèle déposée A.O. – Visé, Paris*

Cat. no: 06

TRC acc. no: 2015.0420

Object: Postcard

Main text: none

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: VISÉ, Paris

Size (cm): 13.9 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style postcard with a design including a central shield with the British flag, surrounded by pansies and flower buds. Below are some small red flowers. In the two bottom corners are British flags. The card frame has simple embossed lines. On the inside there is a card depicting a Scottish woman with parcels and the printed text: "To my dearest".



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "with love from Fred" and the address "Mrs E Barker 23 Fifth Avenue Queens Park, Paddington W10 London"

Also printed on the back of the card is CARTE POSTALE POST CARD
POSTKAART CORRESPONDANCE ADRESSE VISÉ, Paris et Exportation. J. S.
Paris [?] Déposé

Cat. no: 07

TRC acc. no: 2015.0437

Object: Postcard

Main text: "A Happy New Year"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 14.1 x 9.2

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style postcard with design of a British and French flag flanked by mistletoe above the main message. The card frame has an interweaving semi-circle design.



On the back of the card is printed: *Modèle Déposé.*

Cat. no: 08

TRC acc. no: 2015.0448

Object: Postcard

Main text: None

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Marque EME

Size (cm): 13.9 x 9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: Envelope style postcard with a line of five hanging flags (from left to right Russia, Italy, Britain, France, Belgium), with shamrocks (good luck) above and forget-me-nots below. The card frame has an embossed design of roughly shaped ovals (almost a wood effect).



On the back of the card is hand written: "Mr & Mrs J. Thompson from Thomas Liddle".

In the bottom left hand corner is printed: MARQUE EME [in a rectangle] DÉPOSÉE
FABRICATION FRANÇAISE

Cat. no: 09

TRC acc. no: 2015.0419

Object: Postcard

Main text: None

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: E. Le Deley, imp.-édit

Size (cm): 13.9 × 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: Envelope style postcard with a central design of the Belgian, French, British and Italian flags surrounded by clover, thistles and a white flower. The card frame has an embossed pattern of stylised flowers.



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "Wishing you & Uncle a very Bright & Happy New Year From J. B. D."

There is also the printed texts: CARTE POSTALE CORRESPONDANCE ADRESSS
E. Le Deley, imp.-édit, 127, Boulevard de Sébastopol, Paris

Cat. no: 10

TRC acc. no: 2015.0434

Object: Postcard

Main text: "SOUVENIR FROM FRANCE"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 13.5 x 8.5

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The main design consists of a blue peacock with the tail 'eyes' consisting of the flags of the various Allies fighting together. The flags are (from top to bottom): Britain, France, Italy, USA, Russia, Serbia, Romania, Portugal, Japan and Belgium. The card frame is embossed with a lace and fringe design with stylised flowers.



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "Dear Harry just a Card Wishing you a happy birthday from D-ady [sic] XX

Printed on the back is: *CARTE POSTALE POST CARD CORRESPONDANCE
ADRESSE Fabrication Française Modèle Déposé*

Cat. no: 11

TRC acc. no: 2015.0430

Object: Postcard

Main text: "Like the way I cling to thee"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: H.S.

Size (cm): 13.9 x 8.9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The main design consists of a Red Ensign (flag of the British Merchant Navy) on a flag pole surrounded by ivy. The embossed card frame includes what appears to be thistle with four horseshoes, one in each corner of the frame (the same frame can be seen in cat. no. 15).



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "With best love from Alf XXX", as well as the printed text: *H.S. – Modèle déposé*

Cat. no: 12

TRC acc. no: 2015.0433

Object: Postcard

Main text: "AVC" (Army Veterinary Corp)

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: C.M.

Size (cm): 13.6 x 8.8

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The design consists of a crown over a wreath that encloses the initials of the Corps. The card frame has an embossed design of numerous indentations.



On the back of the card is printed: *PARIS DÉPOSE FABRICATION FRANÇAISE* with the initials CM or MC (see 2015.0425, which is by the same company).

Cat. no: 13

TRC acc. no: 2015.0429

Object: Postcard

Main text: "CANADA OUR PRIDE"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: C.M.

Size (cm): 13.9 x 8.9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: Design based on a central, maple leaf flanked by the British and French flags. The card frame has an embossed design of a row of dots and eggs, flanked by vertical lines (the same embossed design can be found on 2014.0425, cat. no. 04).



On the back of the card is printed: *PARIS DÉPOSÉ FABRICATION FRANÇAISE* with the initials *CM* or *MC*.

Cat. no: 14

TRC acc. no: 2015.0424

Object: Postcard

Main text: "Long may she wave"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 13.8 x 8.9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The design consists of a large USA flag with what appears to be olive branches in the background. The card frame has an embossed pattern of jagged lines set at a slight angle.



On the back of the card is hand written in coloured pencil (with various spelling mistakes, and sometimes quite illegible): "My Dear Mother just a P.C. to let you know that I had your litter hall right, and the Woodbine [cigarettes] dear I ham glad to hear the you are hall quite well, as it lives ? me and Willie this time the same will dear Mother I had a litter from Cowsion M. and she his quite will, till Feddie sister if she have not had a litter from im that he his getin bitter fast and will soon be with me for she must not fart [fret] about him for I ham looking after him and will see that he his hall right, so hall keep , me a good hart it nd then hall will be save [?] then ... will dear Mothers give my love to you hall in the home from hall Joe to dear Mother and holl XXXXXXXX "

SENTIMENTAL CARDS

Cat. no: 15

TRC acc. no: 2015.0431

Object: Postcard

Main text: "MY HEART IS EVER THINE"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: H.S.

Size (cm): 13.9 x 8.9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: Sprigs of pink and yellow flowers surrounding the main text. The card frame is embossed with a design of thistles and a horseshoe in each of the four corners (the same embossed pattern can be seen on cat. no. 11).



On the back of the card is the printed text: *H. S. – Modèle déposé*

Cat. no: 16

TRC acc. no: 2015.0447

Object: Postcard

Main text: "I love you"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: Unknown

Size (cm): 13.8 x 8.7

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style postcard with a garden scene with a trellis work and fencing with flowers and birds of various types.



On the back of the card is written: "To Dear Daisy with fondest Love & Kisses from Fred". In addition, there is a printed text: *Fabrication française*.

Cat. no: 17

TRC acc. no: 2015.0432

Object: Postcard

Main text: "TRUE LOVE IS NEVER PARTED"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: H.S.

Size (cm): 13.4 x 8.9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: A group of purple and white pansies and buds surrounding the main text. The card frame has an embossed design of stylised flowers.



On the back of the card is written in pencil: "With best love from Alf xxx"

There is also the printed information: *H.S. – Modèle déposé*

Cat. no: 18

TRC acc. no: 2015.0446

Object: Postcard

Main text: "TO MY DARLING"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: *Visé Paris*

Size (cm): 13.8 x 8.7

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Exhibitions: Mini-exhibition at the TRC (9-11-2015 until 24-11-2015)

Description: A group of daisies and blue cornflowers draped over the main text and with a scroll design in one corner. The card frame has an embossed trellis work pattern.



On the back of the card is printed: *J.J. MARQUE DÉPOSÉE Visé Paris*

Cat. no: 19

TRC acc. no: 2015.0445

Object: Postcard

Main text: "To my dear Sister"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: *G D.M Paris*

Size (cm): 13.9 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The design is a basket of flowers (roses and lily of the valleys) set underneath the main text. The embossed card edging includes (unidentifiable) flowers of various types.



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "With much love Harry" as well as the printed text: *Fabrication Française G.D.M Paris* (set within a diamond shape).

Cat. no: 20

TRC acc. no: 2015.0435

Object: Postcard

Main text: "HAPPY BIRTHDAY"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: H.S.

Size (cm): 13.8 x 8.8

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a hand-embroidery machine

Description: The main design consists of a large, shaded red rose with foliage.



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "To William from Dad XXX"

Also printed on the back is the text: *H. S. – (Modèle déposé)*

DESIGNS MADE ON A SCHIFFLI MACHINE

Cat. no: 21

TRC acc. no: 2015.0438

Object: Postcard

Main text: "TO MY DEAR MOTHER"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: J. S. Paris

Size (cm): 13.7 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a Schiffli embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style (portrait) design of a large, shaded purple flower with leaves, with smaller flowers in shaded purple below. The card frame is decorated with straight lines (this appears to be a common design associated with Schiffli embroidered cards, see cat. Nos. 22, 23 and 24).



On the back of the card is printed: *Carte Postale – Postcard Fabrication française J. S. Paris déposé*

Cat. no: 22

TRC acc. no: 2015.0449

Object: Postcard

Main text: "TO MY DEAR MOTHER From your loving Son"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: *J. S. Paris*

Size (cm): 13.9 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a Schiffli embroidery machine

Description: The main design consists of purple and yellow pansies with small pink flowers in the background. The card frame is decorated with straight lines (this appears to a common design associated with Schiffli embroidered cards, see cat. nos. 21, 23 and 24).



On the back of the card is printed: *CARTE POSTALE POST CARD POSTKAART
CORRESPONDANCE ADRESS VISÉ, Paris et Exportation. J. S. Paris. Déposé*

Cat. no: 23

TRC acc. no: 2015.0426

Object: Postcard

Main text: "TO MY DEAR WIFE FROM YOUR LOVING HUSBAND"

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: J. S. Paris

Size (cm): 13.8 x 9

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a Schiffli embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style postcard with an abstract design in green, purple and yellow. The card frame is decorated with straight lines (this appears to be a common design associated with Schiffli embroidered cards, see cat. nos. 21, 22 and 24).



On the back of the card is printed: *Carte Postale – Postcard CORRESPONDANCE*
ADRESSE VISE Paris et Exportation J. S. Paris. Déposé

Cat. no: 24

TRC acc. no: 2015.0450

Object: Postcard

Main text:

Date: 1914-1918

Country of origin: France

Manufacturer: *J. S. Paris*

Size (cm): 13.9 x 9.0

Material (s): Paper, silk thread and a gauze ground

Machine: Made on a Schiffli embroidery machine

Description: An envelope style postcard with an all over design of stylised purple and pink flowers with shaded green foliage. There is also a small card that went into the envelope that has a bunch of flowers and the text: "Remember". The card frame is decorated with straight lines (this appears to be a common design associated with Schiffli embroidered cards, see cat. nos. 21, 22 and 23).



On the back of the card is hand written in pencil: "From George Berry". In addition, there is the following printed information: *CARTE POSTALE POST CARD POSTKAART CORRESPONDANCE ADRESS VISÉ, Paris et Exportation. J. S. Paris. Déposé*

SOURCES

Printed Source

COLLINS, Ian (2001). *An Illustrated History of the Embroidered Silk Postcard*, Radlett: Gabrian Antiques.

LAFFIN, JOHN (1988). *World War 1 in Postcards*, Gloucester: Alan Sutton.

RADLEY, C (1985). *The Silk Postcard*, Essex: R.F. Postcards (private publication).

ROEBUCK, Malcolm J. (2000). *Stevengraphs Bookmarks and Postcards, etc: World War 1 Postcards*.

(<http://www.stevengraphs.com/stevengraphs/worwar1silpo.html>)

STROBEL, Heino (2012). *The Beginnings of Machine Embroidery in Saxony*, available at: http://www.annatextiles.ch/machine%20embroidery/strobel_2_english.pdf [retrieved 25 October 2015]

Digital source

<https://sites.google.com/site/embroideredsilkpostcards/home>

Videos showing early hand-embroidery machines in use:

- <http://youtu.be/g9n1CYs9MaM>
- <http://youtu.be/a5ZYZsFnhNU>
- http://youtu.be/_vYCMz-M2zs