Cigarette case

Place of origin: London (made)
Date: 1903 (made)
Artist/Maker: Albert Barker Ltd (made)
Materials and Techniques: Silver; engraving; enamelling
Credit Line: Given by Mrs Herbert Seligmann
Museum number: T.111:1, 2-1998
Gallery location: Silver, Room 68, The Whiteley Galleries, case 7, shelf 1

Public access description
An alternative to pipe- and cigar-smoking, cigarettes appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and retailers were swift to produce a range of accessories tailored especially for them. As the dimensions of this case show, cigarettes at the turn of the century were smaller than the king-size ones of today. Rueff's cigarette case, designed as a stamped addressed envelope, may have formed a set with a match safe --- a case for matches often made to resemble miniature visiting cards or envelopes during this period.

Léon Rueff was head of the Swiss Bank in London during and after the First World War (1914-18). The address on the case perhaps refers to Rueff's office or London club, as The Times newspaper records home addresses for him in Chelsea and Bayswater. Léon Rueff died suddenly, aged 80, in September 1942, the year after his son Marcus was killed fighting in North Africa during the Second World War. Mrs Herbert Seligmann (Lise Ruess) gave the cigarette case to the Museum in 1997 'in remembrance of my aunt and uncle Suze and Léon Rueff whose only son died an Officer of the Hamlet Rifles in Libya in 1941'.

Descriptive line
Cigarette box decorated with an engraved London address, silver & enamel, London, Britain, 1903.

Physical description
Rectangular silver case engraved and enamelled on the front and back to resemble a stamped addressed envelope. Gilded button on the side which presses to release the catch that opens the case. Inside, a strip of elastic stretched across the case (to hold in cigarettes).

Dimensions
Length: 9.3 cm, Width: 8 cm, Depth: 1 cm, Weight: 159.5 g

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Object history note
Léon Rueff, a British national, owned the cigarette case shortly after becoming a delegate-member of the board of the Swiss Bank in London, where he rose to become manager by the start of the First World War in 1914. The address on the cigarette case probably refers to his home residence (now the site of the Stafford Hotel). Later references to him and his family in The Times record that he lived in Chelsea and Bayswater. His Dutch wife, Suze, had learned piano with Arthur Rubenstein, and between the wars their house in Palace Court, Bayswater was a favourite meeting-place for the great figures in the world of music (Times, 1961). Léon Rueff died 'suddenly', aged 80, on 18th September, 1942; his son, Marcus, had been killed in action in North Africa the previous year on April 7th or 8th, 1941 (Times, 1942).

Albert Barker was a London-based silversmith and retailer who in 1887 is recorded as 'a manufacturer, inventor and patentee of travelling dressing bags, gold and silver work, gem jewellery, writing cases, electroplated goods, dressing cases, art stationery, fine cutlery, fancy goods of finest English and foreign manufacture'. In 1892 he held a special warrant of appointment to the Prince and Princess of Wales. At the time the cigarette case was made, his retail business was established in 5 New Bond Street. Barker continued to trade until around 1915, when the business passed to successors Baxter and Shuttleworth. See Culme (1987), p.27.

Historical significance: An alternative to pipe- and cigar-smoking, cigarettes appeared at the end of the nineteenth century and retailers were swift to produce a range of accessories tailored especially for them. As the dimensions of this case show, cigarettes at the turn of the century were smaller than the king-size ones of today. Rueff's cigarette case, designed as a stamped addressed envelope, may have formed a set with a match safe --- a case for matches often made to resemble miniature visiting cards or envelopes during this period (Helliwell, 1988, pp.139-42).

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O73267/cigarette-case-albert-barker-ltd/