

Belgian Postal Stationery

By
Chris Howe

The standard reference work for Belgian Postal Stationery is “Les Entiers Postaux de Belgique” published by the Postal Stationery Society of Belgium with the support of Pro-Post, available in French or Dutch.

In order to fully understand the complexity of Belgian Postal Stationery it is necessary to understand the country’s history. Belgium is a relatively new country on the European scene with most of modern Belgium forming part of the Southern Netherlands, a part of the Low Countries or “Pays-Bas”. The Southern Netherlands were controlled in turn by Spain (Spanish Netherlands 1579–1713) and then Austria (Austrian Netherlands 1713–94) before being captured by the French in 1794 and annexed to France. The Netherlands (Holland) overthrew French rule in 1813 and became known as the “United Provinces of the Netherlands”. After the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, the Congress of Vienna created the “United Kingdom of the Netherlands” for the House of Orange-Nassau by combining the United Provinces of the Netherlands with the former Austrian Netherlands. The Dutch Monarchy was unpopular with the Catholic French speaking majority in the South and there was economic disparity with trade and industry being centred in the Flemish speaking North. In August 1830 the Belgian Revolution broke out instigated by French speaking intellectuals and the Catholic clergy supported by French troops. The European powers alarmed by this turn of events rejected calls for a Republic and wary of French designs vetoed a French candidate as King in favour of Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, the uncle by marriage of Queen Victoria. Leopold was inaugurated as King on 21st July 1831.

Under the monarchy Belgium rapidly industrialised and communications expanded rapidly.

On May 5, 1835 the first railway in continental Europe opened between Brussels and Mechelen. By 1870, the Belgian state owned 863 km of rail lines, while the private enterprises owned 2,231 km.

The first adhesive postage stamps were issued on 1st July 1849.

The first telegraph line, running along the railway line from Brussels to Antwerp, was opened privately in 1846. In 1850 telegraph service provided by the state expanded over the next two years to include the country’s main towns and links with adjoining countries.

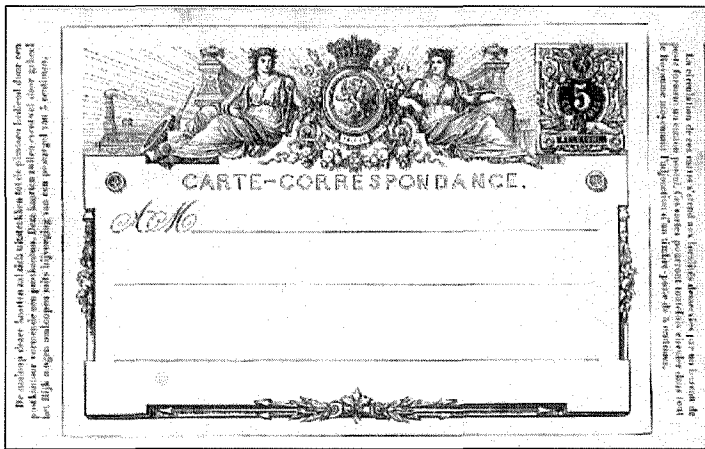
The first Belgian telephone services began to operate privately in 1879.

Postage stamps did not indicate the country of origin until 1869 and then in French only. The Flemish language had to wait until 1893. Language became an

increasingly complex factor in postal stationery.

French was originally the single official language adopted by the ruling elite but it progressively lost its overall importance as Flemish, since aligned with Dutch, became recognized as well. This recognition became official in 1898 and in 1967 a Dutch version of the Constitution was legally accepted. Belgium is now a federal state with the French speaking part reportedly being heavily subsidised by the Dutch speaking one.

Belgium employs, or has employed, the usual variety of postal stationery with the exception of paper wrappers. Postal stationery cards are the most complex element and form the subject of this article.

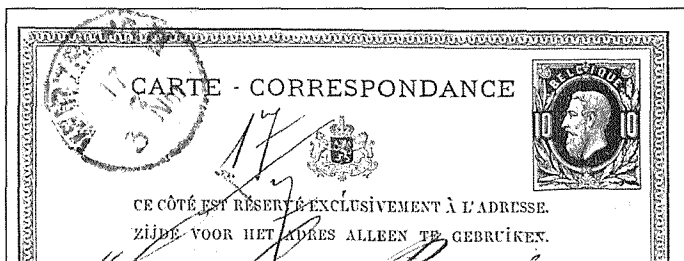


The First item of postal stationery issued on 1st January 1871 was a "CORRESPONDANCE CARD" that was only valid within the postal area where posted. Instructions to this effect were printed on the edges of the card. It could be upgraded to the whole kingdom by the addition of a 5-centime adhesive postage stamp. The example illustrated is a reprint, scarcer than the original and distinguished by the absence of horizontal line between the 2nd and 3rd address lines. The design of the imprint stamp depicting a lion lying down and facing the viewer "couchét gardant" is the same as the low value definitive postage stamps of the time, established a trend that continued until 1985 where a lion, either alone or within the state arms, was employed on internal postal stationery items.

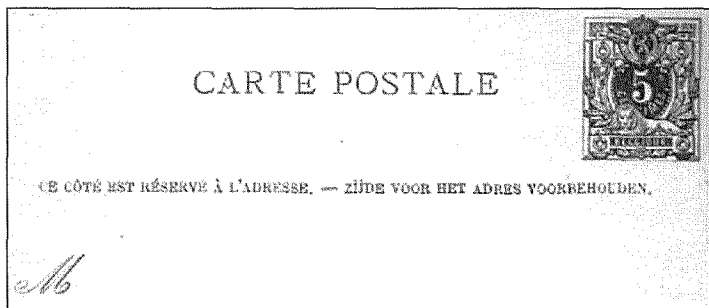
A year later the validity of the 5-centime card was extended to the whole of Belgium. Existing stocks were cut down from 140 mm wide to 120 mm to remove the instructions. New printings were 120 mm wide. The cut down cards can usually be distinguished from the new printings by remnants of the vertical lines separating the instructions from the rest of the card.



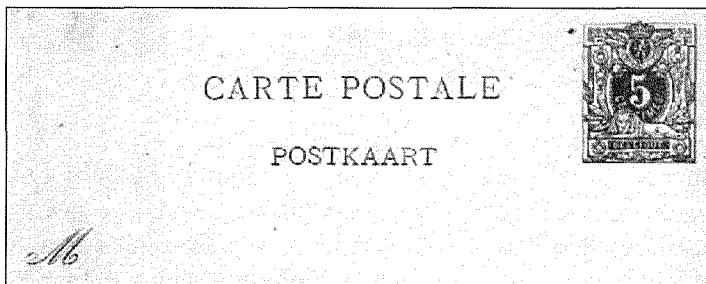
On 1st January 1873 a much simpler design of “CORRESPONDANCE CARD” was issued with the lion couchét gardant in rose lilac and also a similar card with a reply-paid card attached. The issue of outward/reply-paid cards continued until 1st June 1972. Unlike the simple post card that remained in the French language the nature of the outward/reply-paid pair was identified in both French RÉSPONSE PAYÉE and Flemish ANTWOORD BETAALD with just RÉSPONSE – ANTWOORD on the reply part.



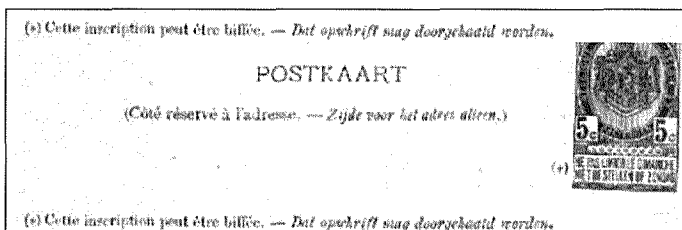
On 1st July 1875 Belgium joined the “General Postal Union”, as a result of the Treaty of Berne signed on 9th October 1874. This led directly to the issue of a 10-centimes “CORRESPONDANCE CARD” specifically for use to foreign destinations employing the effigy in black of King Leopold II looking to the left as the imprint stamp. The corresponding adhesive postage stamp issued in 1869 was in green.



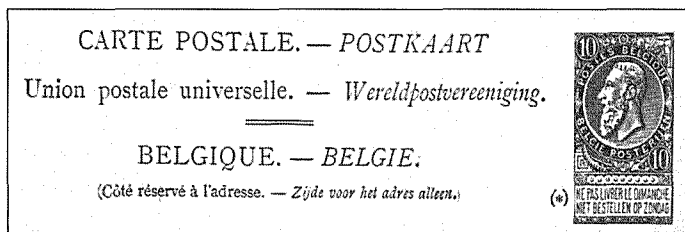
In 1879 the term “CORRESPONDANCE CARD” was replaced with “CARTE POSTALE” i.e. “Postcard” still using the lion couchét gardant in green although the postage stamp was in ochre.



In 1884 the legend became bi-lingual “CARTE POSTALE” above with “POSTKAART” below in smaller font. The imprint stamp remained in French only. The colour of the imprint stamp was now the same as the corresponding postage stamp probably to comply with UPU rules?

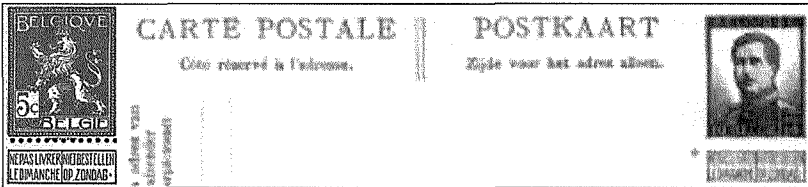
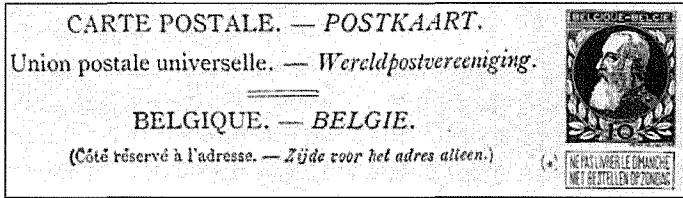


In 1887 the size of the cards was increased from 123 mm x 88 mm to 140 mm x 90 mm. This type of imprint stamp is known as “Armoiries” the coat of arms of Belgium. It was employed for two adhesive postage stamp issues one in 1893 and the other in 1907. The instruction at the bottom of the card relates to Sunday delivery.

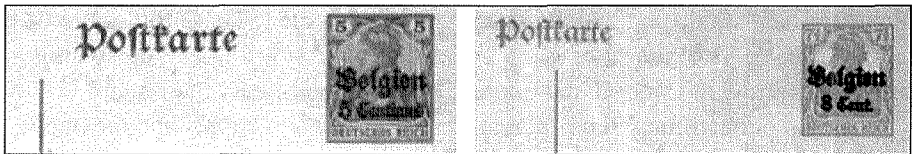


In June 1893, under the strong influence of the Catholic church, adhesive stamps were issued with a detachable label or “bandelette” with the bi-lingual legend “NE PAS LIVRER LE DIMANCHE NIET BESTELLEN OP ZONDAG” “DO

NOT DELIVER ON SUNDAY". In December 1893 the postal stationery series followed suit. Instructions on the bottom of the card were initially linked to the bandelette by an asterisk, then by (2) and then back to the asterisk as the number of instructions on the card changed. The design of the imprint stamp for the foreign mail rate depicts King Leopold II in what is known as the "Fine barbe" issue, first applied to postage stamps in 1893. This image was superceded in 1905 by what is known as the "Grosse barbe".

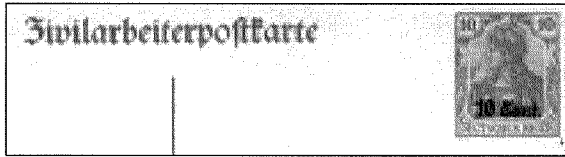


The death of King Leopold II led to the accession of his nephew as King Albert 1st in 1909. Stamps and corresponding postal stationery with a portrait of the new king appeared in 1912 and were known as the Pellens issue after the designer Edward Pellens whose name is included in the design of some of the stamps. The issue is a little complicated as the portrait appears in two sizes on the 10-centimes card and also on another without Pellens name. The internal 5-centimes card employs a rampant lion for the imprint stamp.



The Germans were well prepared for war and on 1st October 1914 "Germania" postcards overprinted "BELGIEN" and with the value in "CENTIMES" were issued. The Germans imposed rigid control over postal services and all mail was censored. During the invasion and immediate aftermath troops looted post offices and Belgian post cards were posted home as souvenirs and widely used by philatelists in the German forces. In 1916 the value overprint was modified to read

“CENT”. It has been suggested that this was an attempt to carry favour with the Flemish community. Towards the end of the year the internal postcard rate was increased to 8 centimes.

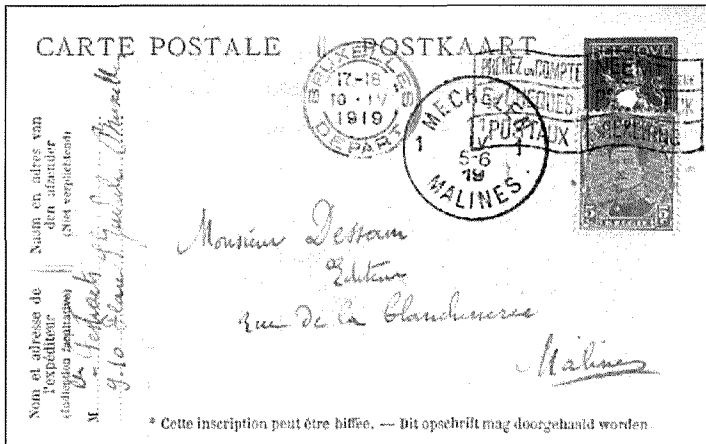


In areas immediately behind the front line known as the “etapes” or “staging” zone the civil population was administered by the military and mail was limited to open envelopes and postcards. It has been suggested that feldpost staff were unhappy handling “foreign” mail and on 1st December 1916 the legend “BELGIEN” was removed from both stationery and adhesive stamps. An alternative theory is that the items marked with “CENT” alone were acceptable in adjacent occupied areas of France.



On 13th October 1914, as a result of the German invasion of Belgium, the Belgian Government was evacuated by sea and arrived at Le Havre in France that same evening. They were accommodated at the Hotel de Sainte Adresse, in a suburb of Le Havre and on the 18th October a Belgian Post Office was opened within the French Post Office, also within the Hotel, using a loaned French date stamp. Mail originating at Le Havre and within un-occupied areas of Belgium used existing Belgian stamps and postal stationery until they were demonetarised on the 15th October 1915 on which date new stamps and postal stationery were issued. These did not have the “Sunday label”. The image of King Albert employed is rather uninspiring and different printings in London and one in Haarlem complicate the issue.

At the end of hostilities all postal materials were in short supply and the free issue of postal stationery demonetarised in 1915 was authorised to be used with a 5-cent adhesive postage stamp. [The “Centimes” appeared on some imprint stamps until 1893, subsequent issues employed “C” or no currency indication at all; so for the rest of this article the English version is used.] The demonetarised item generally, but not invariably, had a hole punched through the imprint stamp. In June 1919 a 5-cent card similar to that demonetarised was issued. This card is illustrated below with the imprint stamp overprinted for use in occupied Germany.



In 1919 there was a stamp issue to commemorate the liberation with an image of King Albert known as “Tin Hat” or “Casque” and in 1920 a postcard.

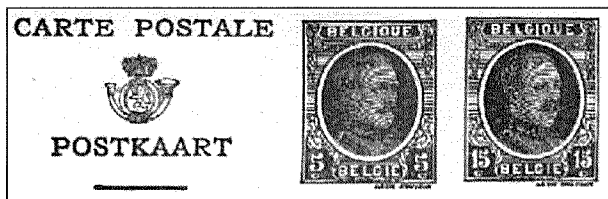


After the armistice the German districts of Eupen, Malmédy and Saint Vith plus the previously neutral territory of Moresnet were occupied by Belgium under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles and then in 1925 annexed. Within these “Eastern Cantons or Kreis” a limited number of Belgian stamps from the 1915 definitive series were used from 15th January 1920 these being overprinted “**EUPEN & MALMEDY**” and surcharged in German currency. A significant proportion of the population in these annexed areas spoke German adding a new complication to postal stationery.

Subsequently on 20th March 1920 the entire 1915 definitive stamp series and also some postal stationery were issued overprinted “**EUPEN**” and the same issues also overprinted “**MALMEDY**”.

There is some confusion about post cards rates at this time. A 10-cent on yellow card was issued on 15th December 1919 for internal use and a “liberation” issue on 1st June 1920 had 10-cent cards for both internal (yellow card) and foreign use

(blue card). After 50 years of a single rate things were about to change and over the following 50 years it rose to 2,50 francs albeit with some long periods of stability. On 16th January 1985 the post-card rate became the same as the letter rate. During this 50-year period the need to surcharge existing stocks complicates the situation such that completion against the catalogue becomes a virtual impossibility.



The stamp depicted is the “Houyoux” first issued as both postage stamps and on postal stationery in 1922 and lasting until 1930 when it was replaced with a heraldic lion as shown below. In 1927 the first tri-lingual French/Dutch/German postcard was issued, all previous issues having been French or French dominant, French/Dutch bilingual. This image of the King was the last one of the ruling Monarch to appear on an ordinary postcard until King Albert II in 1996.



One-way of achieving the surcharge was to re-run cards currently in manufacture applying a second imprint stamp. The first occasion for this was in 1926 with the addition of a 5-cent imprint to the 15-cent card before a 20-cent could be issued. The rate increased twice in 1926 necessitating a 5-cent imprint to the 20-cent card and then in 1927 a red ink “10 cent” surcharge.

In some cases a mechanical surcharge was applied in the form of an elongated octagon. It is this type of surcharge that causes the massive complications of later years, as the number on the bottom of the surcharge, in this case “P010”, is unique to a particular post office. There were very few of these employed up until WWII but subsequently there may be several dozen different overprints. This is particularly true with the advertising post cards. In some cases more than one surcharge was required.

The internal postcard rate was reduced to 35 cents on 1st February 1935. The reduction in rate from 50 cents to 35 cents was initially achieved by a surcharge in red on the stamp imprint. The normal series of postcards show three types of

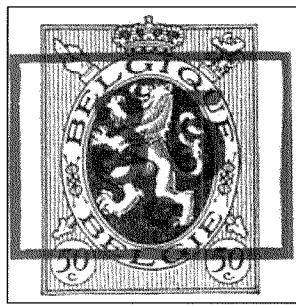
surcharge (a) “typographic”, (b) “à la timbreuse électrique” and the very similar surcharge (c) “à la pédale”.



(a)

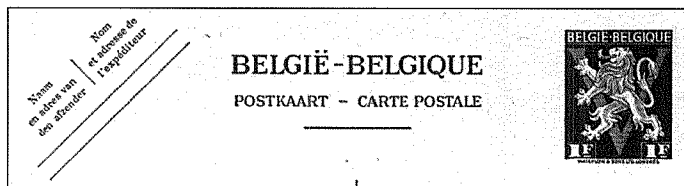


(b)



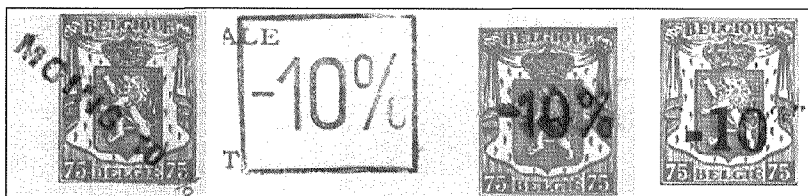
(c)

Unlike their actions in the Great War the Germans did not interfere with postal arrangements in World War II and there was very little internal censorship. They did annex the Eastern Cantons in May 1940 and in “celebration” some postal stationery and adhesives were over printed “Eupen ist frei” by one or more supporters of the German annexation within the Belgian postal service in those areas. The German authorities did not approve of the overprint and although there are some “postally” used examples their status is unsure. German postal stationery and stamps were employed in these areas until Germany’s defeat and the Germans did employ some celebratory postmarks. As these areas were now in Germany mail into and out of Belgium were censored and charged at the foreign rate.



To celebrate the victory in 1944 cards were issued in two language variants depicting a lion rampant on a “V”; 50-cent in green for internal and 1-franc in red for overseas. The corresponding adhesive postage stamps were produced in 16 values and remained valid until 1st October 1959.

An across the board reduction in postal rates was introduced on 20th May 1946 at very short notice and this was generally achieved by overprinting all existing stocks of both stamps and postal stationery with “-10%”. To achieve this, local post offices were authorised to produce their own hand stamp and as a result over 400 different overprints exist. The overprints are listed in the “Entiers” catalogue.



This design of the 75-cent stamp, known as the “Petit sceau de l’etat”, first appeared in 1935 both as a stamp and as postal stationery and lasted throughout the war until 1951. The Belgian Trade and Industry design was short lived lasting from 1948 to 1950. Following the introduction of the “number on heraldic lion” imprint in 1951 there were 9 changes post card design with a phosphor band to the left of the imprint stamp being introduced in 1968 as part of the mechanisation of handling. A ribbon or “banderole” was added to the imprint stamp design in 1977 and birds were introduced in 1986, followed by King Albert II in 1996. The simple post card died out in 2003 with a No Value Indicated card incorporating the “PRIOR” logo adjacent to the stamp. The “service” is still available through the long running illustrated card series that are widely used for competition entries – it saves the organiser opening envelopes.

There were a number of booklets of 10 cards issued from 1937 to 1942 and also in 1948. The cards from these booklets are perforated on the left edge.

Over the years 1873 to 1938 a very small number of cards were officially printed with advertising and sold at a reduced price. There is a specialist publication dealing with these. Naturally many postcards had advertisements privately applied often by hand stamps.

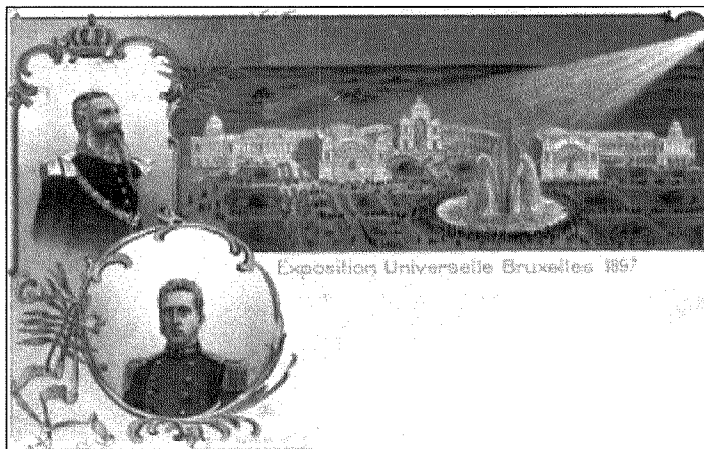
Members are reminded to pay their membership fee for the year 2012

Please send your remittance to:

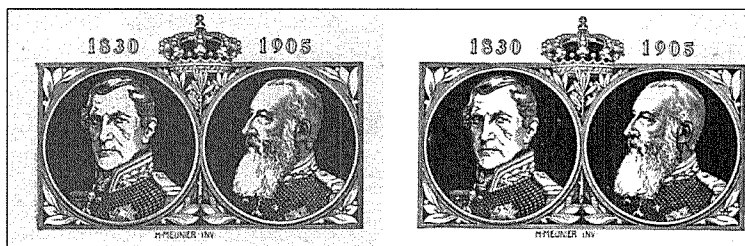
Mr. John A. Cardona

56 Triq Santa Marija, Tarxien TXN 1703 Malta

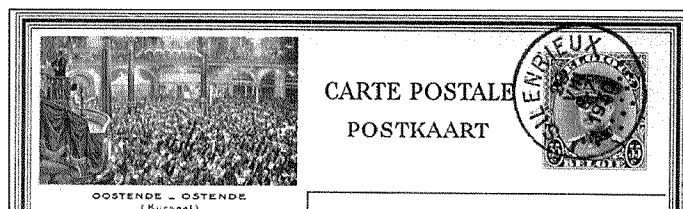
Illustrated Post Cards



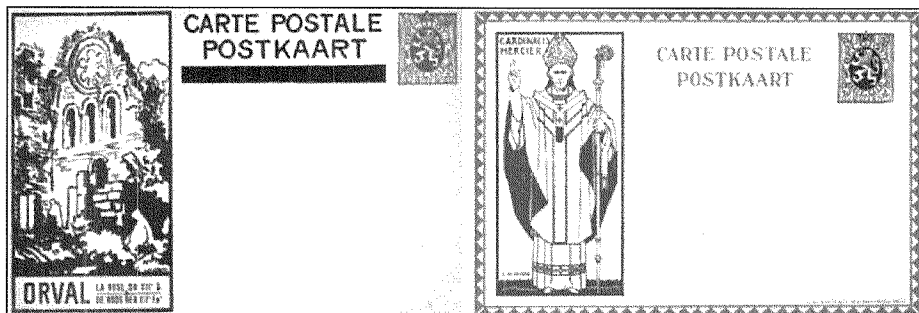
The first illustrated card was issued for the Brussels Universal Exposition of 1897 with the design printed on the reverse of the normal post card with a similar card for the 1910 Exposition.



A 4.5 mm x 3 mm commemorative design depicting King Leopold I and II was produced in 6 colours for Belgium's 75th anniversary in 1905 with the design printed top right on the reverse of the postcard. There were 2 printings of a 10 card series issued in 1936 commemorating the opening of the postal museum. A 2-card issue of 1939 commemorated the "Memling" exposition and uniquely employed the image of King Leopold III.



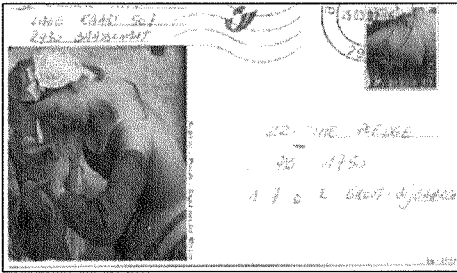
From 1928 to 1939 hundreds of cards were produced with an illustration on the postal side of the card. The majority of the early period cards were in support of tourism, initially franked at the postcard rate, but later surcharged with an added 25 cents, presumably to raise finance to promote tourism. The higher catalogue value attributed to used cards suggests that these were not popular with the public! The King's image is known as "En Casquette" or "Kepi" and appeared briefly as a postage stamp in 1931 and was employed as a mourning stamp after the death of King Albert in 1932. This image only appears on these "tourism" cards.



The 35-cent heraldic lion appeared in 1928 surcharged 25-cent to raise funds for the restoration of Orval Abbey and in 1933 two series of 12 cards, 6 views in 2 different colours, were produced in 1928/29 surcharged 50-cents to support the erection of a monument to Cardinal Mercier outside St. Michael and Gudula Cathedral in Brussels. Cardinal Mercier, Archbishop of Mechelen and Primate of Belgium, was fervently opposed to the use of the Flemish language. There were a few other charitable issues including a 1931 Christmas issue that uniquely had the image of Queen Elisabeth as the imprint stamp.

A public service information card warning of Colorado beetles was issued in 1934 with the heraldic lion and in 1935 with the Petit sceau de l'etat as imprint stamps.

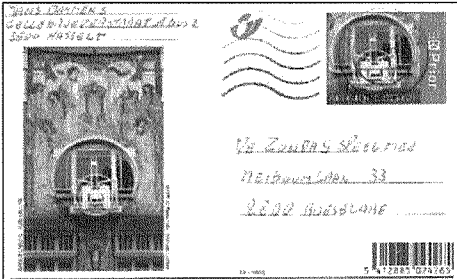
After the war there were infrequent issues all aimed at philatelists until 1993 when annual issues started. Initially one or 2 cards a year but numbers have rapidly increased since. In 1999 the first No Value Indicated card was issued and in 2002 a barcode and the "PRIOR" logo adjacent to the stamp was included in the card design. In 2003 the "PRIOR" logo was modified for no apparent reason only to be abandoned in 2007 in favour of a circled number 1.



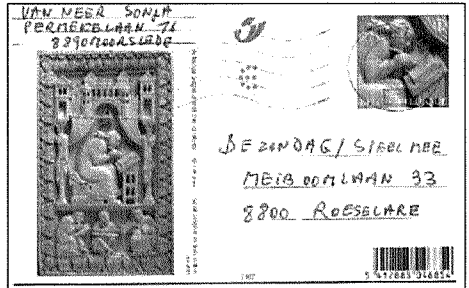
First "No Value Indicated"



"PRIOR" and a Barcode added.




"Go Faster" PRIOR Logo




Circled number 1.

Cochez la mention adéquate:

- Encore merci pour cette inoubliable soirée.
- Encore merci pour le coup de main!
- Félicitations pour cette promotion!

LA POSTE 

Cette carte préaffranchie est valable jusqu'à fin février 2003.



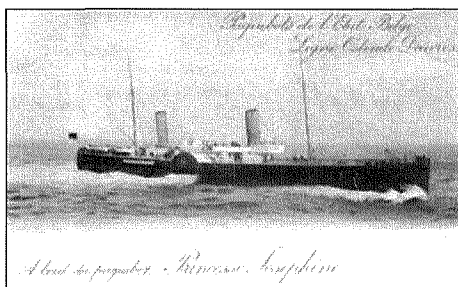
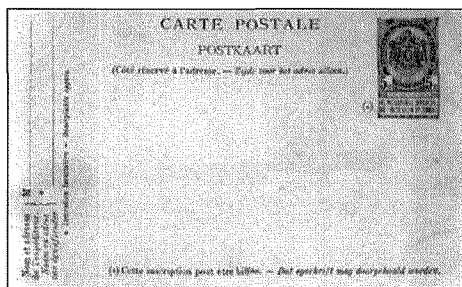
In October 2002 a booklet, introducing a 2-tier system introduced from 18th November 2002, was distributed to every postal address in Belgium complete with a tariff booklet. The second tier was "Day plus 3" at 0,41€D. The booklet incorporated a free postal stationery card at the internal rate of 0,49€D. In fact this tariff proved to be more trouble than it was worth and was abandoned on 1st October 2007.



On 31st May 2005 the post office produced a free postcard with a 0.44 euro buzin bird imprint stamp in support of an anti-smoking campaign. The cards were distributed in 9 major railway stations and some post offices with very little pre-issue publicity. Several similar free issues were made in 2006 and one in 2007.

Paquebot Cards

Paquebot cards are a subsection of the illustrated cards, and were initiated in 1899. These were used on the Ostend to Dover route and employed the standard 5 and 10-cent postcard in the same manner as the Brussels Universal Exposition cards of 1897. The outward journey had the text in red and the return journey in dark grey and several series of up to 36 cards were issued up to the war. After the war 15 and 30-cent cards were issued that were subsequently surcharged as rates changed. The cards were invalidated at the end of 1930.



Advertising Post Cards

In 1933 the internal “Publibel” series of Belgian advertising postcards was introduced printed by l’Agence Belge de Publicite Postale with the objective of raising funds for various charities. The design of the card includes an advertisement in the bottom left hand corner adjacent to the space for the delivery address and below the space for the sender’s address. The advertisement, which may be

sponsored by government or commercial enterprises, appears in single language variants, French, Flemish or German and multiple language variants depending on the area in which the sponsor required the cards to be distributed.

The series reflects the changes in internal postcard rates seen in ordinary postcards, but is unique in employing only definitive stamps with the lion design current at the time of issue. The stamp imprints follow the four main series of adhesive stamps namely the short-lived “lion héraldique” (1929-32), the “petit sceau de l’Etat or lion écusson” (1935-51), the “chiffre sur lion” (1951-77) and finally the “chiffre sur lion avec banderole”. There are stamp values within the publibel cards that are not reflected in the adhesive postage stamp series and some of the colours are different where values correspond.

The first 200 or so cards are not numbered but, with a few exceptions, cards after this include a number at the bottom of the left edge or left, bottom edge. Cards after No. 2225 include the letters F (French), V or N (Vlaams very short-lived or Néerlandais Dutch) or A (German) used singly or in combinations to denote the language(s) employed on the cards. The cards appear in two sizes 140 x 90 mm. and 148 x 104 mm.

Although primarily intended for internal use, there were two short tourist series issued in 1949 and 1957 for destinations abroad. Both were on the blue card usual for “cartes pour l’étranger” and employed the 2,50fr. agricultural definitive in carmine or the 2,50fr. chiffre sur lion definitive in red. Many internal publibels were sent to destinations abroad with suitable additional adhesives added.

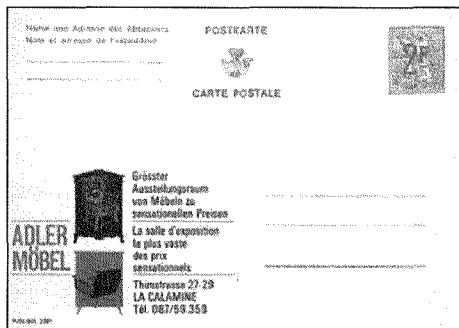
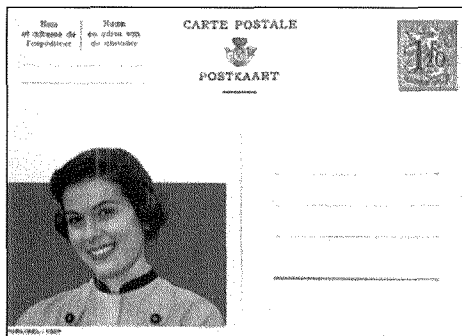
Surcharges in a variety of forms were employed when postage rates changed; such usage increasing during periods of rapid inflation to the extent that some cards exist with different stamp values whilst others are virtually unknown used without surcharges. Only a small number of cards were included in the -10% surcharges of 20 May 1946.

There are approximately 3000 different cards issued in print runs of between 500 and 2 million.

The numbers of cards issued declined rapidly in the 1980’s and ended with the 10fr. cards of 1984.

Members are reminded of two special dates namely, the yearly ‘get together’ on Wednesday 21st Dec 2011 and the Annual General Meeting on Wednesday 25th Jan 2012. Both functions are being held at St. Publius Oratory, Floriana (opposite the Pimary School in St. Thomas Street) and both will start at 18.00 hrs.

The XII Maltex Participating Certificates will be distributed during the ‘get together’.



No advert "Miss Publibel" and "Adler" the ONLY German/French variant.

Numbers 1122, 1123, 1124, 1126, 1127 & 1129 exist in three frankings, 90c chiffre sur lion in blue, 90c chiffre sur lion in blue plus 30c printed in red and 1.20fr. chiffre sur lion in olive.

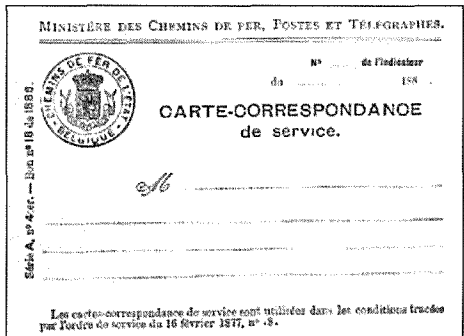
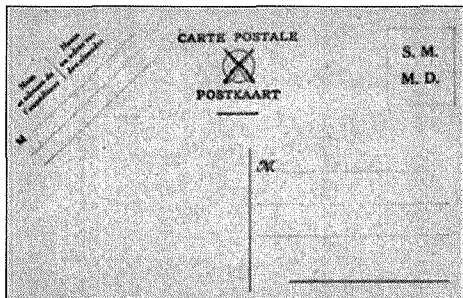
From Publibel number 2292 a fluorescent band was added to the left of the "stamp". From Publibel 2619 the width of the fluorescent band was reduced from 5.5 mm to 2.5 mm

Change of Address Card

In 1937 a change of address card was introduced by mechanically franking a formular card and promptly superseded by a bilingual, French dominant card with the 10-cent state shield as an imprint stamp replaced in 1938 with 3 10-cent bi-lingual cards French/Flemish, Flemish/French and French/German. In 1949 the French/German variant was temporarily abandoned until 1952 and the introduction of the chiffre sur lion imprint stamp when a tri-lingual card replaced it. This was initially French/Flemish/German and subsequently German/French/Flemish before expanding to 5 cards 2 monolingual and 3 bilingual. Numerous surcharges of the red mechanical type and possibly overproduction lead to a very complicated catalogue up to 1983. These cards were franked substantially below the post card rate until the 1970s after which the gap closed considerably but there is still a marginal difference. From 1990-1994 the bird definitive series replaced the "Lion and Number" type of imprint stamp. In 1996 the system was re-branded as "MUTAPOST", the image of King Albert II was employed as the imprint stamp and the number of language variants reduced to 3, French, Flemish and German. Two new formats were introduced in 2003 with the logo "PRIOR". Both issues are monolingual.



1920 Postal Packet Card



The cards above probably don't qualify as postal stationery. The S.M./M.D. card was for use by military forces during the mobilisation for WW2. Many types of service cards were employed for inter government department communications. They exist in a number of colours.

