

Mill Postcards and Associated Original Artwork

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Postcards are a good source of material showing mills and many of the mills featured on them no longer exist. This is a brief introduction to this fascinating hobby.

For those studying mill details, by far the best reproduction method for postcards are real photographs. Such cards (depending on quality) allow the use of a 'magnifying glass' to search for small details of the mill construction and so on.

Lithographic or chromo-lithographic (coloured) postcards are almost up to the standards of the real photograph card in terms of being able to study detail. However, in some instances the image was based on watercolour paintings. These may have had some artistic licence applied and may not be so useful to study mill detail. They are however highly collectable and in their own right a work of art.

The UK was slower than its continental neighbours to use picture postcards for transmission of messages through the post. It was in 1894 that British publishers were given permission by the Post Office to manufacture and distribute picture postcards, which could be sent through the post. From 1899 onwards the standard size of 5.5in by 3.5in (approx 140mm x 90mm), already in use in other countries, was adopted in the UK and became the standard format. The postal rate within the UK for postcards was ½d until 1918. In the UK, Ralph Tuck & Sons Ltd, London were one of the earliest postcard publishers. Their first postcard was published in 1894 and they became the leading postcard publisher, particularly in the art rather than photographic reproduction field.

Lithography is a form of plano-graphic printing, meaning that the surface is flat. It is based on the chemical repellence of oil and water. Simply, designs were drawn or painted with greasy ink or crayons on specially prepared limestone. The design may have been copied from an actual watercolour or oil painting which would be in front of the lithographer. The stone is moistened with water, which the stone accepts in areas not covered by the crayon. Oily ink, applied with a roller adheres only to the drawing and is repelled by the wet parts of the stone. The print is then made by pressing paper against the inked drawing.



Far left is a chromolithographic postcard of Dorking watermill printed by Meissner & Buch at their works in Leipzig, and alongside it is what is believed to be the original artwork by Noah Winspear in 1906 on which the postcard was based. Winspear was a Yorkshire artist who produced a vast number of paintings for postcard reproduction.

Chromolithography is the addition of colour into the actual printing process as opposed to adding colour by hand to a black and white lithograph. It is a labour intensive process often involving a master printer in addition to the artist or designer of the image to be printed.

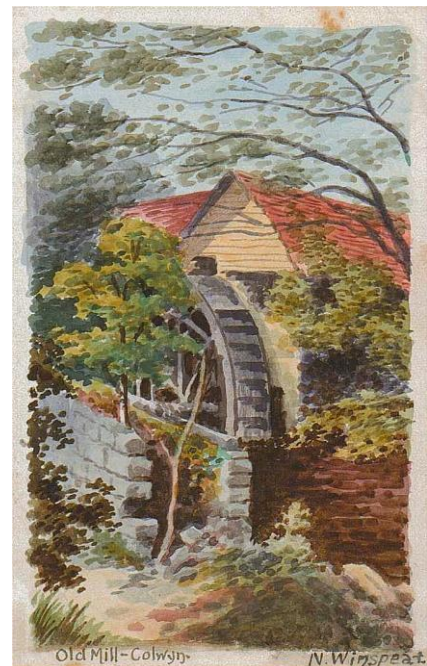
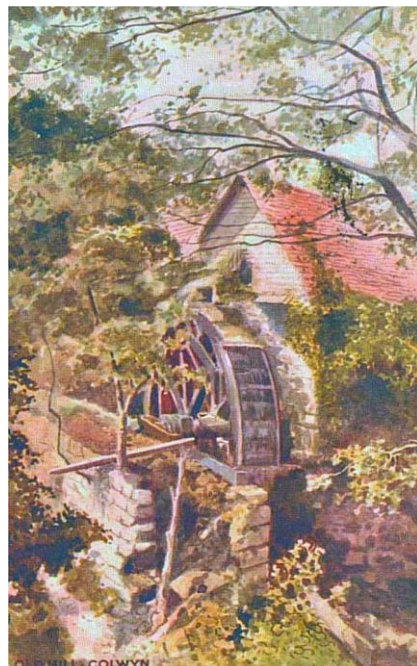
Postcards were printed in multiple impressions. For each colour in the final print, a different stone would have been prepared; this means that each sheet of paper will pass through the press as many times as there are colours in the final print. In order for the prints in progress to avoid being covered over by the next colour being applied, each print in progress must be precisely 'registered', making sure that the print would be lined up exactly each time it went through the press so that each colour would be in the correct position and the overlaying colours would merge correctly. If you use a magnifier to look at such an early colour postcard you will see solid blocks of colour in a variety of sizes and shapes.

Chromolithography was an expensive and labour intensive process requiring considerable skill. The steam-driven printing press and the wider availability of inexpensive paper stock lowered production costs and made chromolithography more affordable. By the 1880s the process was widely used for magazines and advertising. At the same time, however, photographic processes were being developed that would replace chromolithography. This later technology was known as photogravure.

On **photogravure** cards the picture is composed of many hundreds of tiny dots and because of this mill detail not visible to the naked eye will not show up under magnification. The photogravure process covers the whole range of postcard history and the majority of present day cards are produced by this method.

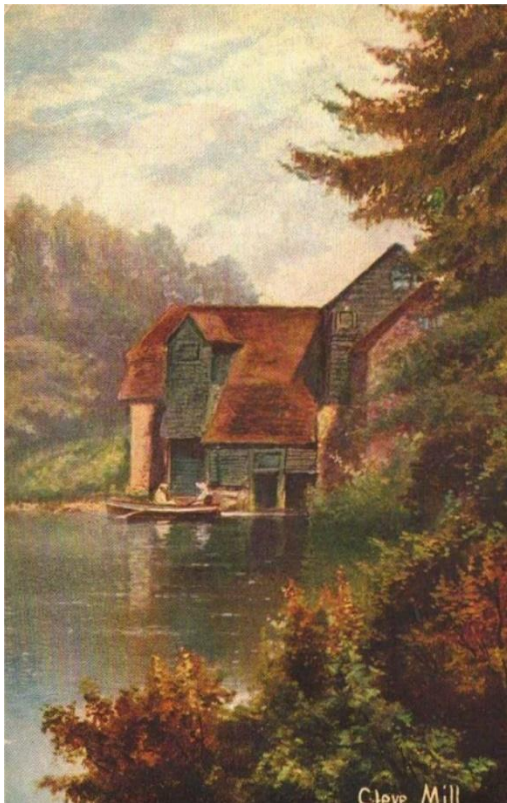
Below is a photogravure postcard of Colwyn Watermill in Wales. Another photogravure postcard and two watercolours of Cleve Watermill on the River Thames, Oxfordshire are shown on the next page.

An example of a photogravure postcard of Colwyn Watermill, Wales, printed by Bernard P Hall & Co of Bakewell & Sheffield, is shown on the left and alongside this is what is believed to be the original artwork on which the postcard was based.



Further reading: Yates M (1996) *Wind and Water Mills on Postcards*, The Midland Wind & Water Mills Group Journal Vol 15, p19-29.

This article of mine appeared in Mill News #139 (April 2014), 28-30.



Above is a photogravure postcard of Cleeve Watermill on the River Thames printed by S Hildesheimer & Co of London & Manchester. This postcard was postally used and dated 1908. Note the boat with 2 people in it.

On the right are two signed original watercolours painted by the artist F Malcom. Although undated, these paintings were from a portfolio of paintings by the artist and those that were dated were in the year range 1891-1905. The paintings are both postcard-sized: it is possible that the publisher used these paintings for this postcard.



Editor's note: Coincidentally, HMG member Mariana Perry-Zoupanou has sent us some of her postcard collection featuring mills, amongst which are these two from original watercolours. Left 'Ringwood' by Wilfred Ball, right 'A Norfolk Windmill' by Brian Gerald.

