

Snaps Village's star role in the golden age of the picture postcard

The Edwardian era was the golden age of the picture postcard, and one of the most popular subjects was the, well, picture-postcard village of Brislington. Local historian Ken Taylor looks at what these cheap and cheerful communications of old can tell us, and invites you to Brislington this coming Saturday.

DRIVING out of Bristol through Brislington, it would be impossible to recognise the scene on a hand-painted postcard from a century ago. Only by researching old maps can the picture be placed in its modern context.

See picture 1 - Then, a carthorse waited patiently outside the village blacksmith's forge, perhaps for a new set of shoes, or maybe the owner is picking up a handful of nails for his latest DIY; today cars pull in to refuel and pick up supplies at the service station.

In 1910, around when the photograph was taken, this part of Brislington was still in Somerset and not yet part of Bristol. The row of houses and shops included a post office where you could have paid a halfpenny postage to send your postcard. Brislington post office was run by the West family, who had an entrepreneurial spirit - as well as being the local undertakers, they also published photographic postcards to sell to the day-trippers from Bristol.

Brislington was a popular rural retreat at the end of an inexpensive tram service from the city. The village offered the chance of romantic country walks, an opportunity to see grand old estate houses, and the many pubs invited people to relax and sample their food and refreshments. On the right hand of the original photograph stood the Hollybush Inn (demolished in 2007 and replaced by flats), and on the left was the King's Arms, which still serves the community from one of the oldest buildings in Brislington.

The post office in St Anne's also published postcards, including a photograph of Sandy Park Road postmarked in 1905. See picture 2.

Unlike at Brislington Square, all the buildings shown here are still standing and the Sandringham (left foreground) is still a public house. Sandy Park remains a major local shopping and leisure attrac-

tion with a car park, cafes, convenience stores and a variety of independent and charity shops to browse. There's also an all-day free festival here on Saturday 14 July - Springfest.

A brightly coloured card of Beese's Tea Gardens (picture 3) posted in the summer of 1906 carried a young man's message to his sweetheart in Bedminster. They'd spent a romantic morning together, presumably at the secluded site beside the River Avon which today retains its rural ambiance and now has a public bar and music on Friday evenings. That morning (Monday 18th June), he wrote, made him feel good to be alive, and he hoped she too was looking forward to their meeting again that evening...

Love, of course, is perennial, but wasn't the postal service fast in those days? Not as instant as email, but still pretty nippy to carry a message of love into the city in an afternoon.

The speed of postal delivery has gone down a lot since then, and the price has gone up by 31,200%, an increase that began in June 1918 when the cost doubled to a whole penny.

For many people that price hike signalled the end of the fashionable craze for postcards, a process that really began with the outbreak of the Great War and which was completed in June 1921 when a further halfpenny was added to the postage. Within a year the price dropped back to a penny, but the nation's love affair with the medium couldn't be rekindled, and the "golden age of postcards" was over.

Brislington had been particularly favoured by the postcard-buying public, and a century ago there were dozens of publishers competed for custom, producing hundreds of photographic images. Many of those pictures were successfully reprinted in a series of marketing upgrades to keep them



A hand-coloured postcard of Brislington Square in 1910; Below, the same view today



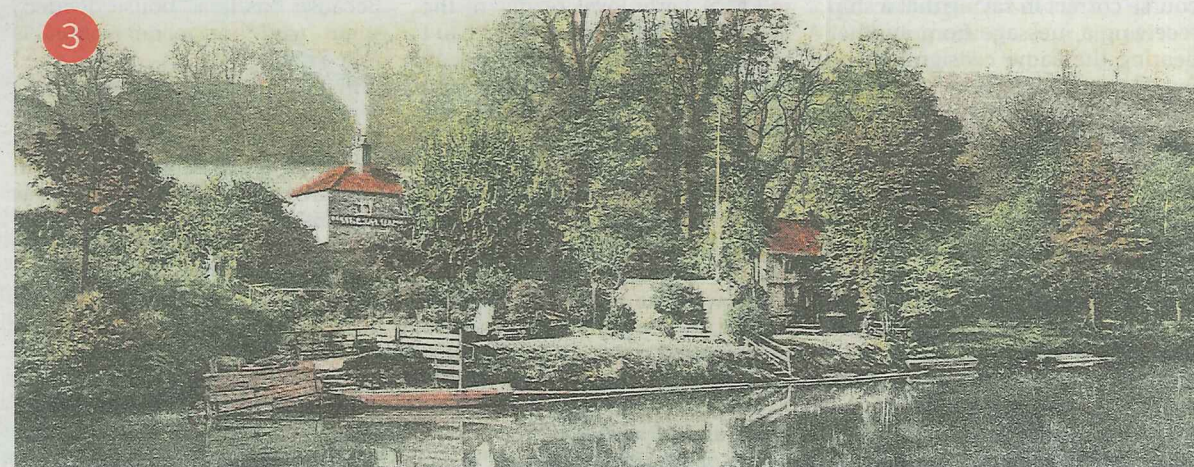
Left, Sandy Park Road in 1905.

at the cutting edge of the trends.

Remarkably, almost exactly a hundred years earlier in the 1820s, a wealthy antiquarian resident - George Weare Braikenridge - spent a small fortune commissioning artists to paint scores of pictures of Brislington. Together, the postcards and the Braikenridge Collection of paintings form a double legacy that is probably unparalleled in providing pictorial detail for any village in

England.

Brislington still has areas of rustic beauty such as Nightingale Valley and St Anne's Wood where St Anne's Well nestles in the tranquil valley. Although the ruin of the medieval chapel was destroyed by development in the 20th century, many of Brislington's grand 18th century buildings do survive and some are keen to welcome visitors, such as the Black Castle pub and



Beese's Tea Gardens, 1906

Arnos Manor Hotel.

Perhaps many conversations over a meal and a drink may find the subject turning toward the inevitable challenge left by the coincidence of those two outpourings of interest in visual art in Brislington, a century apart and ending a century ago... How will Brislington celebrate and commemorate itself now, in a way that will be treasured in another hundred or two hundred years' time?

» # If you have any old postcards of Brislington, please contact the author c/o Brislington's online museum (museum@brislington.org) - Ken is writing an illustrated catalogue of Brislington in the 'golden age' of postcards. Bristol City Council provides free access to old maps and the pictures in the Braikenridge Collection via the Know Your Place website at <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/knowyourplace>

» The Sandy Park Road Improvement Neighbourhood Group (i.e. SPRING) holds its 'Springfest' at various venues on Sandy Park Road on Saturday 14 July, from 10am to 4pm. For details, see springbris.org/fest/

» Latimer is on holiday