

PHILATELY ANYONE?



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The idea of studying or collecting postage stamps or philately, to use the official term, might be dismissed by the majority as child's play or reserved for older generations. The truth is, stamp collecting is enjoyed by more than 60 million collectors worldwide.

A Brief History of the Postage Stamp

In 1838 Englishman Rowland Hill first came up with the idea of applying a stamp to letters to indicate the cost of postage had been paid by the sender. Until then, postage costs were paid for by the recipient of the letter.

The first adhesive postage stamp, the Penny Black, was issued in 1840. It was introduced to standardise the rate of postage across the United Kingdom, making it readily available for all.

Surviving examples of this insignificant looking stamp, once costing only a penny, can fetch in excess of \$169,000 today.

Why Collect Stamps?

While some philatelists are drawn to stamp collecting for the thrill of finding a rare stamp that might be worth a small (or large) fortune, others are drawn to their beauty as miniature works of art.

Stamps also provide an insight into a nation's culture and history. While the majority of early stamps typically featured the country's head of state, over time they have come to feature depictions of events, historic figures and celebrations.

For anyone thinking about exploring stamp collecting as a hobby, Stanley Gibbons, the world's longest established rare stamp merchant, shares a wealth of information on its website.

In essence, here's where to start and what to look out for:

1 Buying Your First Stamps

Buy the largest packet of whole-world stamps you can afford and sift through them to see which catch your eye. You can find endless assortments for sale online and it might also be worth asking older relatives if they have a collection.

2 Used Or Unused Stamps

Used stamps are the cheapest option and will often have postmarks on them, making them less valuable but no less interesting. If you come across an older unused stamp, check that the adhesive gum on the back is intact which can add to its value.

3 Choose A Theme

The endless variety of stamps available can be a bit overwhelming. Start by collecting stamps according to a theme. Perhaps a country or an international sporting event such as the Olympics - the options are limitless.

4 Stamp Collecting Equipment

Tweezers are considered an essential piece of equipment for stamp collectors as is a book to keep them in. You can buy specially produced 'stockbooks', or a simple binder to which pages can be added will suffice.

5 Stamp Catalogues

These help in the identification of stamps and the stamps available for a particular theme you might be collecting.

The collection and redistribution of used stamps ensures these miniature pieces of art and history are saved from landfill, retaining value as they continue to be passed through the hands of many.

Sources:

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2015; Frama, 2020; The Postal Museum, 2020; Fast Company, 2016; DeZeen, 2022; Australia Post, 2022