

Who is Dinah?

Tonie and Valmai Holt investigate the mystery comic postcard artist of World War II

In this article we return to a topic that is one of our greatest delights and, at the same time, one of our greatest frustrations. It is the identity of the talented artist of the 'cute kid' type of postcard whom we simply know as 'Dinah'.

She drew cards in the same genre as far better-known artists - like the well-documented Mabel Lucie Atwell, or the more familiar Douglas Tempest, Arnold Taylor, Madge Williams, Vera Paterson, Phyllis Cooper, Agnes Richardson, Nora Anni Birch, Kit Forres, Beatrice Mallet, 'Ludgate' (Gibson) or 'Comicus' (Harry Parlett). They all drew chubby children, usually in grown-up situations, and some of their best work (as is certainly the case with 'Dinah') was published during the dark days of the 1939-1945 War.

These philosophical youngsters helped raise morale when things were tough, when food (January 1940), sweets (July 1942) and petrol (22 September 1939) were rationed and in short supply: when the Ministries of Food, Information, Health et al were propagating patriotic messages at us by a variety of media (in newspapers and magazine ads, on posters, in 'Food Flashes' on the radio etc.)

They remain irrepressibly cheerful as they queue for food, patch their clothes (as 'Mrs Sew and Sew' advertised) and cope with the blackout.

Many of the captions use current uplifting slogans, like 'There's a good time coming'. Others use the titles of contemporary hit songs, 'Deep in the Heart of Texas', or appropriate ones like 'I'll walk beside you'. Some employ the slang of the day (not a little influenced by the 'friendly invasion' of the Yanks that Britain was then undergoing) like 'Swell' or 'Sew what?' (the pun indicating a patriotic session of 'Make Do and Mend'). Many of Dinah's characters are in uniform or on war work. They are seen 'On leave', on a 'Refresher Course', doing 'A Little Bit of Overtime'. They use wartime phrases like 'Inside Information', or 'Free

Press'.

The radio assumed a greater importance in everyone's lives during WW2 than it had ever done before. One of the most popular comedy shows of the war was ITMA. The initials stand for 'It's That Man Again' - a phrase used by the Press to describe Hitler's series of annexations in 1938/9 of countries he maintained were wrongfully taken from Germany after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. Tommy Handley, the comic genius star of ITMA, decided to adopt the phrase for the title of the show when it started in 1939.

Catch-phrases were a popular feature, and Dinah uses some of the favourites for her captions: 'Good Morning! Nice Day', for instance, which was the habitual greeting of 'The Commercial Traveller', one of the show's stock characters, played by Clarence Wright. 'Here is the News' was the prelude to one of the most listened-to programmes of all. The news was eagerly heard, not only by civilians on the Home Front, but by Resistance Workers throughout the Continent. Coded messages were often broadcast during the news, which were signals to the Resistance, such as the verses from a poem by Verlaine broadcast to the Maquis to herald the D-Day Landings of 6 June, 1944. Dinah uses 'Here is the News' as a caption. Another much-loved show was 'Monday Night at Eight' - subject of another Dinah postcard, as was 'Good Night, Forces'.

Most of the Dinah postcards in our collection were published by Tuck and, if postally used, bear date stamps from 1943 to 1949. The majority have no series name or number, but curiously usually bear the French words for postcard, 'Carte Postale'. One Oilette series, No. 9, obviously went from 9A to at least 9L. We also have 'Oilette Postcard No. 11A', which would indicate another series. Others are simply numbered 'Oilette Postcard No. 12', 'Postcard No. 67', or 'Oilette Postcard No. 91' - but with no letter. We would be most grateful if anyone can supply information to fill what are obviously very large gaps.

Another feature of the Dinah Tuck postcards is that many bear a motivating patriotic message on the back - as did



many other cards of the period. The Dinah cards fall into three categories:-
1. Messages signed 'The Prime Minister', such as 'This is a time for everyone to stand together and hold firm'; 'Let us all strive without failing in faith or in duty'; 'We shall continue steadfast in faith and duty till our task is done'; 'We have to gain the victory. This is our task'.
2. Other stirring Winston phrases are simply attributed to 'Mr Churchill'. None of these appears on any of our postcards earlier than the General Election of July 1945, in which Labour gained an overwhelming majority and Winnie was superseded by Clement Attlee as Prime Minister. These later messages include, 'Advance Britannia! Long Live the Cause of Freedom! God Save the King'; 'Let us not forget for the moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead'; 'Forward, unflinching, unswerving, indomitable, till the whole task is done, and the whole world is safe and clean'; 'We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our tasks both at home and abroad' and, crux of all these post-war messages, 'There is still a lot to do'.
3. Other messages are unsigned slogans: 'Send to Attack', 'Express your thanks by building tanks' (!); 'Your £.S.D. will make men free' or 'Your country needs your £.S.D.'

Other Dinah designs are published by Mason's Alpha series, also identified by 'Dinah' series plus a number (e.g. 12/7). These have the look and feel of later productions, but still have the same charm.

So, as we have attempted to show, there's a great deal more to Dinah's 'Cute Kids' than is at first glance apparent. They are very colourful and immediately appealing, but they are also historic documents, charting the slang, the songs, the radio programmes, the attitudes, the morale, the propaganda messages of a nation at war. But the question still remains: 'Who is Dinah?'.

Tuck Oilettes

9A ?

9B For evermore

9C 'The Home Front' (p.u. 1943)





- 9D Home Grown
 9E Can it be true?
 9F ?
 9G Here is the news (1943)
 9H ?
 9J Good Morning! Nice Day! (1943)
 9K I'm all austerity these days! (p.u. 1943)
 9L On Leave (1943)
 9M ?
 10A There's a good time coming
 10D The sailor with the navy blue eyes
 10F No basic? We should worry (1944)
 11A Inside information
 11C Very tasty, very sweet!
 11D The girl friend
 12 I'll make short work of this!
 13 I've come to the conclusion
 67 Engaged!

Other Tuck postcards

- no. 54 Here's luck
 Down by the sea
 A little bit of alright!

These all numbered PC 91

- Longing to see you (1943)
 A piece of cake
 I'll make short work of this
 Free Press (1945)
 Refresher Course
 News from the front (1945)
 For the love of Mike (1944)
 The Home Front (1944)
 I'll walk beside you (1944)
 Is my journey really necessary (1944)
 Good night, Forces
 Early Birds! (1945)
 A pleasant reflection
 Deep in the heart of Texas
 I'll (k)not forget you (1945)
 Making a stir (1945)
 Why worry? (1945)
 Swell! (1945)
 Mary and her little lamb (1945)
 Monday night at Eight (1945)
 Washing up (1945)
 A little bit behind
 Trying it on (1945)
 I've come to the conclusion (1945)
 Ladies in waiting



The backs of the Dinah postcards carry a selection of patriotic messages on the lines of 'this is a time for everyone to stand together and hold firm' - the Prime Minister

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Food flash
 Long distance call
 Boots! Boots! Boots!
 There's a good time coming (1944)
 The Girl Friend (1944)
 Booked!
 Chin chin!
 Oh what a beautiful morning!
 Happy to greet you
 In clover
 Between you and me
 Sew what!
 Watch your step
 Two to one on (1947)
 for Auld Lang Syne (1949)

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