

“Madame is not at home.....”

## Silver card cases in Victorian and Edwardian England

By Anne Thackray

Victorian and Edwardian silver card cases – small boxes designed to hold visiting or calling cards – survive today in large numbers. The fine design and expert workmanship of many of these cases testify to their status as luxury goods, and to the importance formerly attached by the British socio-economic elite to the etiquette of exchanging social cards.

So many card cases were made, in so many different materials, that it is still possible to collect attractive examples for relatively little money, even though interest in collecting card cases has increased greatly in recent years. Antique and vintage card cases range from the extremely rare (bejeweled and enameled gold Fabergé, or fragile birch bark) to the much more common silver, mother-of-pearl or tortoiseshell. Many were made of relatively inexpensive materials: wood, papier-maché, leather, cardboard and plastic. Currently, prices for card cases vary according to materials, maker, rarity, and above all, popularity with collectors. The condition of the case is very important, as repairs are difficult and expensive.

Although gold has long been used for the making of very small decorative boxes (snuff boxes, for example), as well as for larger boxes which were destined to spend most of their existence sitting on tables, few gold calling card cases were ever made, owing to their cost and impractical weight. Cases made of silver seem to have survived in greater numbers than cases made of any other material. This is probably because a large number of silver cases were originally made, silver is relatively durable; and silver’s intrinsic value meant that people took greater care of silver card cases than of ones made from cheaper materials.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will focus primarily on British silver cases, particularly those made in Birmingham. From the 1820s until about 1870, Birmingham was the primary source for silver card cases. Richard J. Stanes lists some eighteen Birmingham producers of ‘castle-top’ silver cases alone, working from the 1820s to c.1900.<sup>2</sup>

A few cases were made elsewhere in Britain: in Edinburgh by James Nasmyth, in London (for example, by Sampson Mordan in 1872-1907), and in Chester, Exeter and Dublin.

In the nineteenth century, Birmingham surpassed London as a center for the making of small items of silver, or ‘toys’: expensive objects containing so little silver that they were exempt from assaying under the Acts of

1. David Mitchinson, *Calling, Cards & Cases* (Geneva, Patrick Cramer, p. 149

2. These were Nathaniel Mills II and Sons, Taylor & Perry, George Unite, Edward Turpenny, Hilliard & Thomason, Bettridge & Son, Alfred Taylor, William Dudley, Edward Smith, Joseph Willmore, Yapp & Woodward, David Pettifer, Elkington & Co., Thomas Prime & Sons, Frederick Marson, Deakin & Francis, H.W. Dee, and L.W. Dee....as well as, in London, Sampson Mordan, Thomas Johnson, and Barnard Bros. (Richard J. Stanes, *Visiting Card Cases: A History and My Collection* (self-published, n.p., n.d.).

Parliament of 1758-59.<sup>3</sup> This meant that Birmingham-made silver items did not need to be transported 125 miles to London's Assay Office. In 1773, Birmingham industrialists and silversmiths (including Matthew Boulton) successfully petitioned for a new Birmingham Assay Office, reducing the risks of transporting their products to be assayed in London.

The capital remained the main market for Birmingham-made silver and jewelry. By 1850, most of the silver or gold sold to middle-class customers in London's jewelry shops was Birmingham-made, even if London merchants did not advertise this. A number of leading Birmingham silversmiths bypassed London merchants and middlemen by opening their own London shops and registering with the London Assay Office, enabling them to sell directly to Londoners.

### **The social history of calling card cases**

The peak period for British silver card case production ran from about 1830 to the early 1900s. This coincided with the years in which the etiquette of social calls and card-exchanging was most punctiliously observed.

While people had been paying formal social calls for generations, the most widespread use of calling cards came from the 1820s onwards. Large-scale production of calling card cases soon followed. The Industrial Revolution and the British Empire made new fortunes, creating greater social fluidity and challenging established British hierarchies.

This was especially the case in towns, where newly-enriched families sought to move upwards socially, while established socio-economic elites tried to retain control of entry into their ranks, without entirely blocking social advancement. Below the level of the aristocracy (which continued to shun open association with 'trade'), upper-class and middle-class British families combined anxiety to protect their own status with interest in lucrative social connections, possibly even marriages, with the newly-rich. Meanwhile, the range of professions considered gentlemanly was expanded during the nineteenth century in Britain.

All of these factors encouraged the formalization of social interaction. As families became more prosperous, wives and daughters were more likely to stay at home rather than go out to work. Private and public spheres became increasingly separate, and domestic life more formalized.

Moral as well as social factors underpinned the development of an elaborate calling card etiquette. Victorians were particularly anxious to protect 'ladies' from exposure to morally, socially, or financially doubtful members of society, so restricted access to their unmarried daughters.<sup>4</sup> As the exchange of calling cards was the initial step in Victorian 'access rituals', it constituted social bedrock, and Victorian etiquette books became dominated by instructions on the correct use of calling cards and making formal calls.<sup>5</sup>

3. For example, in the early 1800s Birmingham was the world's largest producer of buckles, a staple element in gentlemen's footwear for generations.

4. There were legal and economic reasons for this. Until the *Married Women's Property Act* of 1870, a wife's property became her husband's upon marriage. Life insurance was costly, and few ladies were educationally equipped to earn their own livings if widowed. Divorce (unavailable to wives on the grounds of adultery alone) meant social exclusion.

5. Leonore Davidoff, *The Best Circles: Society, Etiquette and the Season* (London: Croom Helm, 1973).

There were practical advantages to the card system. For socially superior people, the etiquette of cards and calls reduced opportunities for social climbing, offering a means of politely increasing (or reducing) social interaction. For social alpinists, the card system minimized face-to-face snubs.<sup>6</sup> For everyone interested in belonging to the 'right' (i.e. richer) social circles, the card system effectively excluded poorer and lower-class people, as cards could only be exchanged between people rich enough to employ at least one servant. (When paying a formal call to somebody's home, one did not give a calling card directly to the lady of the house, but only to the servant who answered the front door).

The restriction of card etiquette to the more prosperous levels of society helps to explain why so many card cases are obviously luxury items, made of attractive (and often costly materials), and why their designs punctiliously followed changes in Victorian and Edwardian contemporary taste. However, card cases would not have been so beautiful and luxurious if their sole function was to hold visiting cards. As mere receptacles for cards, these cases were seen mostly by servants. Formal callers were routinely turned away at the front door by a servant using the established formula of words, 'Madam is not at home'.<sup>7</sup> The caller was then expected to give her card to the servant, who placed it on a silver salver or some other appropriate receptacle in the front hall.

This was not, however, the only function of a calling card case. Once the visitor had penetrated to the inner fastness of the drawing room, her card case had other purposes. Ladies showed off their cases to one another during formal calls, much as Georgian gentlemen brought out their snuff boxes. A well-chosen card case could advertise the visitor's social status, wealth, personal character, fashionable taste, literary interests, travel experiences, education, and patriotic political views. Given the scrutiny to which even visitors' calling cards were routinely subjected, card cases were a positive gold mine of useful information for hostesses.<sup>8</sup>

Card cases also eased social interaction during formal calls. Etiquette required that such calls be short, and that callers avoid serious conversation. Mrs. Beeton instructed ladies to linger no longer than fifteen or twenty minutes at most, to keep their bonnets on (to avoid giving the impression that they intended to stay longer), and to talk about some 'object' (she does not specify what).<sup>9</sup> According to etiquette, visitors held their calling card cases in their left, gloved hand upon entry into the drawing room. A beautiful case could thus function as a convenient and safe topic for conversation.

### **The development of calling card cases**

The practice of leaving social cards probably derives from the earlier practice of writing notes on the backs of playing cards, and was well-established among the British aristocracy and gentry by the late eighteenth

6. Calling cards reduced but did not eliminate the risk of embarrassing encounters (or non-encounters, i.e. being 'cut dead'). After the exchange of cards, there was still the minefield of introduction etiquette to be negotiated.

7. Mrs. Isabella Beeton, in her *Book of Household Management* (London: Samuel Beeton, 1861; facsimile edition, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968), at pp. 10-11, warned that the only courteous way to receive the form of words 'Not at home' was 'as being perfectly true'.

8. See *The Glass of Fashion: a universal handbook of social etiquette and home culture for ladies and gentlemen. By the lounge in society* (John Hogg, 1881), p. 60 (cited in Michael Curtin, *Propriety and Position: A Study of Victorian Manners* (Garland Publishing Inc., New York and London, 1987), , pp. 136 and 138, n. 24).

9. Isabella Beeton, *The Book of Household Management* (London, S.O. Beeton, 1861), pp. 10ff



Fig. 1 and 2: 'Concertina' card case in mother-of-pearl, abalone and silver. Shown closed (fig. 1), and open (fig. 2) to reveal interior divisions. Maker unknown.

Photograph by courtesy of Robert Kamnatnik Antiques, Toronto, Canada.

century.<sup>10</sup> Few earlier cases are known, as Georgian ladies normally carried cards in their étuis.<sup>11</sup> The earliest case found so far is a George III silver-gilt case, made by Thomas Whipman in about 1765, which bears the arms of the aristocratic Lyttleton Frankley family of Hampshire.<sup>12</sup>

The standardization of calling cards in nineteenth-century Britain led naturally to a standardization of the cases made to hold them. British calling cards usually measured three-and-a-half high by two inches wide, so most British card cases are therefore roughly three and three-quarters inches high by two and three-quarters inches wide. In the early Victorian era, card cases were routinely rectangular, with right-angled corners, but by the mid-1800s their outlines were more fluid and their edges shaped with curves.

Gentlemen's cards (and card cases) were smaller than those made for ladies, because they had to fit into a man's waistcoat or breast pocket. They were often curved to make this easier. In general, Victorian gentlemen operated socially largely outside the card system; they could lead public lives with fewer restrictions than ladies, who were responsible for preserving and extending the family's social circle by paying and receiving formal calls. Husbands rarely made formal calls without their wives, for example.

Hence the creation of ladies' 'concertina' card cases (Figs. 1 and 2), with interior divisions to hold the cards of different family members. When a married lady paid calls, she might leave behind cards for other family members. For example, after completing a formal call at the house of a married couple, a married woman normally left one of her own cards, but two of her husband's.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1820s, filigree silver or silver-gilt cases imported from China and Malta were popular, and are usually unmarked. The first silver cases incorporating enough silver to require hallmarks appeared in the 1830s.

10. Hogarth's *The Toilette* of c. 1743, from his series *Marriage à la Mode* (London, National Gallery) includes playing cards scribbled with messages referring to social encounters with the protagonist of the painting, Lady Squanderfield.

11. In 1757, the engraver J. Brooke of Fleet Street, London, advertised his services as an engraver of 'Visiting Tickets and Compliments Cards' (Edward Banfield, *Visiting Cards and Cases* (Baros Books, Wiltshire, p. 1).

12. Sold by Sotheby's New York in 2009.

13. Though absent, the husband was taken to have called up on the host as well as the hostess. As ladies did not normally call upon gentlemen, the visiting wife could only leave one card of her own – she was only calling upon her hostess, not upon her host.

In the 1820s and 1830s, English silversmiths imitated the earlier filigree silver or silver-gilt cases. The Birmingham firm of Taylor & Perry, founded by Joseph Taylor (d. 1827) and continued by his brother John Taylor, in partnership with John's brother-in-law John Perry, produced the faux filigree silver case shown here (Fig. 3). Taylor & Perry advertised themselves as makers of boxes. As well as producing hallmarked silver card cases, they were probably responsible for many unmarked and unattributed tortoiseshell and ivory card cases still extant.

One of the earliest recorded Birmingham silver card cases is a filigree case by Nathaniel Mills II (now in the collection of the Birmingham Assay Office). Between 1820 and 1858, Nathaniel Mills II and his sons were leading makers of such imitation-filigree cases. Other prominent silversmiths producing imitation-filigree cases included Samuel Pemberton and Edward Munslow (both Birmingham makers), and A.D. Loewenstark of London.

Two of Birmingham's leading card case-makers were Joseph Willmore (1773-1855) and Nathaniel Mills II (1811-1873). Typically, Willmore began his career as a maker of other small silver items (his grandfather, Thomas Willmore, was a maker of silver buckles in 1773-1801). In 1809 Joseph registered his mark as a 'snuff box maker' at the Birmingham Assay Office. He registered repeatedly there as a maker of different small silver objects, as he expanded his business. In 1815 he registered at the London Assay Office, and he established London showrooms to market his products directly to customers in the capital.

In due course Willmore became a leading maker of silver card cases, the owner of a courtyard in Birmingham which combined housing and workshops on a single building plot.<sup>14</sup> He eventually went into partnership with Yappe & Woodward of Birmingham. Willmore's apprentice George Unite became a successful maker of Birmingham card cases himself.

Willmore is noted for his superlative workmanship, particularly as a maker of card cases with repoussé patterns (for which the design was struck from silver placed over a



Fig. 3: Faux filigree silver card case made in 1830 by Taylor & Perry of Birmingham, in its presentation case. (Photograph by courtesy of Steppes Hill Farm Antiques, Ltd., England)

14. This would have resembled Inge Street, the only remaining Birmingham court of the same type (now a National Trust Property).



Fig. 4: Silver card case by Joseph Willmore of Birmingham, 1839-40, expressing the Victorian language of flowers. As well as patriotism (roses, thistles, and shamrocks), the case conveys messages of devotion (honeysuckle), coquetry (morning-glory), and perfect goodness (strawberries), among others. (Private collection)

Fig. 5: Silver 'castle-top' card case 'by' Nathaniel Mills II (d. 1843), made by his sons in 1845, using his name. The building shown is the Royal Exchange, London, which opened for trade in 1845. (Photograph by courtesy of Leopard Antiques: [www.leopardantiques.com](http://www.leopardantiques.com))

mold, and the details of the design were then finely chased up). Willmore used the same floral design repeatedly, striking it multiple times. For example, he produced a repoussé card case with an all-over floral design in 1838 (Fig. 4). He later reinterpreted the same design by piercing it for another card case, and then again used it as a pierced floral border for an 1843 'castle-top' card case featuring Windsor and Westminster.<sup>15</sup>

Nathaniel Mills II (1811-73), the most famous Birmingham 'toy man', was more prolific than Willmore, and as the leading maker of 'castle-top' card cases, is today the most sought-after British maker of silver card cases. Mills apprenticed with his father, Nathaniel Mills I, and only entered his own mark when he was already over 40. After he died in 1843, his business was carried on by his brothers; they continued to use his mark for a dozen years or so, ensuring that some Nathaniel Mills II cases are marked with date letters post-dating Nathaniel Mills II's own death).

Nathaniel Mills II's most famous card cases are his 'castle-tops'. 'Castle-top' cases are scenic card cases featuring topographical views of buildings. These have become the most expensive category of British-made silver card case, attracting collectors interested in architectural views, as well as collectors of card cases. Most 'castle-top' cases do not actually feature views of castles, but the name has stuck – possibly because Windsor Castle and Warwick Castle were among the more popular buildings depicted on scenic cases. They catered to the 1830s-1860s fashion for travel souvenirs, and the repoussé scenes they depict were often based on printed topographical views. The 'castle-top' shown was made by Nathaniel Mills II in Birmingham in 1845 (Fig. 5). It features the Royal Exchange, where trading began on the first day of that year. (The building had been opened by Queen Victoria in late 1844).

Today, prices of 'castle-tops' cases depend on the identity and rarity of the building depicted. An apparently unique 'castle-top' of the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London, made in 1845 by Nathaniel Mills II, fetched some eight thousand pounds at auction.<sup>16</sup>

15. Christie's 'Interiors'sale, South Kensington, March 12, 2013 (lot 97).

16. Dreweatts Auction House of Bloomsbury, 'Jewellery & Silver, Watches, Coins & Medals' sale of July 6, 2005, (lot 446). The estimate was £ 800-1,200. only.

Another Nathaniel Mills II 'castle-top', hallmarked 1852, depicting the Dublin International Industrial Exhibition of 1853, brought £ 8,500 at another sale by the same auction house.<sup>17</sup> Standard images of St. Paul's Cathedral, Windsor or Westminster Abbey are relatively inexpensive. Views of English cathedrals are common, but collectors usually pay higher prices for Oxford colleges, or for the less famous Scottish castles or country houses (e.g. Norton Hall near Sheffield). Also more sought-after are views of familiar buildings taken from unusual angles, or 'double-sided' cases, which have views on both sides.

'Castle-top' card cases were more than travel souvenirs: they signified their owners' personal interests, experiences and loyalties. Admirers of Sir Walter Scott or Byron might own 'castle-top' cases featuring Abbotsford, the Waverly Monument or Newstead Abbey. This example (Fig. 6) by Taylor & Perry combines a medallion honoring Byron on one side with a view of Byron's family home, Newstead Abbey, on the other, both images being set in pierced scrollwork. Royalists went for Windsor Castle or Osborne; history-lovers for Warwick Castle, while ladies who had visited London's Great Exhibition of 1851 might own a 'castle-top' of the Crystal Palace.

The solidity of many castle-top cases has contributed to their survival. The section of a castle-top case reproducing the view of a building was die-stamped from relatively thick silver laid over a mold, then set into the body of the case.<sup>18</sup> The bulkiness of die-stamped 'castle-top' card cases led to flatter designs in 1835-50, with engraved views of buildings.

For collectors, there are plenty of alternative kinds of silver card cases available. These may be less expensive than 'castle-tops', but can be very beautiful. There are silver or silver-gilt filigree cases from the 1820s and 1830s (as well as silver imitation-filigree cases). The Victorians produced engraved, pierced and repoussé patterns of all kinds, following contemporary design trends and popular interests. The flat surfaces of card cases lent themselves to reinterpretations of historic Gothic, Byzantine, or Moorish designs, figurative images, or nature-inspired patterns.



Fig. 6: Silver card case made in 1836 by Taylor & Perry of Birmingham, with a medallion of Byron on one side, and his family seat Newstead Abbey on the other. (Photograph by courtesy of Steppes Hill Farm Antiques, Ltd., England)

17. Dreweatts Auction House sale at Donnington Priory, 'Fine Silver and Objects of Vertu Sale', Feb. 26, 2014. (See Roland Arkell, 'King of the Castle sets record at £ 8500', *Antiques Trade Gazette*, March 5, 2014).

18. In 1850, a directory listed some 49 'die-casters' (mold makers) as working in Birmingham (David Mitchinson, *Calling, Cards & Cases*, p. 152).



The case shown (Fig. 7) was made in 1894 by the Birmingham firm of Hilliard and Thomason. The firm's mark, registered in 1861, appears on a variety of small silver items, including different types of boxes – nutmeg graters, vesta boxes, vinaigrettes, and cigar cases. This particular case features various fern species, reflecting the Victorian *pteridomania*, or craze for growing ferns, collecting specimens of ferns, and incorporating ferns as design elements in all kinds of objects. In the 1840s, engine-turning – long used routinely by watchmakers - became a popular novelty in card cases. Different engine-turned patterns were often combined on the same card case, making striking designs which caught the light as the case was handled. In Edinburgh, George Cunningham and James Nasmyth & Co. produced tartan designs in the 1840s – 1850s.<sup>19</sup>



One of the most magnificent examples of Victorian historicist card case design (still sometimes available on the market) is the 1852 'Renaissance' silver and parcel-gilt card case by Elkington & Co.. This case, probably inspired by Renaissance prints, was designed by George Stanton, an assistant to Elkington's chief designer. The original case was exhibited in 1855 at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, and then in 1862 at the International Exhibition in London.<sup>20</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, Aesthetic Movement designs appeared on card cases, which combined naturalistic plant elements, birds, Pre-Raphaelite maidens, and Europeanized refer-

Fig. 7: Silver card case made in 1894 by Hilliard & Thomason of Birmingham, featuring different species of ferns, reflecting the Victorian fascination with ferns. (Photograph by courtesy of Robert Bush Antiques Co., London, England)

Fig. 8: Aesthetic Movement card case of silver, parcel-gilt and enamel card case, monogrammed 'AJP' and made in 1880 by Frederick Elkington of Birmingham. (Photograph by courtesy of Louis Wine Ltd., Toronto)

ences to the Japanese art and design so popular at the time in Western Europe. Aesthetic Movement card cases often incorporate strong diagonal lines and geometric elements.

The example shown (Fig. 8) was made by Frederick Elkington of Birmingham in 1880 and retains traces of its original parcel-gilding in its recessed panels. Part-gilding of silver cases enabled owners to enjoy the visual qualities of a gold case, without the cost and impractical weight of solid gold. The process of electroplating – covering one metal by another – was patented by Elkington & Co. in 1840, supplanting the older, lethal method of mercury gilding. This case must originally, with its golden panels, engraved design, and enamel roundel, been richly colorful.

19. David Mitchinson, *Calling, Cards & Cases* (p. 156).

20. This card case can be viewed on the website of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London (museum accession no. 1302-1854).

The exterior features birds and butterflies, bamboo, a geometric diaper-patterned border, a diagonal floral band, and – most unusually – a small enamel roundel of a beautiful blue-eyed blonde in classical robes, with white flowers in her hair. The elaborate design is signed with a monogram, 'AJP'; further research into Elkington archives might identify the designer. The interior of the case is lined in dark blue-lilac moiré silk.

The placement of the opening catch on the left side of the case indicates that the case was not only intended to hold the owner's cards, but to display her up-to-the-latest-fashion Aesthetic Movement taste (and her wealth). The owner would have held the case in her left hand (in accordance with etiquette), while opening it with her right hand. Handling the case this way ensured that the design of the front of the case was presented to onlookers the right way up, i.e. with the enamel roundel at lower right.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, careful individual craftsmanship in card cases like this one gave way to mass-production of cheaper cases. Many silver cases were produced to standardized designs, with sections being pressed or die-stamped repeatedly from sheet silver). This explains why multiple examples of some card case designs are still to be found.<sup>21</sup>

In the Edwardian era, the trend in card cases was towards greater simplicity in appearance, along with novelty in design. It was the era of envelope-shaped card cases; of collapsing card cases; of cases ingeniously combining multiple functions (e.g. holding calling cards and postage stamps at the same time). Some silver cases featured abstract designs in which rippled or engine-turned surfaces caught the light attractively. Others were made to resemble materials other than silver, such as crocodile skin (Fig. 9). Some card cases were attached to a silver chain for easier carriage.

The cards-and-calls system, so firmly entrenched in upper Victorian society, was on the wane even before the First World War, however. At its height, paying and receiving calls, and leaving cards, had occupied so much time for Victorian



Fig. 9: Edwardian silver card case imitating crocodile skin made in 1903 by William Batty & Sons of Birmingham. (Photograph by courtesy of Daniel Bexfield Antiques, London, England: [www.bexfield.co.uk](http://www.bexfield.co.uk)).

21. David Mitchinson, *Calling, Cards & Cases*, p. 160

society ladies that many adopted the French 'at home' system, printing on their calling cards the day and time when they could reliably be found 'at home' to their circle.

For Edwardian ladies, the system of formal calls and leaving cards grew steadily less important. Advances in the education of women and in employment opportunities open to them; the opening of respectable restaurants and clubs as places which could be visited by ladies (previously restricted to dining at one another's houses), and the advent of bicycles and automobiles meant that Edwardian ladies could leave home more often, and had more activities open to them when they did. The invention of the telephone reduced the need to pay calls in order to glean or convey news.

Above all, in the early 1900s the 'servant problem' reared its head. The attraction of alternative forms of employment reduced the supply of domestic servants, so an increasing number of ladies now had to answer their own front doors. Since it remained improper for a caller to present her social card to the lady of the house, calling cards (and their cases) were less and less useful.

Edwardian ladies still paid formal calls and left calling cards, but the system was no longer sacrosanct. In Edith Nesbit's *The Railway Children* (London, 1906), initially published as a serial in 1905, the author openly targeted formal calls in a book intended for middle- and upper-middle-class children:

'Mother did not spend all her time in paying dull calls  
to dull ladies, and sitting dully at home waiting for dull  
ladies to pay calls on her.'<sup>22</sup>

Such a sentence, unthinkable in the 1860s, indicates that though the etiquette of formal calls remained only too familiar in 1905 to Nesbit's young readers, it was no longer socially binding. Indeed, it might even be mocked.

The twentieth-century decline in paying formal social calls was inevitably accompanied by a corresponding decline in the production of card cases. The advent of WWI further depleted the ranks of domestic servants, and the huge number of war casualties led to an understandable reluctance to make or receive condolence calls (formerly a routine social requirement). Condolence calls became simply too depressing for all concerned.

After World War One, business cards – the modern equivalent of the eighteenth-century trade card - began to supplant calling cards. Business cards had long co-existed with calling or visiting cards, but Victorians and Edwardians would have considered it rude to present one's business card in a social context. This changed after the Second World War. While some calling card cases were made in Art Deco styles in the 1930s, and references to leaving social cards still appeared in contemporary literature, social cards were no longer widely used after the war. People increasingly considered their business or profession to be a mark of their social status.

22. E. Nesbit, *The Railway Children* (London, 1906), 3d. edition, p. 2.

23. David Mitchinson, *Calling, Cards & Cases*, p. 6.

Today, many people rely on business cards for business and social purposes alike. Accordingly, searching the Internet under the term 'card case' is likely to produce websites of firms offering to produce cases for business cards. The social calling card case has become a historic artifact. Though some collectors use antique silver card cases to hold business cards, for most the appeal of an antique silver card case is aesthetic rather than practical. Using a Victorian or Edwardian silver card case as a business card holder is unadvisable, as the accompanying wear and tear is hard on fine silver.

Several British museums hold large collections of calling card cases, but currently images of these are not widely available online. The Mrs. French Collection of some 936 card cases is held at the Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston. (At the time of writing, the Museum did not display these on its website). Other British museums or cultural trusts with good collections include the Burton Art Gallery & Museum, Bideford, the Wolverhampton Art Gallery & Museum, and the Hampshire Cultural Trust. In Canada, the Glenbow Museum and Art Gallery of Calgary has a fine collection of card cases, but my online search of its collections (via the museum website) did not produce any mention of card cases.

Until recently, there were few books about card cases. The standard reference works were Edwin Banfield's *Visiting Cards and Cases* (Baros Books, Wiltshire, 1989), and Noel Riley's *Antique Pocket Guides: Visiting Card Cases* (Guildford, Lutterwood Press, Guildford, 1983). During the years that card cases remained inexpensive, however, some people put together outstanding collections, and recently some of these collectors have published excellent books. Scholarly and enjoyable, these new publications combine discussion of the social practices which led to the development of card cases, with information about the design, materials, makers and techniques of the cases themselves. Collectors, social historians, and anyone who enjoys looking at beautiful objects, will find these books well worth reading, as they are superbly illustrated.

The most outstanding recent publication is undoubtedly David Mitchinson's *Calling, Cards & Cases* (Patrick Cramer, Geneva, 2012). Mitchinson, formerly the Head of Collections and Exhibitions at the Henry Moore Foundation, is the author of major scholarly works on Moore. In *Calling, Cards & Cases*, he writes extensively about the practice of paying and receiving calls, and calling cards etiquette, calling or visiting cards themselves (British, continental European, and American), and the cases made to contain them. The text is fascinating, and the illustrations – which include calling cards from various countries, as well as card cases – are exemplary.

Wladimir Herman's *Collecting Visiting Card Cases* (Copenhagen, Sølerød Museum, 2005) is a smaller and more portable book. Published to accompany an exhibition of the author's own collection at the Sølerød Museum, it is written in English, with brief summaries in Danish and German. It features a useful bibliography and a multilingual list of relevant terms: collectors hunting for card cases on the Internet or at antique markets in continental Europe can now explain what they're looking for in English, German, French or Danish.

As calling card cases are small and easily shipped, the Internet is a tremendous boon to card case collectors. Regardless of one's place of residence, it is possible to make a fine collection. One can easily follow international auction results, and buy or sell cases (at auction, directly from silver dealers, or on Ebay and similar sites). For those on 'Twitter', the online 'Card Case Forum' (@cardcaseforum) is an ongoing international conversation about subjects of interest to card case collectors and enthusiasts.



In his book *Calling, Cards & Cases*, David Mitchinson explained that his 'addiction' to researching the subject of card cases began while he was still a student, prompted by a passion for collecting and an interest in social history. Calling card cases had advantages as objects to study and collect:

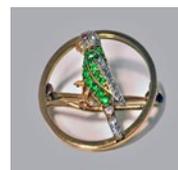
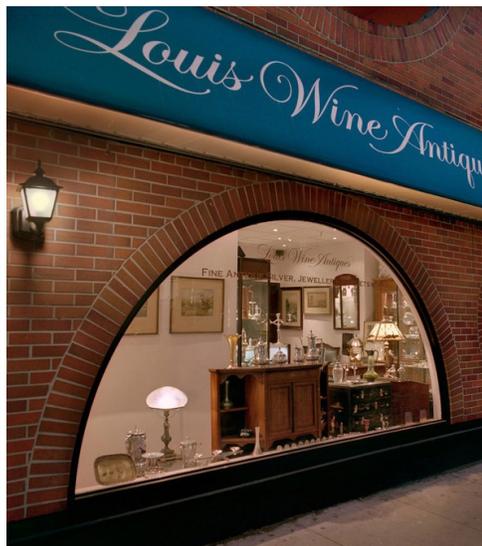
'Small enough to be easily collectable, taking up little space and available in many attractive materials, they appeared as neglected treasures whose time and usefulness had passed.'<sup>23</sup>

No longer 'neglected', Victorian and Edwardian silver card cases are now increasingly collectible, and the finest examples attract much competition among collectors. Card cases in general, and silver card cases in particular, remain conveniently sized, enormously varied, and beautiful relics of a fascinating social and design history.

**Anne Thackray**, art historian, holds an M.A. in Victorian history from the University of Toronto, and taught Victorian social history at the Open University for many years. She collects Victorian silver card cases, and inherited (accurate) advice on the etiquette of paying calls from her English Victorian grandmother.'

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