

INTRODUCTION

When one gets something for nothing, that something is usually at the mercy of a whim!

For many decades smokers found cards in their packets of cigarettes. It is hard to imagine anything exposed to greater caprice, yet it is equally hard to visualise a more insinuating form of publicity.

Of course, it is commercial advertising, not brazen, perhaps, but just a quiet whisper. The sponsors, wise in their ways, linked each set, like a serial story, and the outcome is that cards, in quantities great and small, can be found in almost every home up and down the land.

The supercilious personage who tossed his cards away to frolic in the breeze is known to all, and the youngster, too—grimy usually, like the sparrow he resembles—seeking “eny sigrette pickshurs.” Both exterminated cards, and both are mixed blessings to a hobby which has come to be known as Cartophilily.

The sponsors of cards knew well that neither of these two types represented an accurate cross section of the community, and even the “superior” were inveigled with film star portraits, football and cricket celebrities, and the like.

In fact, so diverse were the subjects touched upon that only the hardened could resist, and they are known to take more than one look surreptitiously.

Since collecting cigarette pictures is no longer considered a sign that a man or woman should be put under restraint, and since the hobby has taken a place beside stamp-collecting, a brief outline may be interesting, and, as cigarettes, cards and card collecting are all intertwined, the outline must need include them all.

Indulgence is asked should any copyright have been inadvertently included without permission. Sources are quoted as an acknowledgment wherever this appeared necessary.

ERIC GURD

July, 1942.

CHAPTER I

Have a Cigarette?

There is magic in that phrase. The cigarette has become an instrument of human intercourse, and it plays a role greater than reformers ever dreamed of.

As history's pages are turned back we find cigarettes are no new thing. The cliff dwellers of New Mexico used them, and the Indians seen by those who sailed with Columbus in 1492 were smoking tobacco leaves rolled in corn-shucks. Maybe smoking in this rude form preceded the pipe. That is not definitely known.

How the paper cylinder came into use can be told in a pleasing story. The scene is Acre: the time, Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign (1799). The big pipe used by Suleiman Bey's artillerymen was *hors de combat*, and the prospect of a smoke remote. A genius, he could be no less, rolled some tobacco in a piece of fine India paper—generally employed for gunpowder spills—and the first “roll-your-own” cigarette was born. We are told many of the capitals of Europe caught the idea, but nowhere did the habit spread as in Russia.

Casanova, in his memoirs, presents a different picture. He gives an early definition of a cigarette: “The good fellow was carelessly puffing at his cigarette of Brazilian tobacco wrapped in a little paper tube, from which he blew great clouds of smoke with evident enjoyment.” This was before 1798, and helps us to understand the Spaniard's devotion and the gay inconsequent nature which says: “A paper cigarette, a glass of fresh water, and the kiss of a pretty girl will sustain a man for a day without eating.”

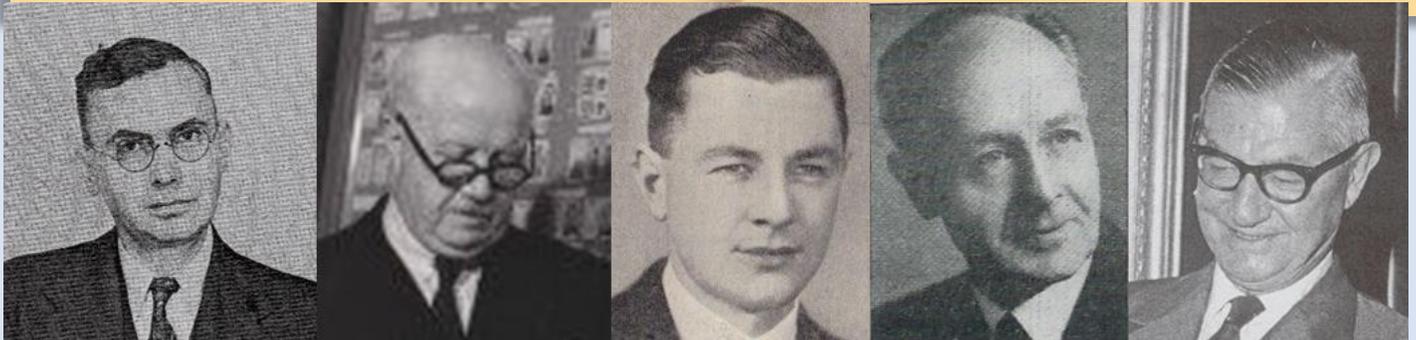
English 19th century literature mentions “roll-your-own” cigarettes. Charles Dickens, in “Little Dorrit,” published in 1855, makes Monsieur Rigald, “roll his tobacco into cigarettes by aid of little squares of paper,” and R. L. Stevenson in “Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes,” “sat upright to make a cigarette.” Oscar Wilde in “The Picture of Dorian Gray,” writes: “A cigarette is the perfect type of a perfect pleasure.” Barrie and Kipling both drew charming pictures in praise of smoking, but the writer who christened a cigarette “a golden network of imprisoned dreams” is, alas, anonymous.

The Smoke of Battle

The blunders of the Crimea campaign (1854-1856) produced two things which can only be regarded as good: the noble profession pioneered by “The Lady of the Lamp,” Florence Nightingale, and the cult of cigarette smoking, caught from the Russians, and spread by soldiers serving there.

According to *Tobacco*, 1st August, 1941, one enthusiast present in the Crimea scented a living by commercialising ready rolled cigarettes, and, on his return to civilian life laid firm foundations for the enormous industry we know to-day.

5



Burdick, Bagnall, Cherry, Gurd and Wharton-Tigar with Gurd's booklet in background. Images from the CCB and the Cartophilic Society of Great Britain

Burdick and his British counterparts

By George Vrechek with contributions from Tim Thornham

“When one gets something for nothing, that something is usually at the mercy of a whim! For many decades, smokers found cards in their packets of cigarettes. It is hard to imagine anything exposed to greater caprice, yet it is equally as hard to visualise a more insinuating form of publicity. Of course, it is commercial advertising, not brazen



perhaps, but just a quiet whisper. The sponsors, wise in their ways, linked each set, like a serial story, and the outcome is that cards, in quantities great and small, can be found in almost every home up and down the land.”

So reads the introduction to a yellowed publication titled – Cigarette Cards – An Outline. The Father of Card Collecting, Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963), could certainly write with some flair, and he was the expert on such matters.

But wait, why would Burdick misspell visualize as visualise? I guess no one is perfect. Let’s read on.

“The supercilious personage who tossed away his cards to frolic in the breeze is known to all....” Hold it. “Supercilious personage” does not sound like our founding card-father Burdick, and “up and down the land” doesn’t sound like a description of the U.S. either come to think of it.

The author is not Burdick, but Eric Gurd (1894-1986) who published his booklet in Great Britain in 1942, which explains how the “s” got into “visualise.”

Thornham notices eight Burdick articles from 1950

The Wrapper subscriber Tim Thornham, from Beaconsfield, England, is a hobby history enthusiast and writes for the CSGB’s magazine now known as *Card World*. His focus, like Burdick’s, is primarily on the non-sports cards which represents the bulk of early card issues. Thornham provided me information on the British side of this story.



Cigarette Cards – An Outline, Tim Thornham with Hobbies and a CCB, and Burdick’s 1950 Hobbies article, photos by Thornham

Thornham recently brought to my attention eight Burdick articles in *Hobbies* magazine in 1950. I had read all of Burdick’s prior articles in *Hobbies* from the first in December 1935 to June 1938 but missed the 1950 articles. Burdick’s 1950 series in *Hobbies* didn’t really cover new ground but had answers to collector inquiries and included his comment, “The hobby is very well developed in England, being headed by The Cartophilic Society of Great Britain and catered to by several full time dealers, local clubs, and magazines.”

Thornham posted on the Vintage Non-sports Forum, “The 1950 series of articles is Burdick's (now much better informed) view of the whole genre of card collecting. He calls it ‘An Outline of American Cards,’ the title very likely derived from the Eric Gurd publication ‘Cigarette Cards - An Outline’ from 1942.”



Cards from Industries of States N117, Yacht Club Colors N289, Naval Uniforms N308 and Wings of Birds of Plumage N312 made smokers experts on the subjects.

Pretty girls

Thornham provided a copy of Gurd's 1942 Outline which discusses the early history of cigarette cards depicting mostly “pretty girls.” Note that card set titles can be misleading. Industries of States (N117), Yacht Club Colors (N289), Naval Uniforms (N308), Wings of Birds of Plumage (N312), National Types (N388) and Playing Cards (N457), for example, are all basically pretty girl cards.

Catalogers even got into separating the pretty girl cards based on some scale of cheesiness. Gurd wrote, “We can detect the mood of the age. Peeping through ornate lettering were the faces of ‘Pretty Girls.’ Sex raised its head and pictures of balloon-bosomed beauties became the order of the day. Smoking and sex – even brand names conform - here are some at random: Mes Passions, Loves Delight, Bit o’ Fluff, My Sweetheart, Kiss-me-Quick.” Gurd’s prose wasn’t dry.

Gurd also stated in a paragraph titled “The Voyage was from England,” that “it would seem” that cigarette cards started in England and appeared in the U.S. slightly later. Both Gurd and Burdick wrote favorably about early lithography card printing – from Germany.

Who’s on first?

Burdick and other U.S. collectors frequently wrote about the first cigarette cards. Burdick’s conclusion in the 1930s was that no one knew for sure where the first such card came from or exactly when.

Was Burdick’s nose slightly out of joint in 1950 responding to Gurd’s England-first position? While I recalled a few Burdick comments about the hobby in Britain, I didn’t remember any mention of Gurd or any disagreements. After re-reading Burdick’s writings, I found I was wrong about the lack of disagreements.

Now there have been spats at times between Britain and the U.S. like the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812 and the use of the word “football” to describe two different sports, but on the whole any rivalry has been friendly and worthy of golf claps during Ryder Cup matches.

Let’s look at some of the old publications in the U.S. and Britain to see how collectors got along.



LCCCo catalogues 1934 through 1938, photo Tim Thornham

A very brief British history

According to Thornham, Colonel Charles Lane Bagnall (1884-1974) founded the London Cigarette Card Company (LCCCo) in 1931, with price lists issued regularly and enlarged each year. In October 1933, LCCCo started a card collecting magazine, *Cigarette Card News*, which is still running today, the longest running card collecting magazine in the world.

In 1935, the Cameric Cigarette Card Club, was founded by Arthur Eric Cherry. This was the first collectors club in the UK and ran successfully right through to 1964, when it merged with the Cartophilic Society of Great Britain. Unfortunately, Cherry didn’t live to see the success of the club he founded, dying in Singapore as a prisoner in World War II.

The Cartophilic Society of Great Britain (CSGB) first met in 1938. Gurd and Edward Wharton-Tigar (1912-1995), British collector (and sometime spy), attended the 1938 meeting. Wharton-Tigar eventually donated his two million tobacco cards to the British Museum.

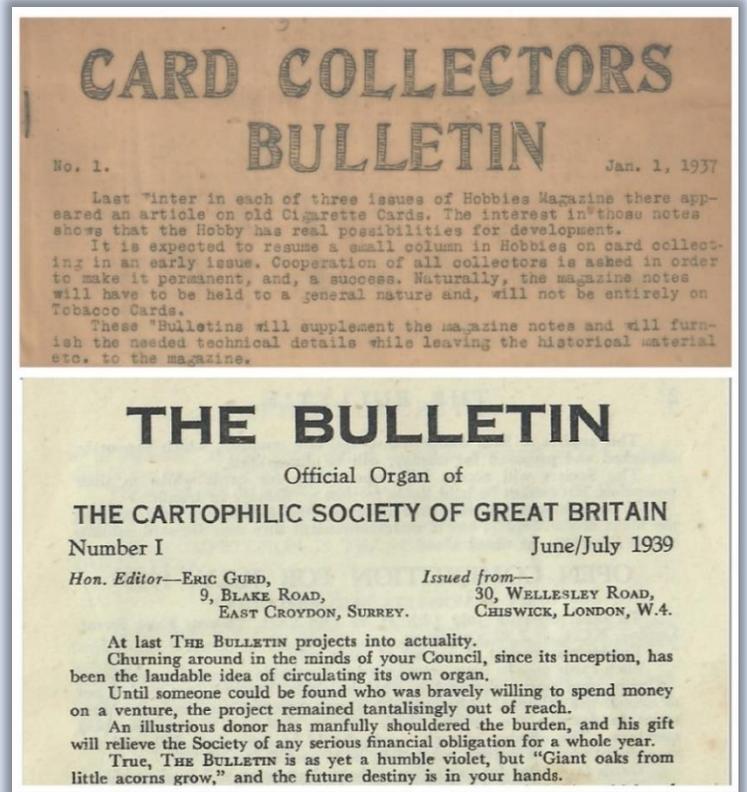
Gurd was elected to the society council and took over responsibility for research and reference books. He was the editor of their early magazine, *The Bulletin*, first issued in June 1939, later becoming *Cartophilic World* and which runs to the present day, now as *Card World*. Burdick started his *Card Collectors Bulletin* in January 1937.

Hobbies 1932

December 1932 *Hobbies* had an article from an unidentified British commentator (perhaps Bagnall): “There has been such a great increase in the popularity of collecting cigarette cards says a London dealer, that this new hobby seems very likely to be widespread. Cigarette cards were first introduced into this country (England) as stiffeners in the paper packets in vogue nearly forty years ago (1892), In America, however, cards with stamps attached were issued as early as 1885.”

Burdick's first comment on the British

In Burdick's first published article in the December 1935 *Hobbies*, he demonstrated that he had done his homework in a "brief outline" exploring the history of tobacco cards in the U.S. and introducing his classification system. He made the first of many references over the years about card collecting in Britain, frequently with a slight dig. He wrote, "I understand the cards were adopted by European tobacco firms at an early date and are still issued there.... I have never collected the foreign cards but understand the hobby is quite flourishing in England. I have seen the catalog and price list put out by one firm in that country. It lists hundreds of beautiful sets. The American field, however, is large enough for one person and the cards have an added esteem which makes them, in my opinion, much more desirable than the foreign issues."



Burdick's CCB top and the CSGB's Bulletin below

Burdick on his scope of work

In his September 1938 *Card Collectors Bulletin*, Burdick wrote, "While foreign items are not contemplated for this listing (his 1939 catalog), it is possible, because of their similarity, that in any future re-listing Canadian sets will be grouped together and expanded." He pointed out that cards distributed in Canada may have originated in Canada, England or the U.S. Burdick's 1939 catalog was titled *The United States Card Collectors Catalog*, but in 1946 the title became *The American Card Catalog* to include North and South American issues. However, he wasn't going to venture across the ocean.

Burdick and the last word

In the August 1939 now *Card Collector's Bulletin*, Burdick mentioned the English book "Cigarette Cards and how to collect them" by I.O. Evans was recently brought to his attention. Burdick described it as a "fine piece of work," but adds "American collectors, however, will find little information on U.S. cards not in the (just issued Burdick) catalog and that little, we suspect, is largely erroneous." Hmm.

In the February 1940 *CCB*, Burdick wrote, "From the Bulletin of the Cartographic (*sic*) Society of Great Britain we learn that new issues of cigarette cards alone are averaging 80 sets per year. (That's the third "Bulletin" – Who started it? Our first one is dated January 1, 1937." Burdick displayed a penchant, which I had missed, for getting in the last word.

Thornham reports, "When the USA 1939 catalog came out, a mini-article was posted by Gurd in *The Bulletin* (#4 from 1939). It seems that the British card hobbyists knew quite a bit about

what was going on in the US, whilst Burdick was still mostly on his own in the late 1930s, which makes his efforts even the more remarkable.”

New subscriber Wright coughs up 30 cents

The June 1940 *CCB* listed new subscriber W.M. Wright of London, interested in buying, selling and exchanging British and American cigarette cards. William Wright seemed to be the first mentioned subscriber outside the U.S. Charles Bray and John B. Wagner also coughed up the 30 cents that month to be subscribers – for the year.

Thornham tells me that William Wright was a prominent figure in the early hobby and was president of the CSGB in 1964 when the Cameric Club merged with CSGB. Wright’s son, Peter, was also an editor of the CSGB magazine for many years. When Peter Wright died, his wife Margaret contacted Thornham, who arranged a memorable trip to Edinburgh to meet her, hear more about the Wright hobby dynasty and acquire Peter Wright’s magazine collection.

Just say something nice

The August 1940 *CCB* mentioned Burdick just getting Bagnall’s Standard Cigarette Card Catalog which provided a few additions to his listings, but other British-American issues “we consider to be almost purely foreign issues, and so not within the scope of the U.S. Catalog.”

In the October 1940 *CCB*, subscriber A.O. Philipp (“I think the British have made a fetish of this complete set thing”) and Burdick took turns commenting that British collectors could easily and cheaply buy complete sets, whereas American collectors had to put sets together with significant effort. Now boys, behave!

In the February 1943 *CCB* Burdick commented on an address by Colonel Bagnall. Bagnall discussed card prices and set completion, and Burdick took no great issue, for once, with the conclusions. The Colonel must not have been involved in the capture of Tripoli or the bombing of Berlin which likely bumped his important address from the headlines of the day.

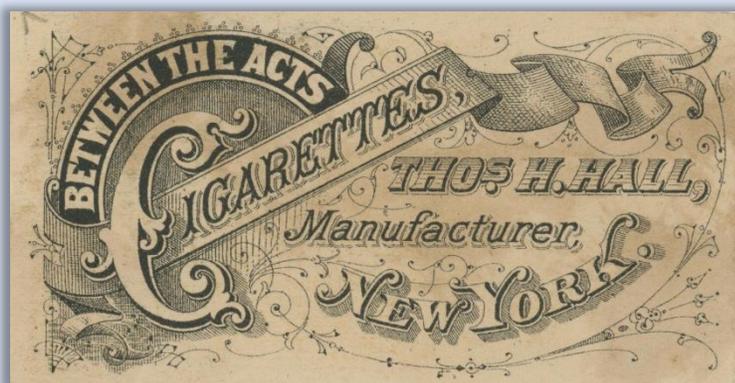
The first tobacco card sticking point

In June 1943, Burdick took issue with *The Cigarette Card News* comment (by Gurd) that Duke produced the first cards for the London market in 1881, feeling that it was more like 1888. Burdick liked his 1886 date for the first tobacco card issue in the U.S. by Hall. In February 1944, Burdick criticized *The Cartophilic World* for not including insert cards other than tobacco cards, “If a Society, firm or individual desires to restrict themselves to one type of card, that’s their business, but they are overlooking a lot of good things – whether they know it or not. A lot of these issues are older than many tobacco issues and their seniority alone merits their consideration.”

In the April 1947 *CCB*, Burdick’s nose was out of joint again. Those pesky Brits seemed to think that they issued the first cards before 1878! Burdick: “During this past year, the English press has contained numerous items pertaining to the earliest cigarette card issues. Some are more or less accurate rehash.... (However), here we find unqualified statements that British cigarette cards were issued before 1878 and such things that are easier to say than to prove. Even the more research-minded writers seem to allow conjecture to figure too strongly in their conclusions at times.”

Per Forbes and Mitchell's 1999 "American Tobacco Cards," the presidential and vice presidential candidates in the N347 Hall set "likely" pointed to 1880 as the earliest cigarette card insert since the candidates (Garfield/Arthur versus Hancock/English) were running in the 1880 election. Cabinets and trade cards prior to 1880 had also emerged, but they wouldn't get far in this catalogers' battle to find the first tobacco insert cards.

The question of the oldest card is still being actively researched. Thornham has evidence that the answer is Hall's N342 cards (pictured here) were first issued in the U.S. as early as November 1877 and not in 1886 as Burdick first thought. But that's a story for another day.



Thos H. Hall of New York City featured actors and actresses in current plays, which date back to 1877.

Why the friction?

One only wonders what the British card catalogers had to say privately about Burdick's compulsion of getting-in-the-last-word in his CCBs. Burdick likely put in more effort than anyone else in exploring the history of cards issued in the U.S. where collectors and subscribers applauded his efforts. He could be a bit protective when commenting about others when their independent research came to conclusions other than his own. However, I don't think he was responding to Gurd's research work with his 1950s *Hobbies* articles. He was likely writing to drum up some new U.S. card collectors and to continue his free ads for the *Card Collectors Bulletin* in *Hobbies* in exchange for his articles.

Wharton-Tigar wrote a letter to Troy Kirk in 1990 stating that he had once taken Burdick and Bray to a World Series game in New York, and that he knew Burdick quite well. My reaction is that Burdick might have been less critical in his comments about what was going on in Britain had he the opportunity to visit and to go to a football game or two there with his counterparts...or even a soccer game - as Burdick might write to get in the last word.

George Vrechek can be contacted at: vrechek@ameritech.net

Tim Thornham can be contacted at: tim.thornham@btinternet.com, or visit the Vintage Non-sports Forum (<https://forum.vintagenonsports.com>) to read his posts, or subscribe to the CSGB to read Tim's recent articles on hobby history (go to www.card-world.co.uk).

This article appeared in The Wrapper #327, May 15-July 7, 2020. Our thanks to The Wrapper for allowing us to post on the OBC site.