

The Future of Philately – A Call to Arms

Editor's Note: *I had the privilege of giving a display to the Dublin Stamp Society earlier this year and in return Chris McDonagh, the Honorary Secretary of the Society, has kindly sent FEPA NEWS an open letter setting out some thoughts on a topic of interest to us all – the Future of Philately.*

An Open Letter to fellow Philatelists everywhere

May 2025

Dear friend,

I don't talk to myself ... much. At least that's what I said when I sat drinking my early-morning cup of tea, feet up, on a warm sunny veranda, alone, by myself. No interruptions. No challenges. That's the way I like it. And white, with milk, no sugar. My cup of tea. That's the way I like it.

Stamp collecting is also my cup of tea. I was thinking about my stamp collection. What I have. How much I have. What it's worth. How I started. Where I have it. How organised it is. What's missing. Who has seen it.

Now, there's a question ... Who HAS seen it? WHO has seen my collection?

Some of my stamp collection is painstakingly mounted with hand-manuscripted text describing every Irish commemorative issue in a pristine spring-back Simplex album, with interleaving pages, all held in a protective case. Oh, what pleasure! Woe betide anyone who should thumb those pages and risk leaving their unwanted DNA imprint on a page. Or worse still, gosh, on a stamp!

But why am I so protective? As I grow more wise and accepting with age, I realise that information not shared is information lost. We've already lost many traditional trade skills to the passage of time, to industrialisation, to mechanisation, to computing, to change. The only way to preserve lost skills and preserve our heritage is to educate today's populace in those skills. Likewise, if we don't encourage people in the ways of philately then we are at risk of losing the skills of the philatelist. We will lose our valuable history through research. We will diminish our national heritage that can be preserved through documentation. We will lose more stamp collectors to the continual marching progress of modernisation and innovation.

Think about that for a moment.

Modernisation. We have more online tools at our disposal today than we ever had.

Innovation. We have more access to knowledge at our fingertips today than we ever had 50 years ago.

What's missing? Aah, ingenuity.

So, with an ounce of modernisation, an ounce of innovation, an ounce of ingenuity, and let's add in an ounce of common sense for good measure... we can have a recipe for the future. A recipe for the future success of philately.

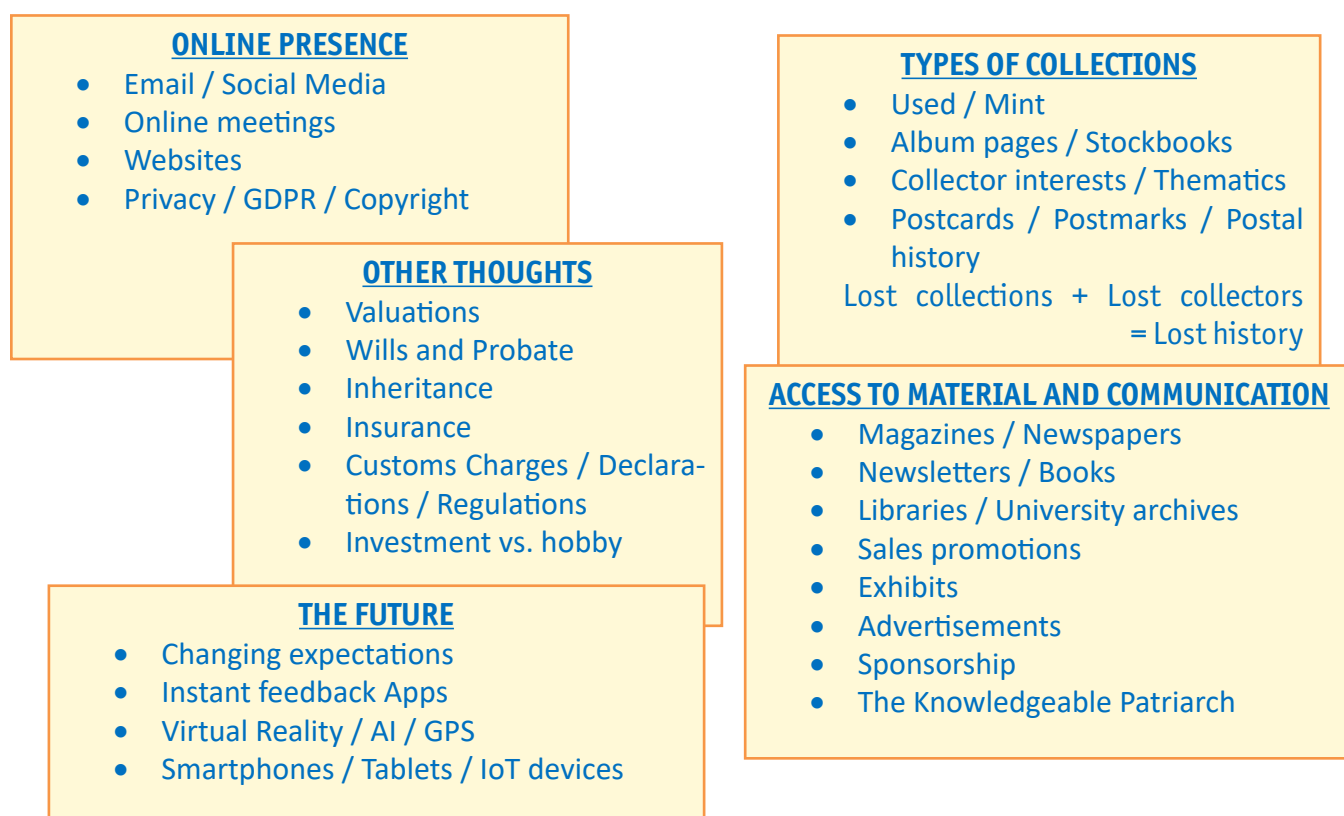
Aaargh! My tea has gone cold and I need a refill. While I'm gone to put the kettle on, I'll leave you with this personal brain dump of topics for you to ponder, and I'll be right back.

ACCESS TO PHILATELY

- Societies / Members / Identity
- Umbrella societies
- High-street dealers
- Exhibitions
- Libraries / Heritage centres
- Archives
- Auctions
- Stamp & Coin Fairs

HISTORY OF PHILATELY

- Postal services
- Post offices
- Couriers
- Delivery by foot / horse
- Stamps / coils / gummed / self-adhesive / digital
- coaches / TPO's / ship / balloon / air plane



Hello, friend. I am back.

With a freshly brewed cup of tea and a cream biscuit in hand, I reposition my chair on the warm sunny veranda to keep up with the mid-morning sun as it rises slowly above the horizon. The horizon keeps changing. I also reposition my thoughts to keep up with the times we live in. The times are also changing. It's time to surpass change and look to a new horizon.

Some days, I view philately as a selfish sedentary pastime. I have items that may never see the light of day. Other days, I get a release of dopamine in the frontal lobes when I fill a page or get that last stamp for the set, at a reasonable price of course. It's not always about having a complete collection. Part of the satisfaction I get is in the act of seeking out the elusive items over time. My interest and excitement in philately keeps me alive today. But to whom will I bequeath it all when I'm gone? I know where I'll be in 50 years' time. Where will my collection be? Where will philately be?

Society is changing. Culture is evolving. And, as I try to grapple with why I bother to collect these miniature masterpieces at all, I hear so much negativity about diminishing societies, declining collector numbers, the demise of the high-street stamp dealers, countries who have stopped issuing stamps, postal administrations who have stopped delivering letters or gone private, et al, ... and don't get me started on self-adhesives ... I ask you, with your permission, what are you doing about it? Yes, YOU! Or maybe I AM talking to myself.

There are some things that we can do to promote philately with 'ease' (pun intended) ...

Engage non-philatelists Encourage the public Enlighten the enthusiast
Embrace the technology Exchange ideas

There is strength in numbers and we are not a minority. Neither are we silent. Our current numbers world-wide are more than sufficient to take on the challenges of the new world. We need innovation and more positive thinking. Ask not what philately can do for you. Ask what YOU can do for philately.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Ately (collector)