

Wladimir Herman

VISITING CARD CASES

Beata & Wladimir Herman`s Collection of Visiting Card Cases

Examples from our collection

Photo: Samsung mobile phone.

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VISITING CARDS



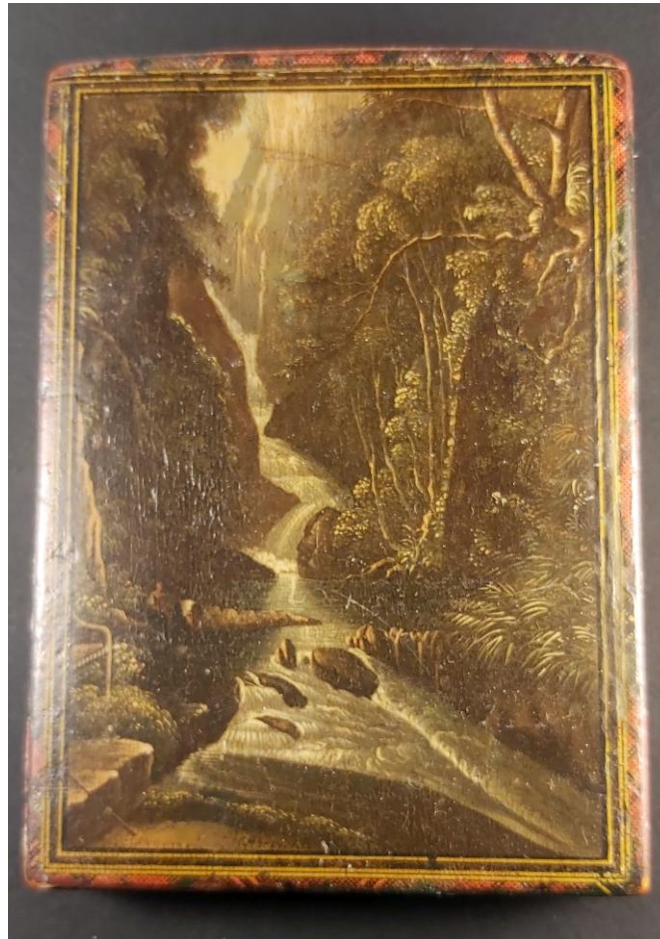
Victorian visiting cards

The 19th century was the golden age of visiting cards. The royal courts, especially Queen Victoria's British court, had a great influence here. But above all, the development of international contacts, trade, economics, communication and tourism had a decisive influence on the popularization of visiting cards, now called also in English *business cards*. At the same time the fashion, ritual rules and etiquette associated with visiting cards disappeared. Today, both the older visiting cards themselves and the recipient containers for them are separate collector's items.

VISITING CARD CASES

The first visiting card cases began to be produced in Great Britain after 1810.

Production developed in the 1830s, primarily in Birmingham. The city was called the Toy Shop of Europe. The most exquisite and popular cigarette cases, visiting card cases, wallets, snuff boxes, powder boxes, glass etuis were produced and were high craftsmanship and artistic quality, especially those made until the end of the 19th century and up to the 1930s, when mass production began to take over.



One of the oldest British (Scotland) card cases, hand painted, 1820-1825

Visiting card cases are made in various sizes, but primarily 7-12 cm high, 5-8 cm wide and 0.5-1 cm thick/flat. This flatness and the way they open distinguish them from cigarette cases and other boxes.

Visiting card cases became increasingly popular among the upper class and the bourgeoisie. A specific type of case features chiseled or engraved images of palaces, castles, monuments, churches, universities and other topographical objects named *castle-top cases*, which is still used today and means a case with a *castle on the front*, even, that castles were not the most typical motifs. In fact, there were other topographical objects known in Britain: churches, monuments, and famous buildings.

The best-known masters of this type of case are Taylor & Perry, Hilliard & Thomason, George Unite, David Pettifer and the most famous of them Nathaniel Mills.



British silver. Scott Memorial by N. Mills

These cases were made mainly in two techniques: *embossed in relief*, deep or flat, *chiseled* and in technique called *filigree*, pierced. Some cases have a special place for monograms. English and American masters relatively quickly encountered competition from Asia: India's Kashmir, Bengal and Vizagapatam, where units of the English legions were stationed. Officers often ordered carved Ivory visiting cards, boxes, sometimes with clear erotic accents. Cases made of wood were decorated with mosaics of various cheap stones, bones and mother-of-pearl, often richly decorated with religious motifs, gods and demigods.



Asian silver



Asian sandalwood

The most attractive visiting card cases were produced by China and Japan. The Chinese visiting card cases of Ivory, silver, tortoise shell, enamel, wood, were primary made for export to Europe and USA. Popular carved ivory, very rare painted enamel cases and silver dragon cases



Chinese carve ivory

Handpainted enamel

Silver dragon

Japanese masters, who were already famous for their *netsuki* and *inro*, responded to the challenge from Chinese competitors with an even more beautiful product: *Shibayama* and *Hiramakie*.

The art of inserting a lacquered small inlay of mother of pearl, precious stones and other fine materials into pre-engraved shapes on the main material, Ivory, is called *Shibayama*.

The main material from which the object is made is Ivory. *Shibayama* is an extremely beautiful and overwhelming artistic decoration technique. Various motifs of people, fauna and flora. Flowers, birds made of pearl, dark branches made of tortoiseshell, fruits carved from precious stones... And impressive ivory carvings. Geishas, samurai, Kabuki actors... Ikebana flowers...

Hiramakie masters fill the reliefs of the decorated object, usually made of ivory or tortoiseshell, with gold, silver and other mixed paints and colors; the whole case is lacquered several times at precise intervals.

The Japanese were also masters of the decorative art they called komai. Cases and boxes made of iron.

The iron was chiseled, cut out and inlaid with thin streams of authentic gold. The Japanese also perfected the oriental decorative technique called damascene, which is



Japan, ivory Shibayama

apan, ivory Hiramakie

Japan ivory carving



Japan, Komai

Japan, damascene

related to komai, but in damascene you can hardly see the black iron metal, it is all just the gold decoration

Dieppe, France, and Erbach, Germany produced also decorative small ivory objects, but not many card cases.

Russia, which had a rich tradition of handicrafts, especially silverwork and lacquer art, extremely rarely produced visiting card cases; there was much greater interest and demand for cigarette boxes and other types of cases.

The most famous of the Russian masters and manufacturers, Fabergé, who employed the elite of the best specialists from the Russian Empire, produced card cases extremely rarely, only a few pieces, and then on specific, private orders from the Tsar Hof, the aristocracy or wealthy merchants.

Fabergé card cases are practically inaccessible to collectors today, if only because of their astronomical prices. With exception the imitations, but as card cases they are also very rare. Like this silver/guilloche card case in our collection, fully hallmarked Faberge (made probably by master Nevalainen).

Russian guilloché on silver. Hallmarked Nevelainen/Fabergé. (Copy?). Unique.



Russian cloisanné by A. I. Kusmichev. Moscow 1900. Unique.



Russia, guilloche (Imitation Faberge?)

Russia, cloisonne

Russia, Lukutin Workshop

Russian cloisonné objects were also famous. Unfortunately, very few visiting card cases of this type were produced. Other Russian items, such as lacquerware from the Lukutin or Vishnyakov workshops, are somewhat more accessible, but also very rare. These famous workshops produced many beautiful items, but not visiting card cases.

French hand-painted porcelain cases, most of them from Limoges, are very beautiful and intensively collected. A special French card case is made of Ivory, decorated with micro painting on porcelain depicting famous buildings and monuments in Paris.



France, hand painted porcelain



France, ivory with paintings on porcelain

The Germans were leaders in the production of small cases in the *embroidery technique*, called Berliner Wool, a specific variant of the known *petit point* technique.



Germany, embroidery

Italy produced impressive *intarsia* cases of wood, depicting folk life in Sorrento, called by collectors *Sorrentinos*.



Italy, wood, Sorrentino

The Scandinavian/Nordic countries produced very few visiting card cases.



Danish wood. Kronborg

Danish Silver



Swedish enamel with gold decoration example. Made by W.A. Bolin ,1916

Portugal and Malta were active in the production of *filigree* visiting card cases. Malta decorated some of its boxes with the Maltese cross. Even countries that didn't normally produce card cases, suddenly surprised with a case made from unusual material. It is the fine Austrian agate visiting card case.



Filigree Maltese cross



Austrian agate

Card cases made of *papier-mâché* were primarily an English specialty. Hand-painted, decorated with fanciful bouquets of flowers and birds, especially peacocks, and finally lacquered, they delighted their contemporary users and today's collectors. They enjoyed the sympathy of even Queen Victoria, and she even honored some manufacturers with the title *Box Makers to Her Majesty!*

Some of the cases were decorated with motifs from literature, with hand-painted famous buildings, with universities buildings and colleges. Today they are called *Oxford or Cambridge card cases*. An English specialty were also cases decorated with *Hinterglassmalerei*. Here it is presented with painted Shakespeare House in Stratford.



British Hinterglassmalerei



British Cambridge case



British, Oliver Twist, hand painted



British, Peacocks, hand painted

Visiting card cases were made of silver, other metals, ivory, leather, snakeskin, lacquer, tortoiseshell, wood, bark, bamboo, papier-mâché, gutta-percha (rubber), seashells, porcupine quills, bakelite, celluloid and even of dried flowers, straw, hair and soft fabric, like the touching in their delicate beauty visiting card cases handmade and beautifully art-folk decorated by the Native Americans.



Native Americans

China bamboo

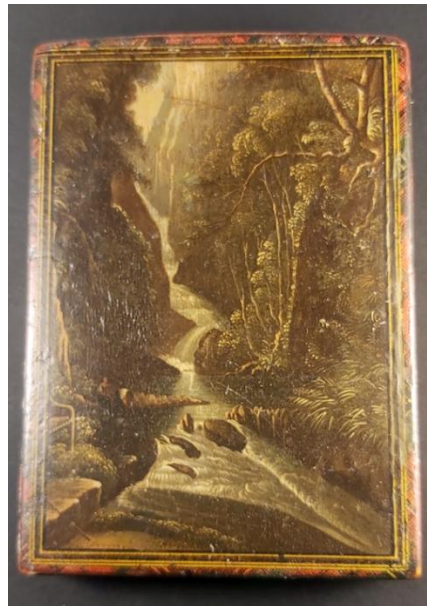
Europe, Porcupine

The development of art, crafts, fashion, etc. is also reflected in the history of visiting card cases. To mention here only English *Arts and Crafts*, European *Art Nouveau* and *Art Deco*. The material from which the cases were made also reflects the changing times. Several card cases were made of synthetic materials, in Art Deco style in the period 1920 to 1950. This is the time when artificial materials, invented in the 19th century, were frequently used to make everyday objects, including card cases.



European bakelite and celluloid cases

I have often wondered where the inspiration for the decorative motifs on card cases comes from. The architectural and topographical motifs on most English boxes are relatively easy to decipher. But some other cases?



Material: Wood. Design: Hand-painted miniature of a waterfall.

No doubt: the card case was made in Scotland in the years 1820-1825. It was one of the oldest British visiting card cases, now very rare. The case has an inscription, but it is almost illegible: seems like *Aberfeldy*... I found and purchased a steel cut on the Internet. Mr. D. O. Hill, well-known engraver, made a series of steel cuts for a topographical album about Scotland. And one of them shows this waterfall! The picture on the case is made exactly after this steel cut. But what work: to paint an exact oil

miniature of a large steel cut! And how many copies of this case were made? It is not known. But another card case with a picture of Aberfeldy is unknown among collectors.



Material: English silver. Motif: 5 children's heads with wings.

Five Angels? The motif is repeated quite often on all sorts of objects produced in England throughout the ages. For an Englishman, guessing what this composition represents is a simple matter. I used to visit the National Gallery in London quite often. And this is where the painting by the famous English painter from the 18th century, Joshua Reynolds, hangs: *Five children's heads*.



Material: Leather and Ivory. Motif: Two children



Kate Greenway's Painting Book, London, ca. 1900



Material: Tortoiseshell. Inlaid is a hand-painted, oval portrait behind glass.

Anyone who knows something about the history of world literature will recognize Lord Byron. But who painted the original portrait? Google images can help here: It is a well-known oil portrait of Byron painted in 1813 by Thomas Philips.



Material: English silver. Motif: profile portrait of a young lady in true Art Nouveau style

Almost identical to Alphonse Mucha's portraits of the great actress Sarah

Bernhardt... But from other sources, including old postcards, I learned, little disappointed: it was neither made by Alphonse nor depict Sarah... Nevertheless, this visiting card case is beautiful and very rare.

(If you are more interested in the subject please click on Copilot/AI: Beata and Wladimir Herman´s Collection of Visiting Card Cases)

