

One of the more diverse additions to the tourist trails in London is the vice (or tart) card, as seen in many of the red telephone boxes located throughout central London. Steve DT has produced a set of photos inspired by these calling cards and its history. These 'Lines of Desire' cards are used by prostitutes to advertise their personal services, and have become as much a symbol of London as the Tower of London. Almost every morning the calling cards are removed from the boxes by the telephone company, only to see fresh cards re-appear within hours.

For the working girl and her 'carder' (usually a man paid to place the cards in the boxes), they are a commercial necessity for attracting passing trade. The cards promise sexual satisfaction and display numerous sexual services inviting you to be massaged, relaxed, tied, spanked etc in any one of the nearby luxury flats, situated only a few minutes away from the phone box, or in the privacy of your own hotel room. The card images used are not a true representation of the actual woman (as they're usually grabbed from the internet these days), but as far as the caller is concerned, the goods on offer are available.

The response by the general public and the tourists, ranges from offended to amused. In some cases it's been known for the tourists to use the cards as an alternative 'tourist postcard' to send home.

The tart card originally took root during the mid 1980's, and at the time illegal to advertise in the phone boxes. Although when the Post Office (renamed British Telecom) was privatised in 1984, this law was repealed - and carding grew (as did the more reputable advertisements). It was a clear moment when the product and the customer clicked into place; telephone boxes and prostitute cards. Both require the public's attention, and in London, it was a perfect match. The telephone boxes still survive today despite the increase of mobile phone usage, and the cards continue to add colour to these boxes, much to the dismay of BT.

In 2009 the Westminster Council still thought it could control the proliferation of calling cards, and with the aid of the phone companies had pooled their resources in order to block/cancel the telephone numbers listed on the cards. This resulted in an increase in telephone number changes due to the increasing availability of fresh SIM cards. so now the numbers come and go but the service remains.





By 2012, the most surprising thing, given the popularity of mobiles, is the number of red telephone boxes still in London. You would expect them in the tourist areas, but why are they further afield? You will still find many boxes in the city business areas, presumably to help the lost and 'untraceable' businessman relax during a long lunch or supposedly whilst 'working late at the office'. And yet these days, second SIM cards are 'two-a-penny'.



Private services don't change but the emphasis can. The cards now list what is their nearest tube station, some of them offer 24/7 services and many now state 'In and Out' calls (One can only presume the clients are too busy to exchange even small pleasantries).

In 2013 nothing much has changed other than the mobile numbers. Even in recession times and when money is scarce, there is still a demand and a need for tart cards offering all kinds of services.

