Background to this research.

The printing firm of C. G. Röder in Leipzig was a major producer of picture postcards (mainly views) mostly printed using the colotype process. This firm was so dominant that their history must reflect the history of cards themselves and it is this that makes them so interesting to me.

Most of their cards were given a job number and it is possible to date these cards simply using this job number. Accurate listing is necessary as reminiscences are not always reliable, (for example see the probable Valentine “indiscretion” in this article). The main benefit of dating these cards accurately, is that you can trace how Röder’s production responded to events from 1901 right through 1944 and it is this history that appeals, as opposed to the necessary number listing.

Pre 1901 Röder is known to have had colotype printing capacity pre 1901, for instance the firm had 4 colotype presses in 1896. This is difficult territory which is still under research.

1901 Production rate about 7 to 8 thousand jobs per annum. Numbering 1 to 7800 approximately. (The three highest p/u cards seen for 1901 are 7538, 7580, 7620).

Röder mass production of numbered ppc’s started in early 1901. It seems that Röder numbers were prefixed by a ‘I/J’ in 1901 (and 1902). I am now inclined to tread this as an ‘I’ and not as a ‘J’ at all. ‘Index’, ‘Indexzahl’ and ‘Indexzeil’ are everyday German words for Indexing and Index Number. There has been considerable discussion of this ‘J’ or ‘I’, but for my part, I am satisfied that Röder assumed that future PPC production was going to be limited and that they could keep indexed details/materials of all printings, allowing very cheap reprints when necessary.

The English publisher Wrench suffered from the same delusion and this brought him down as the PPC boom took off. It was not sensible to store all these details in a world that had gone PPC mad and was craving novelty and change all the time.

As Röder was keeping indexed records of the 1901/02 printings there was no need for the customer to put in a large order for each job. We are all used to seeing Röder promotional cards in later years, implying that the minimum order was 1000 cards and that 3000 would be better. This would not apply in these first years of 1901 and 1902. Judging by the number of repeat printings we find for the Swiss publishers Goetz and Guggenheim in 1901/02. It would seem that they were not ordering in large qualities each time, but were content to order exactly what they judged they could easily sell. When these were sold, then they went back for a few more!

Things were to change drastically in later years, when if inexpensive cards were needed then you had to take many thousands of cards per order. Helmfried reports that the Röder total PPC production was about 7 Million cards for 1901. I have found that Röder handled about 8000 jobs in 1901, this gives an average order of under 1000 cards per job. This is ridiculously low for mass production printing. Orders of 2 to 3000 cards per job, would be where the real profits were to be had. Clearly this “I/J” system, with distributors coming back for reprints at a rate of hundreds at a time, had to stop and be replaced by thousands!

1902 Production rate about 12 thousand jobs. Numbering 7800 approximately to 20,000.

Röder continued with this awkward (for them) “I/J” system, finally dropping it in 1902 (I have not seen a “I/J” card above 20,000). The German market was strong and the mass market British PPC boom was starting up in this year. (Prior to this date the UK market for PPC was relatively small, catering for the middle classes)

1903 Production rate 15,000 jobs per annum. Numbering 20,000 to 35,000.

It is known that Röder had 16 colotype presses in this year. Roughly speaking then it looks as if each machine correlates with round 1000 PPC jobs per year. This is only a rough “ballpark” correlation. Helmfried points out that the colotype machines were not used exclusively for PPC’s and for part of the year they were used for printing book illustrations etc. This makes sense, as I imagine the mid winter months of November, December and January (w)
would see lower demand for PPCs. There would be little point in ordering and paying for cards in November (say) if they were not to be sold until the high summer months. The demand for cards from the UK was very strong in 1903 and this led to Röder needing to increase capacity again for 1904.

1904 Production rate increased to 20,000.
Numbering 35,000 to 55,000.
Both the English and German PPC booms were continuing very strongly and the USA was getting seriously interested.

1905 Production rate 20,000. Numbering 55,000 to 75,000.
Again a heavy year in Germany and the UK with very definite signs of interest from the USA, this led to a major increase in capacity for 1906.

1906 Production rate increased to 35,000.
Numbering 75,000 to 110,000.
Another very strong year, heavy demand from Germany, the UK and the USA and indeed the whole world.

1907 Production rate 35,000. Numbering 110,000 to 145,000.
Röder is known to have had 36 colotype presses in this year. We see that the number of colotype presses correlates again with the deduced production rate, of about 1000 per year for each machine. Demand was pressing hard from Germany, the UK, USA and just about everywhere else in the world.

1908 Production rate 45,000. Numbering 145,000 to 190,000.
The demand from the USA was extremely heavy in this year. This far more than made up for the slight weakening of demand from Germany and the UK. There are anecdotal stories of USA postcard publishing representatives scouring Leipzig to get their cards printed. Possibly Röder bought a few more presses and employed some more workers in this year? Alternatively the “normal PPC” printing season might have been extended? Röder offered to print cards in lots from a minimum of 1000 to 6000 per view. I could imagine that the average batch size went as high as 3000 cards in this year. (I do not know if the average could have been much higher, as a lot of these cards were of the type of “Main Street, Very Small Town”, USA). This would give an output of about 140 Million cards per annum. This was probably their best year as the PPC bubble was about to burst.

1909 Production rate 35,000. Numbering 190,000 to 225,000.
The USA Senate passed a restrictive tariff on postcards in August 1909. It was especially aimed at view cards which was Röder’s speciality. On top of this punitive tariff the USA was rapidly losing interest in view cards. (The USA demand for non-view cards still continued steadily however). This was of course a serious blow to Röder, as view cards were their lifeline, but there was still enough interest from the rest of the world to keep production quotas filled.

1910 Production rate about 30,000. Numbering 225,000 to 255,000.
This was the last year of the “old” first register numbering. The numbers seem to have got as high as about 255,000. The highest “old register” number I have seen is 253,844 (p/u 1914).

1911 Production rate 35,000. Numbering 1 to 35,000.
In 1910, Röder had started job numbering with No 1 again. The PPC world was then in a bad way, with demand falling off in a number of countries (but not all). On the other hand a thorough clear out with other major colotype firms going bankrupt (e.g. Knackstedt & Näther of Hamburg and other majors) allowed Röder to survive and indeed prosper in a modest way. I suspect that this new numbering, starting at No 1 again, may have been part of a cartelisation agreement with the other Leipzig major producer Emil Pinkau. I can only trace Pinkau’s card numbering back to 1913 when this firm had got to 2500 (coded number). But they presumably were numbering their batches before this, without putting the details on their cards. This might lead back to Pinkau also starting from the beginning in 1911 also? Very speculative I know, but the Leipzig cartel was strong and some sort of “market sharing” simply had to be reached. This was very common practise with German firms at that time, the chemical industry was a very pronounced example of “market sharing” and certainly the printing industry was not far behind. Another reason to think this was a cartelisation agreement is that Röder’s production share stayed precisely and exactly the same at 35,000 jobs per year until the end of WW1 in 1918. Another example possibly of cartelisation sharing was Pinkau’s very steady “allowance” of 400 lots per year in the 1920’s.

C.G. Röder and the British market
Röder printed for a number of the British major companies. This particular Tuck card → (Ronneburg, Saxony, Tucks “Passepartout” make for local publ. Leopold Brandes) has no number but the border style on the front is distinctively Röder. (Numbered Tucks printed by Röder do exist, see TPA 11). Other publishers using Röder include Peacock (Pictorial Stationery Co.) numbered 132,083 ‡ (“Stylochrom” card, Fermain Valley, Guernsey). Abraham of Keswick no 44,153 ‡ (Coaches descending Dunmall Raise, series no. 436) and G.W. Wilson (not shown). – All cards from the collection of Chris Ratcliffe. –
1912 to 1918
Production rate steady at 35,000 jobs per year. Röder had 34 collotype presses in 1913. I would imagine that the average lot size was not much above the minimum print level of 1000 cards per lot, say about 1500 cards per lot. This would give a yearly production rate of about 50 Million cards per annum. Some way from the glory years of 1907/08!

The end 1913 / beginning 1914 numbering is very accurate, as I have a photocopy of a letter from Röder dated February 1914 confirming a recent printing (from the collection of Chris McGregor).

We can see that once past 1918 the possibility of confusion with pre 1911 numbering vanishes, as on the “first time round” numbering Röder only reached about 255,000.

1919 to 1929
Estimated production rate steady at 16,000 jobs per annum. This gives the following Röder numbers used, all in thousands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Röder Numbers (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>275 to 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>291 to 307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>307 to 323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>323 to 339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>339 to 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>355 to 371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>371 to 387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>387 to 403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>403 to 419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>419 to 435</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>435 to 451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1930 to 1933
The production rate seems to have dropped to very low levels. Numbers used about 450,000 to about 470,000 very approximately.

1930/33 were the years of the Great Depression which hit Germany particularly badly, with truly massive unemployment. Although Röder was still exporting some cards in the inner war years, a lot of its work was for German publishers and work here seems to have diminished drastically in these depression years. Figures are very hard to get, but production was low, a lot of the cards were for very minor villages in Germany. By the end of 1933/1934 the German economy was recovering and there appears to have been a reversion to normal activity.

1934 to 1939
Estimated production 20,000 jobs per annum. Helmfried reports that the number of collotype presses had gone down to “less than 20” in the 1930’s. This would be very approximately in line with my finding of a correlation of about 1000 jobs per press in any one year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Röder Numbers (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>480 to 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>500 to 520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>520 to 540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>540 to 560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>560 to 580</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>580 to 600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C.G. Röder and Valentine
This Röder printing for Valentine of Dundee (White Sands, Abendon, Valentine’s Series, p/u 6 June 1904) is interesting, as the card number of 40057 indicates a printing in 1903. I had previously thought that Valentine printed all of their own cards, as this fact is proclaimed proudly on almost all of their output. I have checked this with the Valentine archives and this 40057 number does not fit in at all with the two main Valentine registers, but it does fit the Röder register. There was a large upsurge in the British PPC market in 1903, this may have caught Valentine temporarily short of printing capacity.

1940 to 1943
Estimated production rate 20,000 jobs per annum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Röder Numbers (thousands)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>600 Th to 620 Th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>620 Th to 640 Th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>640 Th to 660 Th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>660 Th to 680 Th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Little or nothing?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall production rate seems to have largely ignored the great inflation of 1922/23, but was badly affected by the great depression of 1930/33. Things picked up again in end 1933/1934 with a reviving economy. The volume of cards produced post WW1 was a pale reflection of former glories. The average batch size would also be low, an average of 1000 if they were lucky in the 1930’s (a lot of the cards were for very small locations in Germany).

The highest Röder number I have is 669, 173. Helmfried has 674,166, used in October 11th 1943 and Chris Ratcliffe has 671, 994 dated 6.10.43. This indicates a finish around the 675 thousand mark for WW2 production. Production probably finished at the end of November 1943, as the heavy Allied bombing of Leipzig was concentrated into the months at the end of 1943 and beginning of 1944.

Unfortunately Leipzig housed a Junker’s aircraft factory as well as oil storage facilities. Two of the bombing raids, the one of the 4th December 1943 and the other of 19th February 1944 were particularly damaging, destroying the city centre. Röder was in the Stötteritz district which was burnt out in the December 4th 1943 raid. According to one source 75% of Leipzig’s printing capacity was lost, at that time. The railway and communications were badly affected.

The middle of the Röder factory was knocked out by the bombing but the two ends survived somehow. Enough of it survived to allow production to continue there after WW2. Indeed when I saw it in the 1990’s, the OAN (Offizin Anderson Nexo, the DDR successor to Röder) factory were using the re-roofed front portion left after the bombing. The post 1945 reconstruction period is difficult and is under research. I feel that Röder production for 1901 to 1944 is enough for one article.

On my visit to the old Röder factory in Leipzig’s Perthestraße I saw that some of the old Röder colotype machines were still there and were still producing high quality colotype work for the firm of “Leipziger Lichtdruck Werkstatt”. I understand that LL W are still running “Lichtdruck” courses and producing high quality colotype work for the firm of “Leipziger Lichtdruck Werkstatt”. Indeed when I saw it in the 1990’s, the OAN (Offizin Anderson Nexo, the DDR successor to Röder) factory were using the re-roofed front portion left after the bombing. The post 1945 reconstruction period is difficult and is under research. I feel that Röder production for 1901 to 1944 is enough for one article.
Helmfried gave an initial account of the firm of Hofmann, Leder & Co in TPA 11, including some excellent illustrations of their “Kunstverlag” promotional cards. Although we are aware of Otto Leder, nothing was known about Hofmann or his firm.

I wrote to the Saxony archives and they were kind enough to send me details of this firm. It turns out that the firm was founded on 20th November 1899 in Meissen. The three principals were:

--- Paul Max Hofmann
--- Johann August Otto Leder
--- Arthur Richard Beyer

The firm was set up to buy and sell “Luxuspapier” products, Galanterie (fancy goods) and leather goods as well as writing materials etc. The description “Kunstverlag” was used in their letter heading.

Beyer left the firm on 31.05. 1900, so he played little part in it. Otto Leder left on 05.01. 1901, leaving only Herr Hofmann to soldier on. The firm soon went broke and bankruptcy procedures were started on 21.12. 1903.

Interesting to learn that George Webber received an answer from the Saxony archives. I wasn’t so lucky, as often before, the final note said I should better come along and check directories myself. Perhaps it would be a good idea to have a foreign postal address of my own for any possible inquiries in the future. But enough of this.

George mentions TPA #11 as source of some information on the firm Hofmann, Leder & Co. First mentioned in TPA #10, p18, then TPA #11, p32. It appears that he may have also overlooked the OLM piece in TPA #18, pages 14–19 which deals with Otto Leder and the printers he had used. As I understand Hofmann, Leder & Co and the later (as we know now) own Otto Leder business as one complex, I have included all the bits of information I had at hand at that time on the Hofmann business, too.

The above makes clear that this firm was a short lived fancy goods dealer. Any cards issued would have been for 1903 or earlier. Otto Leder’s involvement with this firm was quite fleeting and peripheral. Of course Leder went on to make his own successful career in PPC publishing.

There still are questions left about Leder. Was he a photographer? The cards he issued were generally of very high photographic quality and design. Did Leder photograph the views himself or did he commission other photographers to work for him? Have there been any exhibitions of his work and lastly does anybody have any biographical details about him?

Aha, Karoline was a born Weiss and not married to a Mr. Weiss but a Mr. Mai. And not a member of the Leder family. Appears to have been an entire women’s controlled business, our OLM postcard publisher. The mention that Karoline Sophie Mai comes from Dresden explains quite well the move of the business to Dresden in (early?) 1908.

But where was Johann August Otto Leder? What had happened to him? Still alive and travelling across the globe to shoot photographs to be published as postcards? Or had he passed away already by 1907? Further research will perhaps find an answer. Also why was there a “Otto Leder” postcard business suddenly turned up at Munich around 1912.

Perhaps Otto was indeed a (travelling) photographer. Running a business AND travelling abroad for months doesn’t work together.

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